

SPEAKING OUT:

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IN SCOTLAND

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40 Years of Women's Aid in Scotland

Published by Scottish Women's Aid.
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132 Rose Street
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www.speakingout.womenslibrary.org.uk

Designed by Kirsty McBride.

Cover image: Edinburgh and Lothian Women's Aid poster displayed in Edinburgh bus station advertising services for women, c. 1977. Courtesy of Scottish Women's Aid.

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Introduction



What is Women's Aid?



Card designed by Anne McChlery (who also designed the Scottish Women's Aid banner), 1990s. Courtesy of Dorothy Fall.

Women's Aid works at a local and national level in Scotland to ensure women's safety from domestic abuse, by providing refuge and support, and through campaigning for political and legislative change. With its roots firmly embedded in second wave feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement, Scottish Women's Aid was founded in 1976 to bring together and co-ordinate the growing network of Women's Aid groups across the country.

The first of these groups had sprung up in Edinburgh and Glasgow early in the decade, largely inspired by the establishment of refuges south of the border and the foundation of the National Women's Aid Federation in 1974. By the mid-seventies, there were 15 Women's Aid groups across Scotland. Scottish Women's Aid was founded as a central body with the aim of supporting these existing groups, nurturing the development of new groups, and campaigning on a national scale for the prevention of domestic abuse, the accountability of perpetrators, and the protection of women and children. Today, Scottish Women's Aid provides a collective voice for a network of 36 affiliated member groups across the country.

Women's Aid groups provide refuge accommodation for women, children, and young people who are experiencing domestic abuse, offering a safe place and protection. They offer advice and support to help women take their next steps, whatever they may be. They can provide help and guidance on housing, entitlements to benefits, and legal rights. Women's Aid groups also offer outreach services to women not living

in a refuge but in the local community, and help is available by phone, through drop in sessions at health centres, or from Women's Aid offices themselves.

Scottish Women's Aid and local Women's Aid groups also provide training for people in a variety of services coming into contact with women, children, and young people experiencing domestic abuse, including healthcare professionals, the police, social workers, and youth workers. Women's Aid groups also carry out prevention work, including sessions in schools to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to promote understandings of healthy and respectful relationships. A range of services specifically for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse have also been developed, mirroring the services provided to their mothers but recognising the particular needs children and young people may have.

Being a women-only organisation has always been fundamental to Women's Aid. It is crucial that offices and refuges are spaces where women, children and young people who have experienced the trauma of domestic abuse feel safe. But there is also a commitment within the movement to model alternative ways of living, to demonstrate that women do not need to be economically, practically or emotionally dependent on men. Women's Aid supports the provision of services in Scotland for male survivors of domestic abuse, but has never provided a service for men (either victims or perpetrators). As a feminist organisation, the focus is on supporting women and their dependents – and on promoting the gendered analysis of domestic abuse which is vital to shared understanding and effective multi-agency responses (including those for men). This stance has sometimes been controversial within the network and on occasion a local group has disaffiliated because it has decided to employ male workers or offered services for men.

Scottish Women's Aid plays a key role in campaigning and lobbying on a wide range of issues related to violence against women, children, and young people, working with policy makers and politicians to bring about change in responses to domestic abuse from the government, justice system and the authorities.

Ultimately, Women's Aid in Scotland aims to 'break the silence' – to raise awareness of domestic abuse among the public and policy makers, to change attitudes and promote women's equality and children's rights, to campaign for responses which actively prevent violence against women, and to bring an end to domestic abuse altogether.



Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, Spring 1989. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

What is Women's Aid's understanding of domestic abuse?

“Battered wives, that was the term that was used for women that we now say have experienced domestic abuse. So we've come a long way [from that], thank goodness.”

Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

For over forty years, since grassroots groups of women highlighted the problem of 'battered wives', activists, researchers, policy-makers, and service providers have discussed violence in intimate relationships, and the language used to describe it. Women's Aid has always been at the forefront in this crucial process, drawing on expertise and feminist analysis to shape and develop understanding and practice. The way we talk about domestic abuse directly impacts our understanding of the vast number of ways it can be experienced, and how we respond to it. Over the years, the terminology Women's Aid uses has changed to reflect important developments in understanding the scope and nature of the phenomenon. Several of the oral history interviews comment on this:

“One of the things I talked about was my own experience of abuse by a partner at a time when domestic abuse [...] was still very much seen as, you know, husband and wife, kids, you know, like, people who'd been married for a while. Nobody talked about abuse by boyfriends.” – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women's Aid.

Evidence gathering, research and theory has become more sophisticated, but also contested, since women broke through the silence of centuries to name men's abuse of power and control of their partners as a serious public issue. The organisation moved on from talking about battering and violence, to the broader word 'abuse', to encompass the range of harms, constraints and impacts which characterise this course of conduct.

Domestic abuse is not an isolated incident or a fight between equals. It is a pattern of surveillance and domination by one partner over the other. Fear is not just a by-product, but a central tactic used to gain control and compliance. This abuse is characterised by controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. The abusive tactics used impact on all aspects of life. Within this pattern of behaviour, physical violence may be non-existent, or regular and 'low level', or severe and sustained. Financial control is a common and effective element of the strategy. In the large majority of cases domestic abuse is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. This is what brings thousands of women and children into contact with Women's Aid groups every year.

It is important to understand that violent acts can occur in the context of very different kinds of relationship. When an incident of domestic abuse is recorded by police, there is nothing to indicate whether it is the action of someone who habitually uses abusive behaviour to intimidate and control; or an act of retaliation or self-defence; or the result of a one-off fight.

That's why, in recent years, the work of Women's Aid and the resulting policies and legislation to tackle domestic abuse have increasingly turned attention to the concept of coercive control, to shift the focus from acts of violence or abuse to patterns of behaviour exercised by one partner over the other (extending to control of the whole household, including children), and their impact. Coercion is the threat or use of sanctions/force to make the victim behave in a particular way against her will, or to impede the ability to do something she wishes. Control is about the conduct, tactics and unwritten rules used to gain compliance and obedience, by controlling resources (including finances), micro-managing day-to-day activities, and limiting and depriving the partner access to freedom of choice or action. Tactics are tailored – usually around the traditional 'female' domestic, sexual and mothering roles, and intersecting with other aspects of identity including ethnicity, age, religion, sexuality and disability.

By focusing not on tallies of incidents, but on the impact and consequences for women and children, Women's Aid recognises that abuse and coercion (not just in domestic settings but wherever people conduct their daily lives) functions to control women and girls, to limit their freedom of action as well as safety, and thus to violate their human rights. Gender-based violence is both cause and consequence of inequality.

What is the Speaking Out project?



Edinburgh and Lothian Women's Aid group protesting council approaches to rehousing women suffering domestic abuse. City Chambers, Edinburgh, 1970s. Courtesy of Scottish Women's Aid.

The year 2016 marked the 40th anniversary of Scottish Women's Aid. To celebrate this important milestone the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the organisation, in partnership with Glasgow Women's Library, the University of Glasgow Centre for Gender History, and Women's History Scotland, a grant for a project that would document the ground-breaking work of Women's Aid in Scotland over the last four decades. The [Speaking Out: Recalling Women's Aid in Scotland](#) project aimed to record for posterity and share with the public the achievements of the pioneering women who founded the organisation in the 1970s, and the continued efforts of Women's Aid to protect survivors, affect legal change and challenge entrenched attitudes toward domestic abuse in Scotland.

The *Speaking Out* project drew inspiration from Scottish Women's Aid's 30th anniversary oral history project – a small scale oral history initiative driven by the desire to share the unique stories of the women closely involved with the organisation in its formative years. The 2006 team set out to create a digital archive; recording fourteen interviews, producing a range of learning resources, and a short film. Following on from the success of that project over a decade ago, *Speaking Out* adopted a very similar template; but with two years funding and a cohort of over forty volunteers, the project team were able to set an even more ambitious agenda.

Volunteers based across Scotland – from Inverness to the Borders – covered a lot of ground, interviewing 62 individuals connected to Women's Aid in Scotland, including women who helped establish the original refuges, workers involved in more recent campaigns, and journalists, politicians and academics who had collaborated with the organisation. The interviews covered themes such as the day to day running of Women's Aid groups, the organisation's work with children, the impact of changes in Scottish politics, as well as the future of Women's Aid. Oral history interviews proved to be the ideal format to capture the history of the organisation; empowering women to tell their own stories in their own words. The interviews will be preserved in the Scottish Women's Aid archive held at Glasgow Women's Library where they can be accessed by future researchers and the public to ensure that the hard work of the women who built and contributed to the organisation is not forgotten.

Many people in Scotland are not aware of the work Women's Aid do or how the organisation came into being. Its existence and survival was never a given, it was contingent on the grit and determination of ordinary – and in many ways extraordinary – women who fought to change their society. The *Speaking Out* team wanted to communicate this history to the widest possible audience and to raise awareness of the powerful impact of Women's Aid on gender relations in Scotland. One way in which the project chose to do this was a touring exhibition, which debuted at the Museum of Edinburgh in November 2016 before travelling on to eight other locations in Scotland. The exhibition featured leaflets and promotional material, items loaned by survivors and former workers and some more contemporary objects made at Women's Aid art workshops held over the course of the project. It also included a listening station where visitors could access extracts from a selection of oral history interviews. The exhibition drew a lot of attention engaging individuals across Scotland; from local community members to academics, activists and students.

The project film, which is available to view on the Glasgow Women's Library website and was shared across social media, was another means of communicating to wider audiences. Filmed by a group of project volunteers and edited and produced by filmmaker Helena Öhman, it followed the experiences of eight women involved in Women's Aid in Scotland. The women spoke of the progress they had witnessed as well as the impact Women's Aid had on them at a personal level and on Scottish society in general. Alongside the film, the *Speaking Out* team produced a learning resource to be used in secondary schools and by youth organisations. The resource introduces young people to the history of Women's Aid, offering them the tools to recognise domestic abuse and demonstrating the power of activism to shape society for the better.

The dominant focus on 'great men' and 'great events' has often obscured women's continual struggle and the ways in which we have shaped our history. On the 40th anniversary of Scottish Women's Aid, *Speaking Out* sought to redress this balance; recording the history of the organisation as told by the women themselves. This is important – not only because the achievements of Women's Aid in Scotland deserve to be celebrated – but because in elevating stories of female empowerment, we may inspire future generations of women to get out and fight for the change that they want to see.

Being a volunteer on the Speaking Out project

"I volunteered for the **Speaking Out** project as an oral history interviewer. I thought the role of oral history interviewer would suit me best as I knew I enjoyed talking to people, and it was something I'd never tried before.

We took part in training sessions at Scottish Women's Aid, exploring the history of Women's Aid in Scotland, and wider issues and the history of the movement against violence towards women. We learned about the nature of domestic abuse – that it's not just about physical violence; it's also about manipulation and humiliation, and coercive control. We received training on the sort of equipment we'd be using, and the dos and don'ts of oral history interviewing.

I was really nervous when I headed off for my first interview – I was convinced I would mess it all up by recording the interview then deleting it! But everything went fine, and I really enjoyed chatting to my interviewee and learning about her experiences. I found out afterwards that this interview had actually been the first conducted for the project – I'm glad I didn't know that before I set off!

I did three interviews for the project, all with women who had worked in refuges in or near Dundee. The women were all very different, with various reasons for having become involved in Women's Aid, but they all had a core motivation and dedication. They had many tales to tell, about day to day life in the refuges, the challenges they had faced, and the amazing ways in which the women in refuges had offered unconditional support to each other – truly women helping women.

We ourselves had amazing support from the project team, and our regular meetings and catch ups meant that we could all see how our work was contributing to the project, and how it was all coming together.

In its forty years, Scottish Women's Aid and the wider Women's Aid network have helped many women in crisis, and helped raise public awareness of domestic abuse in all its forms. But the problem has by no means gone away. That's something else I have learned – that there is much more work to be done. The Speaking Out project has offered a chance to celebrate what has been done so far, but also to look forward to the future.

Taking part in the Speaking Out project has been an amazing experience, and it has been a pleasure and an honour to meet some of the women involved in pioneering the early Women's Aid groups. It also gave me the opportunity to contribute to the creation of an archive which will be a resource for years to come, and has its own place in the history of Women's Aid – something that everyone who contributed to the project can be proud of."



What is this publication about?

This publication intends to offer a brief overview of the forty-plus years of Women's Aid's history, and expand upon some of the themes that emerged as this history was explored. Using excerpts from the oral history interviews captured by the project, the publication also aims to give an insight into the experiences of the women who have been involved in or affected by the history of Women's Aid in Scotland.

Please note that this publication discusses themes of domestic abuse and includes accounts by survivors of their experiences.

The Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (0800 027 1234) offers support and advice to anyone affected by domestic abuse, and is free to call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This publication has been written collaboratively by Dr. Lesley Orr, Susie Dalton, Morag Allan Campbell, and Stella Sabin.

All of the oral history interviews captured by the project are stored in the Scottish Women's Aid archive at Glasgow Women's Library and are accessible to the public. Please contact the library's archive team for more information.

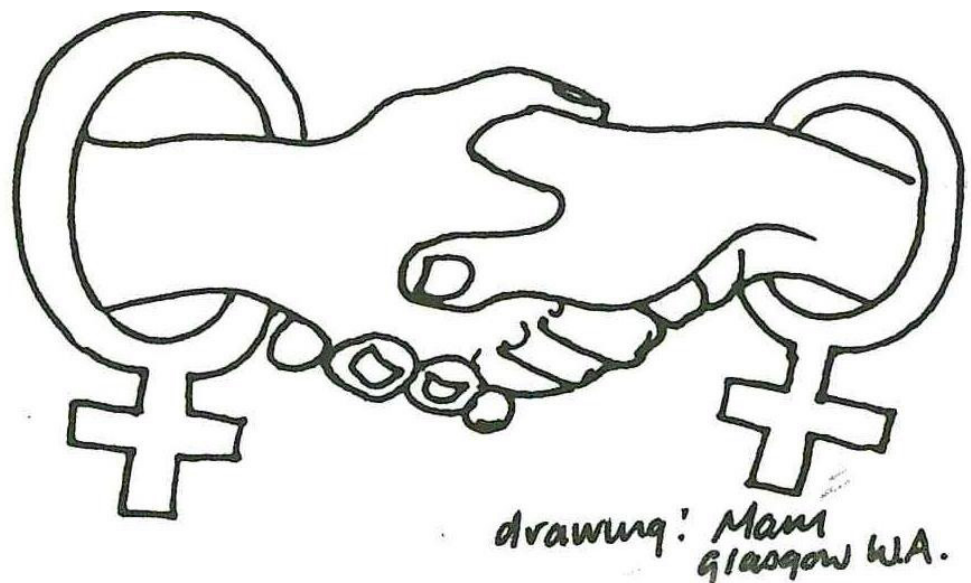


Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, April 1985. Drawing by Mary Patrick, Glasgow Women's Aid. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Chapter 1

Women's Aid: A Feminist Movement For Social Change

“Women’s Aid enabled me to bring together ideas about feminism with a practical reality of doing something that would affect women’s lives in a positive way.”

Judith Hodgkin, founding member of Dundee Women’s Aid.

The origins of Women’s Aid in Scotland are rooted in the Women’s Liberation Movement of the early 1970s. Women’s Liberation groups brought together women who were coming into contact with new feminist ideas which gave them a language to articulate what they were feeling about their lives as women. Local ‘consciousness raising’ groups emerged in Scottish cities and universities. They enabled women to share experiences, and to talk about key issues – work and money, power and politics, advertising and the media, sex and relationships. The women who got involved were angry about the sexism they encountered in all aspects of their everyday lives – and that included men’s intimate and sexual violence. They were discovering that ‘the personal is political’ and naming the problem as women’s collective oppression under patriarchal structures and traditions, including marriage laws and customs. For a number of pioneering women in the early 1970s, the desire for practical action which would contribute to personal and social change found a focus in the issue of ‘battered wives’. In 1973, two members of the Glasgow Women’s Liberation group visited Chiswick Women’s Refuge in London, established in 1971:

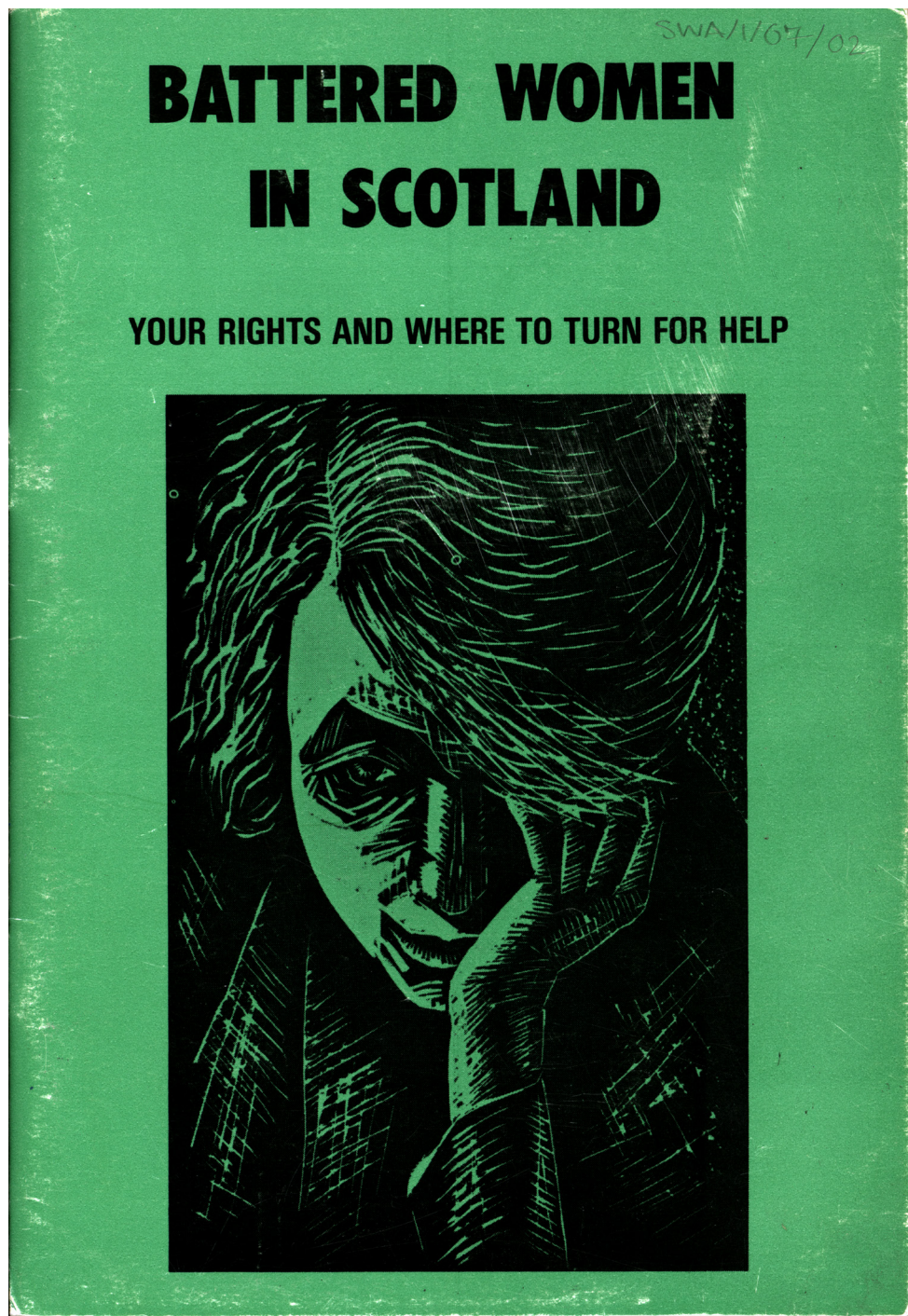
“We drove home to Glasgow, I remember. Actually, we were both weeping from the sort of things she told us and this realisation that we had that there really was a big problem here and that nobody was doing anything about it.” – Marion Blythman, founding member of Edinburgh Women’s Aid.

Inspired by Chiswick and other examples, feminists in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen started to campaign and lobby for accommodation so that they could set up similar refuges. The first safe house opened in Edinburgh in December 1973, followed by Interval House in Glasgow in February 1974.

As local groups were established and opened refuge doors to women fleeing abuse, their example inspired women’s groups in other parts of Scotland, and so the movement grew:

"We had a speaker from Dundee Women's Aid and she came and told us about the group and told us what they were doing and she brought a woman from the refuge with her and she spoke about her experiences. And it made a huge impact on me because it seemed like the practical edge of feminism. There was a lot of talk of theory and all the rest of it in those days [...] I think I was moved by women getting together to do something for other women and it was practical." – Shirley Henderson, former Falkirk Women's Aid and Scottish Women's Aid worker.

In 1974, there was an informal get-together of women from the groups around Scotland, to pool knowledge and discuss principles. The Scottish Office offered to provide funding if a national coordinating body was established. The groups agreed, Scottish Women's Aid was born, and in 1975 Fran Wasoff and Ruth Adler, as the first paid staff, established the Edinburgh office. Their task was to coordinate the network and also campaign for change.



A pamphlet for 'battered women' in Scotland, produced by Scottish Women's Aid in 1977. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

For most early activists, involvement in the movement had started out of a desire to give a practical edge to their feminist commitment. Some individuals and groups came through other routes, however, and although they were committed to providing support and refuge to victims of abuse, they had reservations about associating too closely with a radical feminist agenda. Differences came to a head in 1979 when the SWA National Conference adopted the seven demands of the Women's Liberation Movement:

1. Equal pay for equal work
2. Equal education and job opportunities
3. Free contraception and abortion on demand
4. Free 24-hour childcare
5. Legal and financial independence for all women
6. The right to a self-defined sexuality and an end to discrimination against lesbians
7. Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression towards women

There was contention within the network, with some members not agreeing with the right to abortion on demand. This led to one group disaffiliating from the national network and continuing its work independently.

A radical movement

How was it that a few women in Scotland's cities and towns, with almost no resources, with little political, economic and cultural power, were able to challenge the prevailing social order; to define and name domestic abuse as a major public issue, rocking the status quo and making a significant impact in the changing political climate of Scotland down the decades since the 1970s?

Change – personal, legal and societal – throughout the forty years since the foundation of Women's Aid, is one of the strongest themes in the oral history testimonies collected by the Speaking Out project, recalled by many interviewees who remain passionate and proud of the movement and its achievements:

"I think Women's Aid always had two really important elements, it had the providing services directly for women but it also had a long-term aim of ending violence against women... to highlight issues about domestic violence, not only for legal reform but also with a view to changing attitudes. That was what distinguished Women's Aid from lots of other organisations, you know, including social work, that there was this kind of radical edge to it, where you weren't just providing a service, you were changing things." – Shirley Henderson, former Falkirk Women's Aid and Scottish Women's Aid worker.

The vision of a better world helped sustain energy and commitment in the face of hostility and opposition from the public, statutory agencies and the media. These women and their ridiculous ideas were considered to be at the margins (sometimes beyond the pale) of respectability, decency, or even sanity, transgressing the norms of acceptable behaviour. This is because Women's Aid pioneers were challenging the established patriarchal order – the taken-for-granted everyday reality.

"I think everybody expected, they all talked about burning your bra and I think they all expected you to be a lesbian and to wear doctor marten boots and dungarees and generally hate men. Mind it's still pretty much like that in some places, I think, the understanding or lack of it. Certainly with Women's Aid in the early days, it was you were fighting against the current all the way with the police, the social work and housing. They really regarded us as being weird." – Liz Fotheringham, former Inverness Women's Aid and Lochaber Women's Aid worker.

Although some early Women's Aid members adopted a radical feminist separatist, anti-state stance, others wanted to influence and transform state institutions into effective agents for gender and social justice. In practice, the requirements of providing adequate refuge accommodation, safety and support for women and children meant that each local group had no choice but to engage and negotiate with councillors, social workers, housing officials, police and lawyers.

"In those days, the commitment of social work was to keep families together at all costs. Well, that certainly wasn't our commitment, we thought that some families should break up. And, I mean, there has been a complete change in social work thinking but, at that time, you know, social workers didn't sing from our hymn sheet, nor did the police, nor did housing officials." – Fran Wasoff, former coordinator of Scottish Women's Aid.

Collective working



Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, Spring 1992. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Collective working was central to the feminist ethos of Women's Aid, as the movement sought to reject traditional patriarchal hierarchies: the top down structures in which men hold the main power and senior roles. Collectives had a flat structure, with all members sharing authority and responsibility:

"...and it was great, it was absolutely fantastic, you know, everybody feeling they were on the same level, on the same wages, everybody had equal right to speak, object to ... A lot of really good work came out of that because people felt part of an amazing team. But not all the time, there was a lot of problems as well, but the force that that can create is – I just can't explain, unless you've been part of something like that, how wonderful that is, you actually thought that you had all the right ideas and that you were going to change the world, ultimately – if we could just get women to realise, that we do have power." – Betty Howieson, former Dundee Women's Aid worker.

The intense experience of living or working in refuge and the endless collective meetings and discussions generated shared understanding, confidence and group solidarity – as well as factions and heated debates. This was commonly experienced as a profound breaking and remaking of women's own lives and assumptions. For some groups, collective working became more difficult to practice as more members joined and collectives grew bigger. Reaching consensus and making decisions became harder. In the 1990s funders, politicians and local authorities began to put pressure on groups to adopt more traditional management structures – becoming more 'professional' – to meet the requirements of public funding including Care Commission registration.

“We worked collectively and everyone had an equal say in the collective – but then it got to be that there were paid employees and there were so many people and the collective became a series of groups [...] there were little groups of people who thought things should be one way or another way and then collective discussions – which were always long – meetings used to go on to 11 o’clock at night [laughs], became acrimonious and people would keep bringing the same things back because they wanted things different, and people were not accepting collective decisions, and we just needed more structure because it just wasn’t working.” – Anonymous, former Dunfermline Women’s Aid worker.

While most Women’s Aid groups, and the national office, now operate as hierarchical organisations, the belief in retaining a collective form of governance is still a deeply held position. Some feel too many concessions have been made to secure funding and the tension between principles and pragmatism remains a contentious issue within the movement.

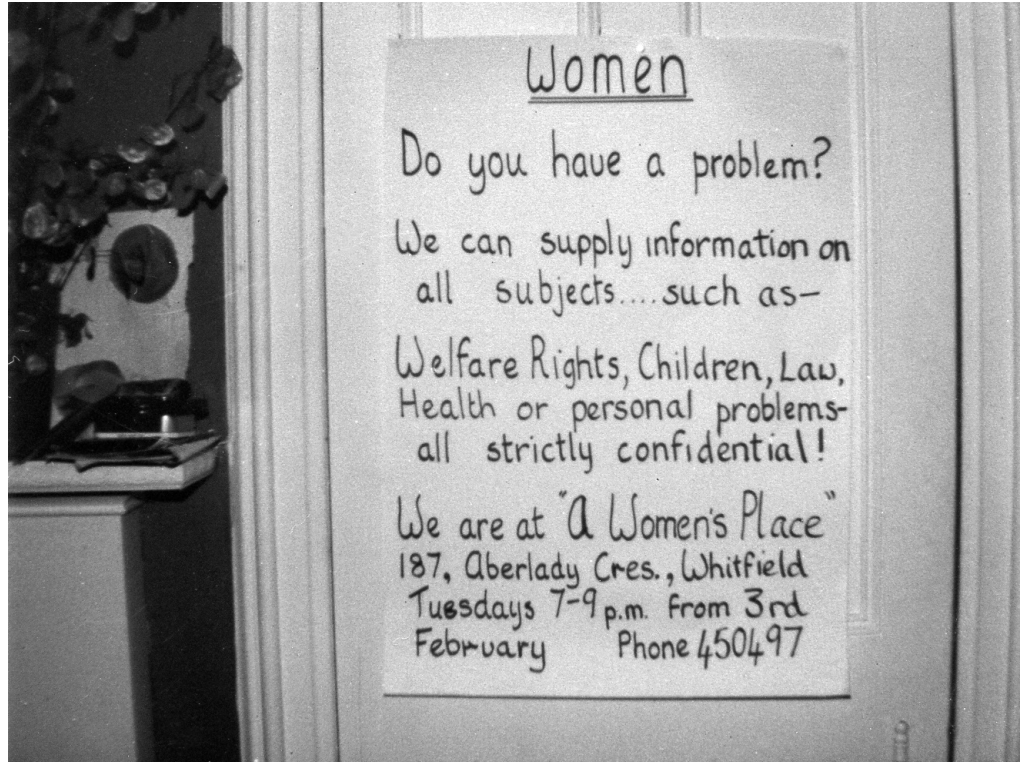
The Women’s Aid network

Local groups are autonomous and choose whether or not to affiliate with the Women’s Aid network. Scottish Women’s Aid helps to facilitate networking amongst groups through conferences and training, helping the movement to work to agreed principles and objectives. This has always been a vital strength for the movement, giving the opportunity to meet others from across Scotland and pool specialist knowledge.

The network grew as new groups were established in every community of Scotland, from Stranraer to Shetland, and into the twenty-first century. There is ample evidence of Women’s Aid’s transformative impact since the early years. By 2003, when Lochaber Women’s Aid came into being, both agencies and the local community were much more aware of the issues, and positive in their attitude:

“Lochaber certainly was an area ripe for development because I was welcomed with open arms by all the agencies and it was a good area to work in. So I provided that for about a year, a little over a year, and then I had a public meeting for women who were interested in setting up a Women’s Aid group... And it was just wonderful. It was so good. There was huge interest in setting something up. And again that was still in the days of collectives so we set up a group and a collective.” – Liz Fotheringham, former Inverness Women’s Aid and Lochaber Women’s Aid worker.

Changing lives



A poster advertising 'A Women's Place' [sic], a day centre in Whitfield set up by Dundee Women's Aid in 1980. Courtesy of Scottish Women's Aid.

The intersections of different elements in women's identity and experience – including class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, poverty, age, disability and whether or not they had children – all of these factors have challenged simplistic assumptions that 'all women' are the same, or can be 'empowered' in similar ways. Women's Aid as a social movement has had to grapple with many complex developments (internal and external) which have impacted on its evolution into an expert organisation with a high public profile. In the early years, Women's Aid burst onto the scene and into public awareness with a very clear message – often at the centre of controversy for taking on the powers-that-be at local or national level, and in the forefront of campaigning for legislative change:

"The organisation was providing services and that was really, really, really crucial. But there was also much more of a focus and politicisation of women about domestic abuse and what that meant and the impact it had. There was much more of a sense of having that involvement, getting women involved. There were more marches, there was more challenging society I think, getting society to pay attention." – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women's Aid.

“Women’s Aid really made a direct difference to women’s lives, you could see it happening in front of your eyes every day in refuge, and the empowerment was so important, they had been ground down, told they were rubbish; now they discovered they could lead independent lives, in different family structures, seeing an alternative to the traditional marriage relationship, finding confidence.”

Sue Robertson, former Central Women’s Aid worker and coordinator of Scottish Women’s Aid.

As we look back over forty years, it is clear that Women's Aid has been an enormously significant and successful movement, despite (and perhaps because of) these challenges. In the midst of constant pressures it has retained a distinctive feminist ethos even as the movement has negotiated a shift from the margins to carve out an important and recognised place in the mainstream of Scottish public life. At its heart are countless women who have found the strength, the solidarity and the resilience to claim their right to a better world.

Although so much has been achieved, the struggle is far from over:

"I think we're at a crossroads where it's about do we think we've got where we need to be? Have we done what we need to do? Do we need to shape change? Does something need to change?" – Lydia Okroj, Scottish Women's Aid, former Edinburgh Women's Aid worker.

As you read the story of Women's Aid, shaped by the diverse testimonies of those who have been speaking out, remember, as Dr Kate Cavanagh reflected after decades of involvement:

"In terms of women's voice, women's politics, feminism, Women's Aid was – and still is – the business!" – Dr Kate Cavanagh, academic and activist.



Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, Autumn 1987. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Chapter 2

Women Helping Women





An important motto and working principle of Women's Aid cross-stitched by Margaret McLaren for workers at Dumbarton District Women's Aid (c.1989). Loaned to the *Speaking Out* exhibition by Margaret K.

The solidarity of women is crucial to the formation, development, and day-to-day running of Women's Aid in Scotland. Early on in the movement, 'women helping women helping women' became a motto, and women working together has remained a central tenet to the work Women's Aid continues to do today.

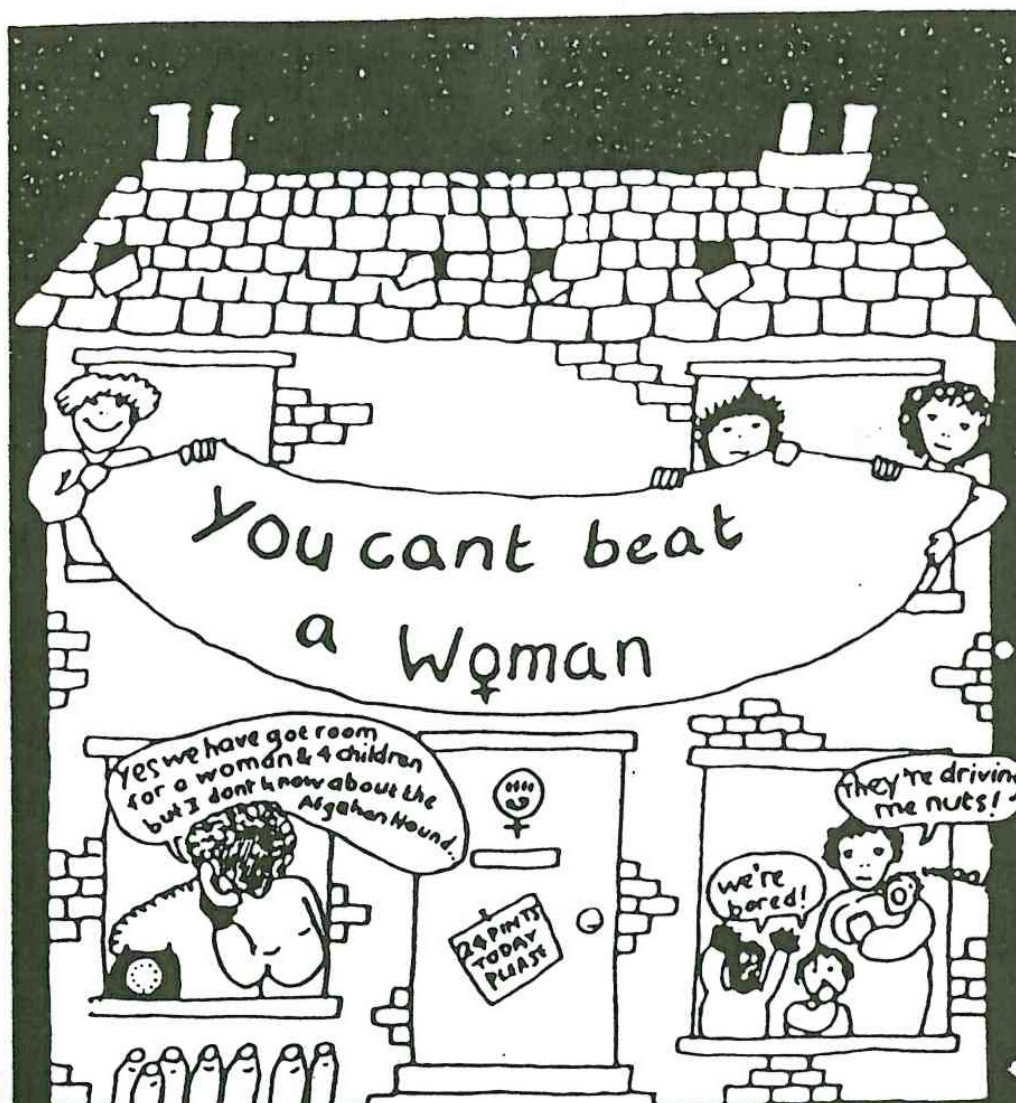


Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, June 1985. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

“...the success wasn't in [a woman in refuge] staying with us, the success was in her knowing that she could come back to us...”

Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

The first Women's Aid refuges were established in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1973 and 1974 respectively, inspired by the first refuge in the UK, opened in Chiswick in 1971. The idea was to provide women and their children with a safe, confidential, alternative to living with their abuser, for as long as they needed.

In the early days, the refuge accommodation was basic, often comprising of only a shared kitchen, bathroom and living space with separate bedrooms for the women and families using the refuge. Organising women coming to the refuge demanded collaborative work from Women's Aid volunteers and other women in the shelter:

"At that stage you would get a phone call from a woman wanting to go into refuge, you would phone the refuge. You would tell the other women in the refuge someone was coming so they could get the room ready. You would get a taxi, get the woman sent to the refuge by taxi and get them to phone you when they arrived and the expectation was that the other women would actually take care of that woman for that night until a worker would go out the next day and see her. And, to be honest, it worked. The women that went into refuge, generally, really valued the fact that there was someone else there that understood what they were talking about..." – Lydia Okroj, Scottish Women's Aid, former Edinburgh Women's Aid worker.

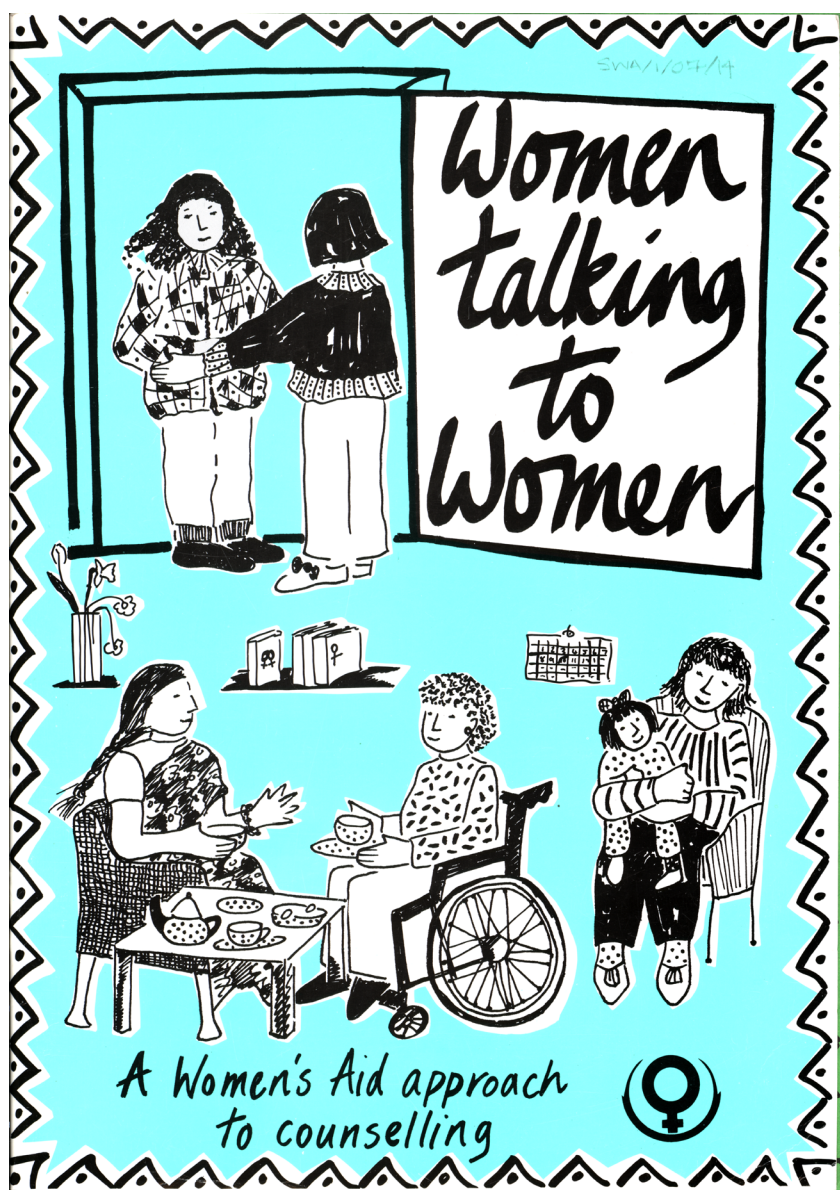
These early shelters provided a revolutionary service, offering women space, safety, and an alternative to living in fear. Attitudes towards the refuges from the police and media were dismissive at best; at worst, dangerously negligent. In 1974, a newspaper published a photograph and the location of a refuge in Glasgow, despite the protestations of the Women's Aid group. The abusive partner of one of the women in the shelter approached the refuge with a gun, and fired a shot through the door. No one was hurt, but it was a violent awakening for those that had doubted the threat faced by the women using the refuge.

"Photographs! Address! Everything. Because, you know, we went to the papers, to make a complaint in the papers, and they said it was in the public interest."

Janet McLeod, former Glasgow Women's Aid worker, on coverage of the refuge in local press.

There was often a strong sense of solidarity and understanding between women in the refuge.

"I would phone into the refuge to let the women know that we were coming back with someone so that they wouldn't get a fright when we went to the door. We would get there and they would have the kettle on and the mugs would be out and they would have a biscuit for her. They would be up and the bedroom door would be open with the heating on and all these sorts of kind things. The women would say, 'Well, I was where she was not that long ago', and they would do this. I've seen women, when we had an emergency admission and at tea time, would take a couple of chips off each of their children's plates and a sausage here and there and make a meal for someone. I've seen that often. Those sorts of things never leave you, and that to me was the real women helping women helping women, you know? It was these women that made it better for women to have to come into refuge because they welcomed them and they tried to help them and they gave their children's clothes to the women for her children to go to school. They shared. They shared things and they're amazingly brave, good, kind women." – Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.



'Women Talking to Women' training pack for Women's Aid workers and others providing information on counselling abused women. Produced by Scottish Women's Aid and the Women's Aid network, c.1983. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

The support offered by other women in the refuge was, in some cases, life changing:

“This woman came up to me and she went ‘Are you Janet?’ and I said, ‘Yes’. And she looked at me and she says, ‘You don’t remember do you?’ and I looked at her, she had white hair now [...] and I said, ‘Yes, I remember you’, and she said, I mean I’m not blowing my own horn here, but she said to me, ‘Janet, I’ll never forget you for the rest of my life’. And that woman was in the refuge. Her daughter was a child and she said [...] her daughter’s 50 now, that’s how long ago it was. And she came into the refuge, and she was suicidal. And she said, ‘I remember you sat all night with me’, ‘cause [...] she’d said she wanted to go out of the window. And she was in the top flat. And she said, ‘I remember you, because you sat all night with me, and it was Christmas Eve’. And I sat with her all night, ‘til she was so exhausted that I was satisfied she wasn’t going to do anything. And she was going, ‘I don’t know why I said that at the time’, and I went, ‘You were in a terrible place.’” – Janet McLeod, former Glasgow Women’s Aid worker.

Before the requirement for professional qualifications, women seeking refuge were encouraged to become part of the movement as workers. Valuing women’s experiences and creating space where personal empowerment was channelled into supporting others was a practical way of working towards autonomy and equality.

Refuges and the provision of services in the refuges have developed over the forty plus year history of Women’s Aid, and today, many of the refuges offer more comfort for women and their families. Refuges today generally also offer more privacy, however, some service users prefer the social atmosphere within communal refuges. Scottish Women’s Aid and local Women’s Aid groups have consistently lobbied the government and local councils to increase funding for the creation and maintenance of refuges across the country. Developments in the refuges were often carried out in consultation with the women using them, to ensure they met their needs.

“To have the opportunity of getting a purpose built core and cluster refuge [separate apartments around a central office and communal space] was just amazing. So that came about because they recognised the need [...] And what women felt was that, there was a report done by Scottish Women’s Aid about refuges, and what women were saying is they wanted their own front door within in a building that had a secure door as well, you know. And calmness and so on.” – Hazel Bingham, former East Ayrshire Women’s Aid worker.

Information and support

A major part of the work carried out by both Scottish Women's Aid and local Women's Aid groups is to provide information and support to women, children, and young people who are affected by domestic abuse, and to raise public awareness of the issue. Available information and support for survivors includes counselling services, legal support, and information on entitlement to benefits and public housing. Much of it has been created in collaboration with survivors of domestic abuse and users of Women's Aid's services.

Outreach by local groups in the early days of the movement aimed to raise awareness of how prevalent domestic abuse is, and to help statutory agencies, health professionals, and other public organisations recognise warning signs that a woman may be experiencing domestic abuse. Examples of this wide-ranging outreach included training doctors and dentists to recognise injuries associated with domestic abuse, encouraging local members of the clergy to facilitate a conversation with worshippers about domestic abuse, and organising marches in public space.

"Well, we did things, like we marched along the high street in Dingwall, which was a big shock for everybody, I think. 'Oh my god, nothing like this before', and the women walked with us as well as workers and volunteers. Brave women who thought, 'I'm doing it', and they carried the banner and walked in front and we walked along with them." – Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.



Many of the service users interviewed in the project spoke of how powerful it was to be believed in telling their stories of suffering abuse, and to have abusive behaviours identified as such by Women's Aid support workers when, often, the women had been led by their partners to doubt their experiences:

"So I went into the Edinburgh office, the facility there, and I was taken into a really lovely room and met a woman [...] I felt as if she must know him because she just completely, completely understood and I was saying things like, 'I don't know why he gets angry' and sort of things like that and she just completely gave a definition to what had been going on in my life that I didn't have a definition for. I could cry now again just remembering that because that one meeting with that wonderful woman [...] just completely changed everything, it changed absolutely everything." – Nicola Borthwick, domestic abuse survivor.

Today, Women's Aid in Scotland continues to provide support and information to survivors, statutory agencies, policy makers, and the general public. New ways of getting information about domestic abuse support services to women have been employed by campaign groups and support workers, including social media campaigns, TV advertising, and distributing information on services in innovative, easily concealed ways. Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline is managed by Scottish Women's Aid and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, offering support and advice to women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

SWA/V/6/6/19

When I arrived at the refuge
I was scared at first and confused
I did not call it home I missed
my gran very much and my
dog, an all my toys. but
for the first time I saw my
mum smile it made me very
happy. I've been to swimming
and parties but now I have
my own room in my house
I am so proud of it all
Mary



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April 1991

Pamphlet offering advice to mothers and children moving from refuge to a new home, produced by Scottish Women's Aid in 1991. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Support for BME women

STOP PRESS

1986

REFUGE

ear Sir/Adam,
The following information is a news release from Shakti Women's Aid
you can include this in your paper/magazine in the features section
"Shakti Women's Aid has n
The refuge is now ready
Shakti meaning 'strong
spent the past eight
finances to assist
various factors, i
a. Racist hostility
b. Communication
c. Poor access

Now refuge for ethnic women

By DAVID FORSYTH

The first refuge for battered women from Edinburgh's ethnic minorities is to be opened within the next month.
A new group - Shakti Women's Aid - has been set up to provide advice, help and shelter for women persecuted by their partners or families.
Funded by the city's council, council help and other agencies, the group will help battered women to come forward.
Two workers will be based at the refuge which will take as

The first refuge in the East of Scotland for Asian women victims of domestic violence is to be opened in Edinburgh. The City of Edinburgh District Council made a grant of £20,190 towards the project, and the picture shows Councillor Marjorie Bain presenting the cheque to representatives of Shakti Women's Aid. At the moment, the only refuge in Scotland for Asian women is in Redhouse. The Edinburgh refuge is expected to be established in a four-apartment house.

RELEASE

Grant is
key to
refuge

The first East of Scotland refuge for Asian women victims of domestic violence will soon be set up in Edinburgh.

It will be made possible by a £20,190 grant from Edinburgh District Council.

Councillor Marjorie Bain presented the

SHAKTI WOMEN'S AID FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

A NEW women's aid group, aimed specifically at helping women from ethnic minorities, is now operating from Picardy Place.

SHAKTI, which means 'strength' in Hindi, is the first of its kind in the East of Scotland. It is a voluntary organisation, set up by a group of Asian women, and is a member of the Edinburgh Community Relations Centre.

problem by setting up a refuge for Asian women victims of domestic violence. The refuge will be set up in Edinburgh. It will be made possible by a £20,190 grant from Edinburgh District Council. Councillor Marjorie Bain presented the

Wife abuse victims are often helped by a refuge. The refuge will be set up in Edinburgh. It will be made possible by a £20,190 grant from Edinburgh District Council. Councillor Marjorie Bain presented the

Wife abuse victims are often helped by a refuge. The refuge will be set up in Edinburgh. It will be made possible by a £20,190 grant from Edinburgh District Council. Councillor Marjorie Bain presented the

Women's refuge

The setting up of Edinburgh's first refuge for Asian women was made one step closer yesterday when a cheque for £20,190 was handed to Councillor Marjorie Bain by representatives of Shakti Women's Aid. The Edinburgh refuge is expected to be established in a four-apartment house.

Our first refuge was situated in fairly quiet residential area and initially seemed an ideal place to have a refuge. However, it became a target for constant racial harassment. Harassment ranged from throwing stones at the window, playing ball outside the door, banging the ball off the wall of the house, racist graffiti, prodding women through letterbox with a long stick, peeping through the windows, setting a disposed settee on fire right outside the refuge, harassing women and children on the street and then finally an air rifle shot through the bathroom window of the refuge. The police were contacted whenever the incidents occurred but their response was inadequate and they did not take any action.

While this was going on, there were negotiations taking place with a housing association for a new refuge to house 3 women and children. But because of the final air rifle incident, we had to move to a new refuge before the alterations were done and we were granted multiple occupancy.

This had major implications for us as service provider and our ability to provide a refuge for women and children who needed a safe accommodation. Space for 3 black women and children for the whole of Scotland is appalling but for that space to be even further reduced to one woman and her children is ludicrous. During this time, we had to refer women to other women's aid refuge and/or homeless units offering them support, which was far from ideal. Another major implication was a financial one. We reduced by two thirds the refuge income from rent, which totals £7500 in deficit.

At present, we are negotiating for another refuge, preferably to take larger families with more than 3 children. This will alleviate crowding situations at the present refuge.

Councillor Marjorie Bain presenting the cheque to representatives of Shakti Women's Aid.

6

Article on a new refuge for BME women, included in Shakti Women's Aid annual report, 1991–1992.
Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

The Women's Aid movement in Scotland has, from the outset, been made up of a diverse range of women. The movement continues to cross barriers of age, class, race, religion, and sexuality. This diversity of views, experiences and identities has meant that different ideas have been promoted, contested and debated across the network over the years.

The voices of black and minority ethnic (BME) women challenged the movement to think about culturally specific forms of abuse: how religious and cultural norms could be used by perpetrators of abuse, and how ignorance and racism in services and the public can dismiss women's experiences or further entrap them.

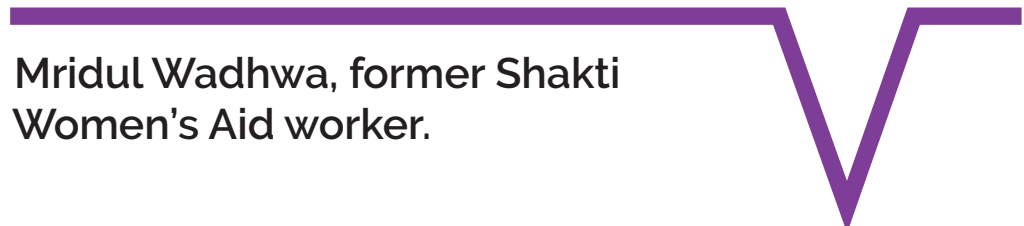
Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid, established in 1981 in Glasgow, was Scotland's first Asian, Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Aid group. In 1986, Shakti Women's Aid was founded in Edinburgh. Both groups continue to operate today as part of the Women's Aid network, providing refuge, support, and outreach services to BME women, children, and young people affected by domestic abuse.

Acknowledgment and understanding of different experiences based on religion and cultural background was not widespread in the first shelters in Scotland, leading to difficult experiences for the BME women accessing these services. As one worker in a refuge in the 1970s described:

"We had experiences of racism happening within the refuge. Not every time but part of the problems were due to people, lack of education, people not understanding the differences of what people needed because of their religious basis, or because of their health issues, or whatever. So, there was a big push on to try and get that, um, to broaden the spectrum of who Women's Aid, who Women's Aid could help." – Jane Rubens, former Edinburgh Women's Aid, Falkirk Women's Aid and Scottish Women's Aid worker.

It was clear that education and a greater understanding was required in the Women's Aid movement to provide services that worked for all of the women who required them. This work is ongoing today.

"The complete discrimination that exists within the system, [...] it's not fair for black minority ethnic women, and that's why I continue to do this work."



Mridul Wadhwa, former Shakti Women's Aid worker.

Gender, sexuality, and Women's Aid

Lesbians and bisexual women have played an active role in the network from the earliest years. The importance of a self-defined sexuality was highlighted as a fundamental right in the Seven Demands of the Women's Liberation Movement and the Women's Aid movement has continued to advocate for a woman's freedom to choose who (if anyone) she loves and lives with.

Around 1 in 4 LGBT people will experience domestic abuse in their lifetimes. Members of the LGBT community can face additional abusive experiences as a result of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. These may include a fear of being 'outed' by their partner or mistrust of service provision based on previous discriminatory experience. Women's Aid in Scotland aims to provide LGBT-inclusive spaces, services, and information, with several Women's Aid groups obtaining charter mark status from LGBT Youth Scotland for their work.

A lesbian support group existed within the Women's Aid network between the 1980s and 2000s, offering peer support and networking for lesbian workers in the movement. The group produced an information leaflet on lesbians and domestic abuse in the early 2000s. Today, Scottish Women's Aid offers training to the Women's Aid network and other professionals on supporting LGBT women in accessing domestic abuse services.

In recent years the Women's Aid network has engaged with trans-inclusivity, working to ensure that services are open and accessible to trans women. Scottish Women's Aid offer training to the network and to external organisations on supporting transgender women experiencing domestic abuse.

Women's Aid publications and spaces also offered an opportunity to discuss sexuality and sex as part of a healthy relationship (sometimes with a rather tongue-in-cheek stance). While not all Women's Aid groups felt comfortable in providing a space for these discussions, those that did were again challenging the status quo – women's sexuality and pleasure were, and in many cases still are, rarely discussed in public spaces.

According to my watch
and the graph on page 56,
you should at least
be breathing
heavily by
now.....




TRY EXPRESSING YOUR SEXUALITY IN
AS MANY WAYS AS YOU CAN - ENJOY IT
AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT BEING A WOMAN
IN CHARGE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR
BODY.

IT'S *YOUR* BODY. MAKE YOUR OWN
DECISIONS ABOUT IF, WHEN AND
WHERE AND WITH WHOM YOU HAVE
SEX.

A short self-help segment about healthy sex, Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, October 1984.
Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Chapter 3

Children and Young People



I'M A YOUNG PERSON AND I HAVE RIGHTS

*I am a worthwhile person
I deserve to be treated with respect and fairness
I am not the cause of another's violent behaviour
It's not my fault
I am not to blame for being abused
I do not like it or want it
I should not have to take it
I do have the right to be heard
I want to be told about decisions that
affect my life and to have my voice
heard about things that matter to me
I am not alone. I can ask others to help me
I deserve to have a safe and happy life
I have the right to play
I am entitled to a life free from abuse/hurt in any way
I am an important human being*

*I am not
alone. I can
ask others to
help me.*

*I deserve to
have a safe
and happy
life.*

A reminder to young people experiencing domestic abuse, Shakti Women's Aid annual report, 1995–1996. First published as part of the Scottish Women's Aid annual conference, 1993. Courtesy of Scottish Women's Aid.

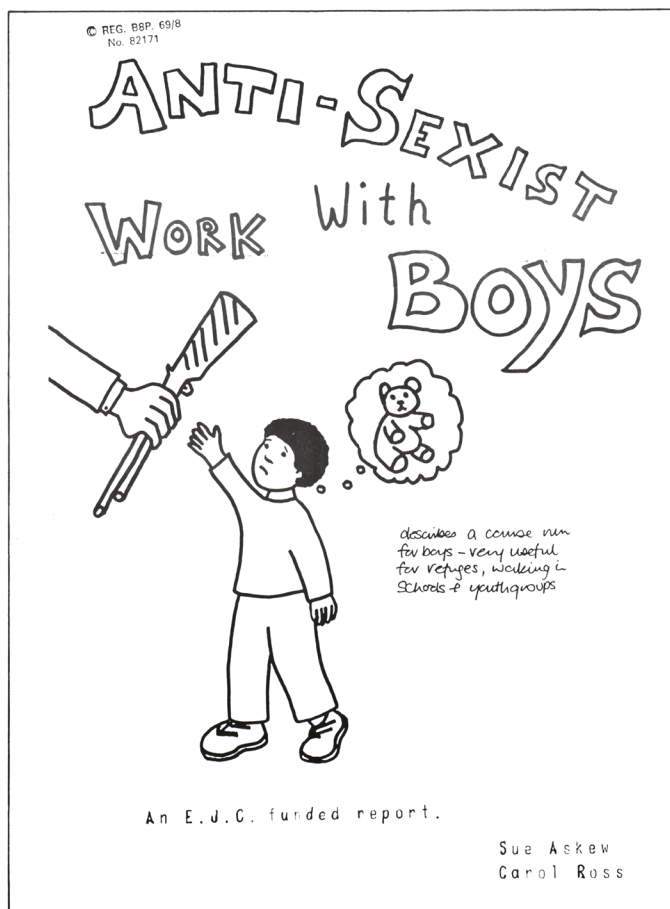
Many of the women who have required Women's Aid's services over its history are mothers. From the beginning, refuges have provided accommodation for women and their children leaving abusive partners.

Mirroring their work with women, over time the Women's Aid movement has developed its understanding of and response to the experiences of children and young people affected by domestic abuse. Today, the nationwide Cedar programme (Children experiencing domestic abuse recovery) exists to assist children and mothers affected by domestic abuse in recovering and rebuilding their lives. Several high profile campaigns on the rights of children and their experience of domestic abuse have developed the understanding and awareness of policy makers, legislative bodies, and the government.

Early work

The initial focus of Women's Aid services was on the needs of the women. While always providing safe shelter space for children and young people, it wasn't until the early 1980s that Women's Aid groups began to identify the particular experiences and needs of children and young people who had been affected by domestic abuse. The first National Children's Worker was appointed in 1982 and a National Children's Group was set up to exchange ideas and information across the Women's Aid network.

"At first it hadn't occurred to us that children would be affected [...] but then, of course, it became obvious when we had the children in the refuge that some children were very withdrawn or some children were quite violent and so on. And some children used very, very bad language that they had picked up, you know. [...] There are ways you can approach children where they [...] can show what sort of experiences they've had and what troubles them and so on and then we could liaise with children's social work and so on in schools." – Maureen Macmillan, founding member of Ross-shire Women's Aid.



Advertisement for report on anti-sexist work with boys. Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, August 1985. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

“The children and young people, their service is very much about one-to-one, group work, also about having a bit of fun. Home might not have been the most fun place to be.”

Susan Jack, Glasgow Women's Aid worker.

In the early days, children's workers in the refuge often focussed on playing with the children, providing safe spaces for them to talk about their experiences, and opportunities for them and their mother to bond. Refuge spaces, although temporary, aimed to provide a home environment for families to enjoy, and offer opportunities for children to relax and have fun.

“We used to take them out to picnics and things and we would take them to the park and to the seaside, things like that, but money was short so we had to be really careful about what we were doing but we used to have good fun. Mums would make picnics and we would go off, like, to a nearby beach and play rounders and play different games with the kids, just having fun. It was lovely, it was nice to see the mums having fun with their children and children being allowed to be children. Because sometimes the children, especially older ones, knew about what was going on and kind of turned into the carer, sort of thing, you know? So, it was good to see them enjoying themselves.” – Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

A contentious issue for women accessing the refuge with children was the cut-off age for male children. In order to maintain the women-only space, Women's Aid groups imposed a cut off of 16 years of age for male children, after which they were no longer eligible to access the refuge space. This caused some controversy, both publicly and with the women using the refuge who had male children of that age.

“The one thing that I used to find very, very difficult is when does a boy become a man and the issues of over-sixteen year old boys. They decided to put the cut-off at sixteen 'cause you could have women in the refuges who are eighteen years old with little toddlers and things like that. And it was very awkward having teenage boys who were almost a man, you know, living around them, especially when there was such fear really. Um, but, of course, a lot of sixteen-year-olds are very much part of their family and, you know, there wasn't a refuge space. And I felt sympathetic to those people and there were times I know that as soon as the workers were away the sixteen-year-old was let in the door [laughs].” – Jane Rubens, former Edinburgh Women's Aid, Falkirk Women's Aid and Scottish Women's Aid worker.

By the early 1990s, there were between 15 and 20 children's workers across the network. There was very little formal training at this point, but the children's workers established peer support and training for each other, and collaboratively produced educational materials for Women's Aid groups and statutory agencies. The 1993 national Women's Aid conference was the first in the movement's history to focus on children, heralding a decade of development of this particular work within Women's Aid.

Development of work

Over time, Scottish Women's Aid and local Women's Aid groups have developed the services available to children and young people, and campaigned for a greater awareness of their needs. There was some contention within the movement that developing work with children would take the focus away from women, and a concern that it would place too much value on the role of women as mothers, which was firmly at odds with many of the feminist principles underlying the movement. However, in general, the movement grew to support an increased focus on working with children and young people, fostering recognition of their particular experiences of domestic abuse.

"[Our workers] changed to actually viewing the children as needing a service, a service that will help them to move on from what they've seen, what they've heard, because we understand how much children took on the guilt of it. And just the same with women, to see children blossoming and moving on from that, and understanding it." – Hazel Bingham, former East Ayrshire Women's Aid worker.

Local Women's Aid groups began to work in closer partnership with schools, teachers, and social workers, to ensure that children who had been affected by domestic abuse were being supported to as high a standard as possible.

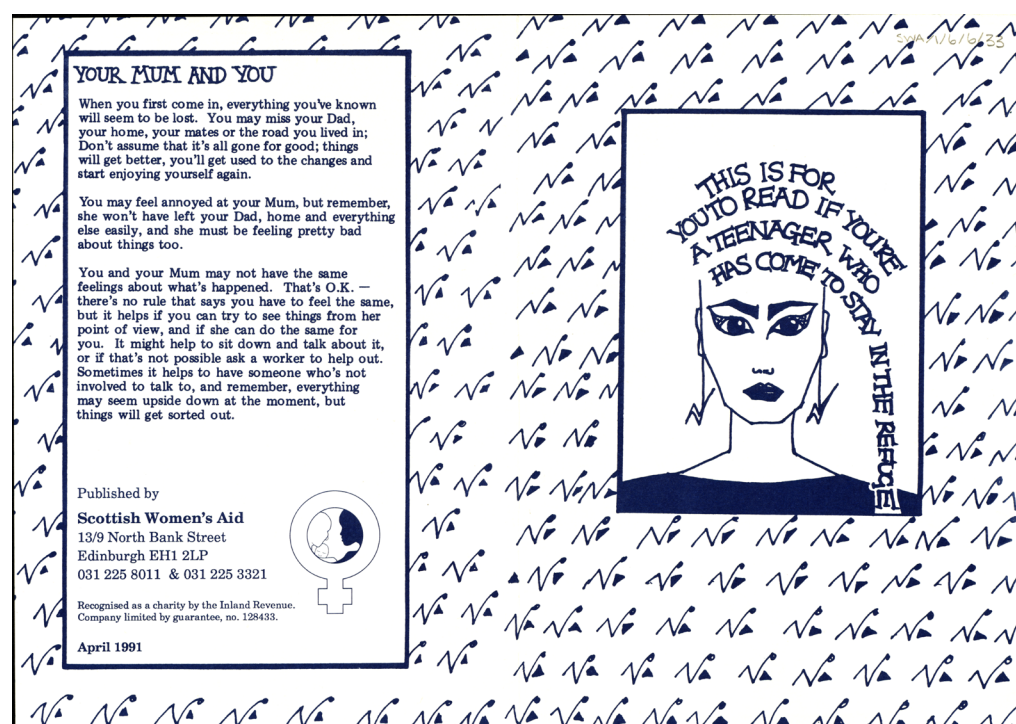
"That was another big leap forward was getting schools to be responsive to the domestic abuse agenda as far as the children were concerned. At first it was all about, 'Oh, this child is from the refuge, [...] make sure they're not stigmatised' and then it's, 'This child's from the refuge and they've had a really bad time at home so be aware of that', that sort of thing." – Maureen Macmillan, founding member of Ross-shire Women's Aid.

Women's Aid groups provided education for both pupils and teachers in school, carrying out workshops with school children to help them identify healthy and unhealthy relationships. Women's Aid groups were also able to support teachers in identifying and understanding the behaviour exhibited by children affected by domestic abuse, which resulted in a better learning environment for the children.

"Some of these children, I remember one girl had been to 13 different schools by the time she went on to secondary school, on to the academy. And, of course, she was creating hell in the classroom and it was because she could barely read or write and she was so far behind because of all these moves that this was her way of getting it away from herself, so she would act the fool and this sort of thing. Once we'd got to the back of that and found out what was going on she was able to get extra help at school." – Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

Mirroring the development in services for women, a greater understanding developed of the cultural nuances in children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse. Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid and Shakti Women's Aid employ dedicated children's workers and offer support to children and young people experiencing forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and 'honour-based' abuse.

"Some of the issues the children's workers deal with are child protection, cultural issues, cultural pressures, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, and we also support a lot of young people who have been forced into marriage or living with the threat of forced marriage. The children's workers also provide training in school to teachers and workshops with the young people to enable them to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and also around cultural issues, cultural aspects of abuse and maybe difficulties that young people are experiencing that maybe are influenced by culture. A substantial amount of our work involves forced marriage and assisting young people to recognise the signs that a marriage is on the horizon. We have a robust children's service which may go hand in hand with the mums who are receiving a service." – Elaine McLaughlin, manager of Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid.



Pamphlet for teenagers staying in refuge, produced by Scottish Women's Aid in 1991. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

I want to be told about decisions that affect my life and to have my voice heard about things that matter to me.



Drawing and response created by young people as part of the 'Children – Equality and Respect' Scottish Women's Aid conference, 1994. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Several high profile campaigns have furthered public and governmental understanding of the effect of domestic abuse on children and young people. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament offered opportunities for children and young people affected by domestic abuse to have direct contact with MSPs. Scottish Women's Aid launched the 'Please Listen' project in 1999, in which children and young people affected by domestic abuse designed and sent postcards directly to MSPs. One of these featured an illustration by a young boy, with the words 'Listen more loudly'. This became the inspiration for Listen Louder, a three year project by Scottish Women's Aid facilitating a direct conversation between government ministers and children and young people with experience of domestic abuse about the need for effective support services. The Listen Louder film resource was produced, scripted and directed by 44 children and young people, speaking about their own experiences and the support they found useful.

This approach of direct contact between children and young people and top-level policy makers was the first of its kind in Scotland, and became heralded as an example of best practice on an international level. This collaborative model has continued to be central to the policy research and consultation that Scottish Women's Aid has provided ever since.

“...I think it's important that we come from that perspective that, actually, children and young people are the experts in their lives and what they've lived with and how it's affected them and we're there to kinda help them to find ways of dealing with that and to recover from it...”

Heather Williams, former
Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

Support for children and young people today

Today, the Cedar programme (Children experiencing domestic abuse recovery), is available in most areas across the country. Cedar provides an opportunity for children and young people to explore their feelings and to take part in creative activities, helping them to articulate their experiences and rebuild their lives. A concurrent programme for mothers is also available, which mirrors the work and structure of the programme for children.

In 2017, Scottish Women's Aid in partnership with the Children and Young People's Commissioner, launched Power Up/Power Down, a new participatory project which asked 27 children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse to talk about what they think needs to change about the current system in Scotland. The outcomes were made into a series of films, and in September 2017, Power Up/Power Down was screened at the Scottish Parliament, and the children and young people involved in creating the resource were invited to meet First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

The development of a greater understanding of the experiences and needs of children and young people affected by domestic abuse has greatly informed the services carried out by Women's Aid groups, leading to more effective and meaningful work. A former worker shared a story from the 2000s involving a colleague who had just started working with children and young people:

“She said to me, 'Do you know what happened last night?' and I says, 'What?' and she says, 'One wee girl says to me, 'I know now, it's not my fault'". And she was 9. And I said, 'Well, what you have done for her, she'll carry that with her. It's not her fault.' And that is where we want to get children to be. That it's not their fault, and they recognise that.” – Hazel Bingham, former East Ayrshire Women's Aid worker.

Chapter 4

Changing Attitudes





A worker adding to the refuge's noticeboard of feminist leaflets and posters. Falkirk Women's Aid, c. 1982. Courtesy of Scottish Women's Aid.

We believe that a world without domestic abuse is not just a dream, it is a possibility. Never doubt it – changing attitudes changes lives.

These words are the strapline on the Scottish Women's Aid website, and they express an aspiration which has always been the beating heart of this movement for change. When the first groups started up in the 1970s, they were challenging the whole edifice of a society which colluded in turning a blind eye to the causes and consequences of domestic violence. There was widespread denial that wife abuse was a serious problem or a public concern. Women who dared to talk about their experiences were told 'you've made your bed, now lie in it'. Or they were interrogated about what they had done to provoke their husbands. Lack of awareness, blaming women and excusing men's behaviour were the default responses when Women's Aid pioneers had the audacity to tear open the curtain – or even attempt to pull it back just a little – in their efforts to generate support for their work. A volunteer at Edinburgh Women's Aid in the 1970s recalled making fudge to sell at a charities fair:

"One day I was at the Assembly Rooms and a couple of women walked past our stall, and one of them actually said to the other within my hearing and one of my fellow volunteers, 'Oh these women are just so stupid, they must like it otherwise they wouldn't keep going back'." – Fiona Allen, former Edinburgh Women's Aid volunteer.

There were plenty of people across Scotland who told the women 'that sort of thing doesn't happen here':

"We were doing a radio programme on Radio Scotland in Inverness and a couple of volunteers went up to speak and this minister phoning up saying, 'A Skye man would never abuse a woman. Never lift his hands to a woman'. I think he really believed it, you know? He believed what he was saying so I think attitudes made it hard for us, or harder for us." – Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

This pervasive myth was particularly present in relation to social class:

“There was still this dreadful perception...oh, it’s a working class problem, it happens in Muirhouse, it happens in Pilton, oh heavens it doesn’t happen in the New Town at all. Well, I know for absolutely damned certain sure, yes it did.” – Fiona Allen, former Edinburgh Women’s Aid volunteer.

Women in these early Women’s Aid groups persisted in tracking down evidence and arguing their case in the face of widespread apathy, ridicule and hostility. However, even in 1989, the widespread lack of public support for Women’s Aid made it a struggle to raise funds:

“I remember feeling really depressed ‘cos I knew there was no hope of raising money using those sources [trusts, legacies and public donation] at that time for domestic violence work. There just wasn’t the public sympathy for it ... those myths are still around, but they were the norm in those days ... there was no alternative voice other than Women’s Aid.” – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women’s Aid.

Public service responses

These attitudes, and the misconceptions which lay behind them, were common not just among the general public, but from the agencies and officials who were on the frontline of public services. Local Women’s Aid groups relied on councillors, housing officers, health professionals, social workers, lawyers and the police to cooperate with them in responding to the complex circumstance and needs of women and children fleeing abusive men. But instead, they frequently met with ignorance, shock and sometimes active opposition:

“It was horrible in those days ‘cause domestic abuse was coming to light – [...] In the early days – in officialdom there was a kind of horror about how much was coming out – how much of it there was [...] and, ‘You are just saying this to get a house, you know, to get a move because you don’t like your tenancy and you want a different tenancy and when you move into it your husband will move in with you’ – a lot of scepticism and trying to reject a lot of claims because I think local authorities, at that time, began to see that this was going to take up quite a lot of their resources if they responded appropriately to what was happening. So, we used to go along and they would say, ‘I don’t see any bruises. Does he hit you? If he doesn’t hit you it can’t be that bad’. It was hard, yes.” – Anonymous, former Dunfermline Women’s Aid worker.

SEXISM KILLS



STOP WOMAN ABUSE

Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, August 1984. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Lack of understanding about domestic abuse as a pattern of fear-based controlling behaviours, combined with unprofessional practice, too often had the effect of colluding with men's abuse and placing women in danger:

"I remember one woman had gone to claim benefit. And they'd called her husband into the office to find out if this was true, sort of thing, and the worker went away to get some sort of paperwork and left the woman's form on the table with the address of the refuge on it ... and he was up banging on the door and shouting the odds". – Annette Miller, former Dundee Women's Aid worker.

From the early years, it was clear that Women's Aid were in the business of education and awareness-raising – not only because the movement was committed to a radical vision of women's equality and liberation which was at odds with the reality of Scottish society, but also because there was the huge everyday task of challenging and changing the frontline attitudes and practices which obstructed the effectiveness of their service to women and children. High on the list of priorities was tackling the way police (a patriarchal institution if ever there was one) traditionally responded – and oral history interviewees from every part of the country recount horror stories about police mind-sets and actions which were totally at odds with Women's Aid. The work of training police officers had to be undertaken at both operational and strategic levels, to ensure that domestic abuse was taken seriously and treated as a crime. A worker with decades of experience at Edinburgh Women's Aid and Scottish Women's Aid bears witness to the magnitude of the task:

"I'll always say that the agency that have done, had the biggest sea change have been the police. When I started the police were just unbelievable. The first police talk I ever did, a police sergeant said "Och, come on now hen, you know yoursel, his team gets beat on a Saturday, he's no very happy, he beats up his wife. She knows he doesnae really mean to do it and by the Monday they've sorted it oot. Noo what's the point of us having a whole load of paperwork?". Seriously, and I mean, you often think people make that up. I was there. It was just like, 'Oh God'." – Lydia Okroj, Scottish Women's Aid, former Edinburgh Women's Aid worker.

Police training could be a real baptism of fire for Women's Aid workers:

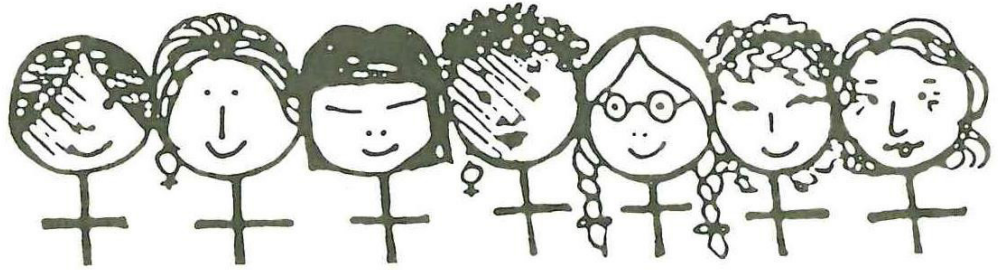
"The Women's Aid worker would open her mouth, and the police officers in the room would jump on her. They were so antagonistic to Women's Aid, so antagonistic, hated them. Like, it was naked hate, it wasn't ... there was nothing hidden about it. Their sense of disdain and contempt for what Women's Aid were trying to do was ... you could feel it in the room." – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women's Aid.

But the problem wasn't just individual officers:

"I used to go to police training sessions for the cadets. And I think they had been told by higher up that this had to happen [laughs] and obviously, you could tell by the body language that the cadets and the sergeant and so on, they weren't all that comfortable, but I don't want to paint a picture that every policeman was like that or not like that. One of our refuge workers was married to a policeman you know ... and so you had policemen who were really very sympathetic and others who were not the least bit sympathetic, but what you needed to change was the whole of the police culture and the way that they viewed domestic violence." – Maureen Macmillan, founding member of Ross-shire Women's Aid.

Around Scotland, local groups worked tirelessly in their everyday contact with police and in provision of training – and it paid off:

"I think one of the strangest things that I've ever seen was a room full of big old fashioned coppers reduced to tears by the testimony of a survivor ... a small petite little woman who got up and spoke in front of this room full of cops about what it was like for her and what she went through. And what it was like when they came out and what they could have done differently. And these great big six foot five guys with tears in their eyes..." – Liz Fotheringham, former Inverness Women's Aid and Lochaber Women's Aid worker.



Faces of sisterhood drawing. Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, June 1985. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

One of Women's Aid's most remarkable achievements has been to facilitate that major shift in police culture and protocol – particularly when support came from the highest level:

"[In 2006] I went through to Glasgow for a meeting that blew my mind because a Chief Constable of Police sat in a room with five feminists and said, 'I've got five years in this job, domestic abuse is my issue, what do you want done?'. And I was like, I said, 'Are you serious?' [laughs] and he said, 'Yeah, I'm serious.'" – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women's Aid.

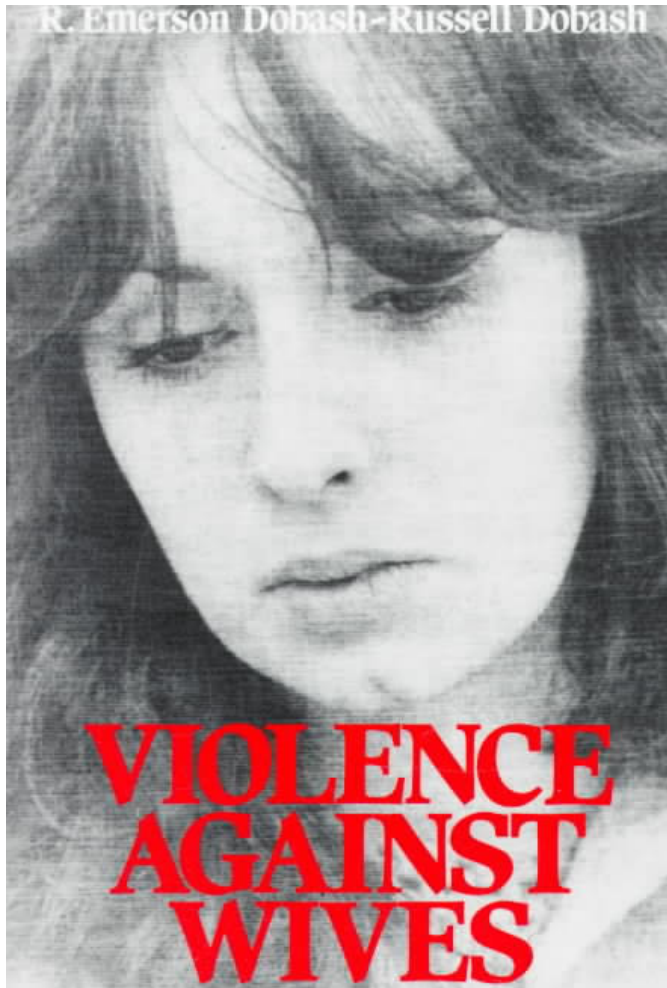
From the early years of the movement, Women's Aid's media, education and training work has been a central driver of change – within the movement as well as in the development and provision of a full programme of courses, workshops and events for practitioners across the key professions. Skilled, creative and passionate trainers have developed excellent resources for building knowledge and understanding in an ever-changing environment, equipping professionals in health, education, social work etc. to respond effectively to new policies, legislation, political and cultural contexts; attempting to counteract ill-informed and sensational media coverage, and to present the voice of expertise. In the 1990s, Women's Aid groups were involved in the high profile Zero Tolerance campaigns, collaborating with others in promoting a clear and challenging public and political focus on violence against women as cause and consequence of women's inequality.

For women involved with Women's Aid, delivering training was often a powerful personal learning experience, building confidence and a real sense of accomplishment:

"I got such a rush of adrenaline because I'd done it, and I couldn't believe it ... I'd always been quite shy and not very good at doing that kind of thing, and I couldn't believe I'd done it. I was so pleased with myself." – Janet MacLeod, former Glasgow Women's Aid worker.

Today, Scottish Women's Aid provides training on domestic abuse to many organisations, including the Scottish Police College, the Crown Office, the Procurator Fiscal Service and the office of the Children's Commissioner.

Academic research



Front cover of *Violence Against Wives: A Case against the Patriarchy* by R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash. Originally published in 1979. The researchers interviewed women in Women's Aid refuges in Scotland as part of their study. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Since 2006, in partnership with Queen Margaret University, Scottish Women's Aid has also developed a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course: 'Gender Justice and Violence – Feminist Approaches', which forms part of the degree programme on social justice. It offers practitioners and activists the opportunity, along with full-time students, to explore and critically examine explanatory frameworks for gender based violence, and the links between theory and practice.

Those connections between theory and practice are vital to ensure that understanding and responses to domestic abuse are always aware of current developments in research. Women's Aid has both driven and contributed to feminist scholarship since Rebecca and Russell Dobash led a University of Stirling team which undertook ground-breaking research in 1975–77, based in part on extensive data collected from women in Scottish refuges, and from Edinburgh and Glasgow police records. Published in 1979 as *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*, the title indicates the politically engaged feminist challenge of the Dobashes' argument. But the empirical analysis also provided statistical evidence of prevalence which was to become a vital campaigning tool for Women's Aid and its allies.

Over the decades, Scottish Women's Aid has continued both to nurture and to utilise the best Scottish, UK, and international scholarship in order to maintain strong evidence-based good practice, firmly rooted in gender analysis, and to inform partnership work with agencies and government.

The feminist ethos of Women's Aid has been constant but also open to new methods, concepts and approaches to research, as these throw important new light on how domestic abuse intersects with a broader spectrum of violence against women. Direct involvement of service users is increasingly important:

"How do you ensure that the views of service users are informing the development of services and policy? And that ultimately led to the WHIR [Women's Health Improvement Research] project in Fife, which was a participatory action research project that involved women who'd experienced domestic abuse in developing the research framework, and delivering, implementing it, so being community researchers." – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women's Aid.

There has been a sea-change in Scottish society over the past forty years. The conspiracy of silence and ignorance has been shattered because:


"We are a specialist organisation, we understand the dynamics of domestic abuse, we understand all about coercive control as well. We know what happens to women, we've heard it time and time again from them, their stories." – Hazel Bingham, former East Ayrshire Women's Aid worker.

And as the expert organisation, Women's Aid has continually pushed this ever-expanding knowledge into the professional, the public and the political domain. Jackie Baillie MSP was volunteering at her local Women's Aid group when she was eighteen. Years later, she carried the portfolio including domestic abuse in the first Scottish Government. Jackie embodies that story of the movement's transforming power and its continuing challenge:

"For me, just that learning experience of how you do that, how you both deliver a service and challenge society to do things differently was really instructive ... As Women's Aid has evolved and our understanding has evolved we've kept pushing the boundary out ... So the need has not diminished, it's just evolved. And I think they are one of the most successful women's organisations I know [...] They have raised awareness and it's been a consistent message, you know, throughout the media, throughout all their communication stuff and certainly in terms of lobbying politicians..." – Jackie Baillie, MSP and former Strathkelvin Women's Aid volunteer.

Chapter 5

Legal and Political Change

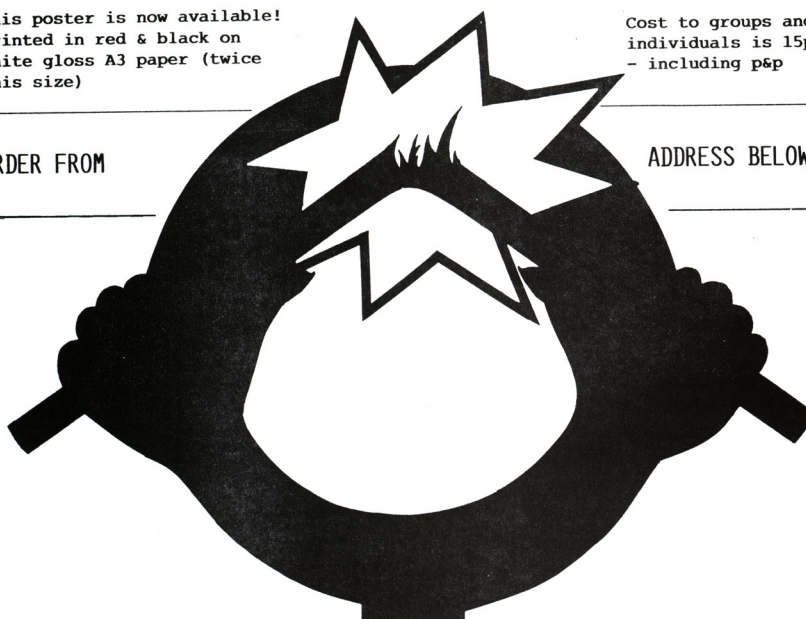


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A poster, available for purchase, featured in a Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, 1989.
Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Legislation and its impact

It's difficult to think of an area of public life which has had more tangible transformative change under the influence of Women's Aid than policy and legislation. The development in the last forty years of legislation designed to protect women, children, and young people experiencing domestic abuse constitute some of the greatest achievements of the Women's Aid movement.

Some of the earliest developments occurred in the 1980s, with the introduction of new laws allowing women to be re-housed after leaving an abusive partner and to have an abusive husband excluded from the marital home. Rape in marriage was only recognised as a crime in Scotland for the first time in 1989. Although these new developments in law did not extend to every woman and were not always enforced, they were part of a pattern that showed an increasing understanding that the law had a role to play in ensuring that all women, children and young people could be safe at home.

“The Matrimonial Homes Act [1981] was a huge milestone in terms of legislative change. It gave women the right to stay in their home even where their partner was the tenant, the named tenant of the home. They could stay in their home with their children and their partner could be excluded using an interdict process. Now, it was civil, it had limits to it but the interdict had powers of arrest attachable and that was big. That meant that if he breached the interdict he could be arrested and charged. That was massive, and the pressure to make that happen, and the work on it came from a collective of collectives, basically, of quite small groups of women around the country and this very tiny, at that time, between 1976 and 1981, very small national staff working together to achieve that change.” – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women’s Aid.

Scottish Women’s Aid continued to push legislators for further legal protection during the 1990s and 2000s, with laws being enacted in relation to stalking, housing rights, harassment, forced marriage and victims/witnesses of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and human trafficking.

Recent years have seen further major legislative developments. In 2017, the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm Act was passed in Scotland, which made it a prosecutable offence to share intimate images of someone without their consent. At the time of writing, the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill, a landmark piece of legislation which recognises emotional and psychological abuse as part of a system of control by an intimate partner, is in the second stage of passing through Scottish Parliament, after being unanimously backed by MSPs.

“The specific offence of Domestic Abuse is, for me, the single biggest thing that has happened in legislation terms since the Matrimonial Homes Act in 1981. It’s the first time that we have an offence that names what domestic abuse is. There is no offence of domestic abuse, you know. At the moment cases are prosecuted as breach of the peace or assault or serious assault or attempted murder. They’re common law offences mostly.” – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women’s Aid.

Political change



Lesley Irving and Lydia Okroj carrying the Scottish Women's Aid banner on a march demanding dedicated funding for Women's Aid services. Princes Street, Edinburgh, 1999. Courtesy of Scottish Women's Aid.

Developing positive links with politicians and officials has been crucial to Women's Aid's ability to shape political and legal change. In the 1990s, many such opportunities were established through Women's Committees within local government and the high-profile Zero Tolerance billboard campaign by the Edinburgh District Council Women's Unit. Women who had been involved in anti-violence campaigns often moved into politics, giving Women's Aid a voice in political spheres.

The mid-90s saw an increased focus on multi-agency responses to domestic abuse, due to a re-organisation of Scotland's local government. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) published guidance in 1998 on developing partnerships to tackle violence against women. Scottish Women's Aid was a driving force behind this development and these partnerships continue today, with local Women's Aid groups as members along with representatives from the police and local authorities.

“That has to be attributed to Scottish Women's Aid, they weren't just delivering services, they were raising the profile [...], they were making it a political issue, a societal issue that we needed to pay attention to.”

Jackie Baillie, MSP and former Strathkelvin Women's Aid volunteer.

Progress has been significantly slower in recognising culturally diverse experiences of domestic abuse:

"At a political and strategic level, I think more can be done for minority ethnic women. Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid was set up in 1981 and it wasn't until 2011 that forced marriage legislation was promulgated. Workers at the inception of the project were dealing with forced marriage issues and it has taken 30 years for a law in Scotland to protect victims/survivors. I said publicly that the Government at that time should be commended. I don't think there's an awful lot of awareness of issues affecting women from minority-ethnic communities. [...] There is still a long way to go in terms of proper protection and support for women experiencing domestic violence considering the diverse communities living within Scottish society." – Elaine McLaughlin, manager of Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid.

While many within the Women's Aid movement have welcomed a closer working relationship with MSPs and the Scottish Parliament, there are also concerns that it has put the movement in a position of dependency, affecting the ability of Women's Aid to affect radical change:

"So, yeah, Scottish Parliament, huge investment, huge commitment. I would say nothing but positive stuff. My personal view is we should have said, 'Absolutely, mission accomplished, phase one completed. We've got buy in. How do we want to move forward as a movement and an organisation?'. Because what I think happened was we became partners with the government and we became allies and "strategic partners" as they like to call it. I think for a lot of people, some of our members, our more radical members, I think they feel like we've just become an arm of government. I don't think we have because I think we still challenge [...] and we have to challenge less because we're knocking at an open door – but how far does your relationship go [until ...] it becomes very difficult to challenge the hand that funds you." – Lydia Okroj, Scottish Women's Aid, former Edinburgh Women's Aid worker.

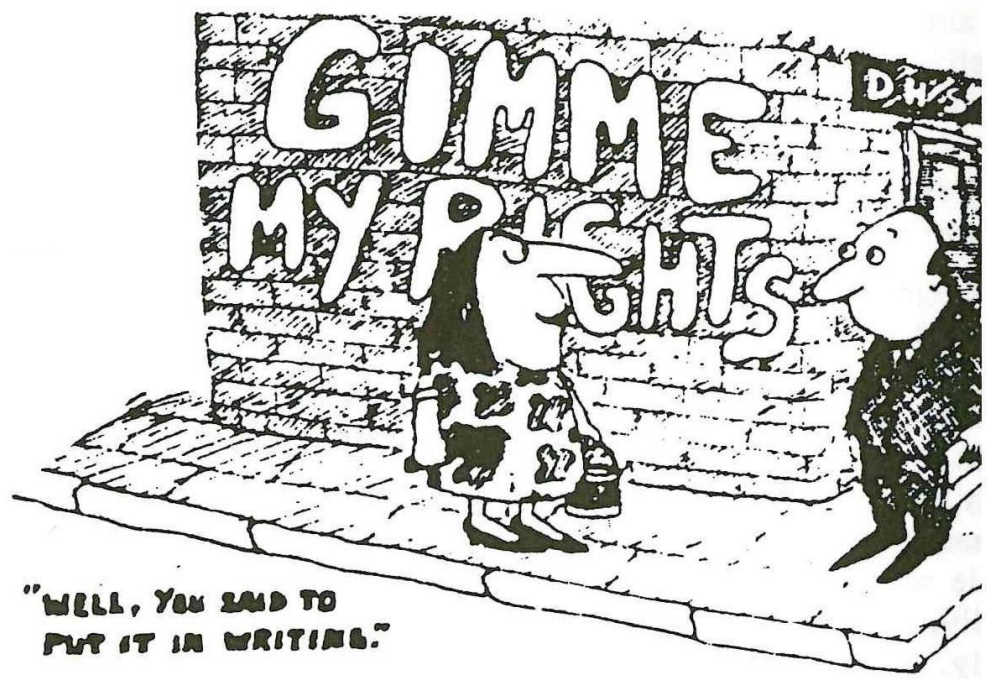


Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, March/April 1984. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

Scottish devolution

Scottish devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 created new opportunities for Women's Aid to lobby for political and legislative change. A Scottish Parliament offered the potential for greater collaborative working due to its accessibility, a higher number of female elected members, and cross-party support for action to end violence against women.

"And very much from early on there were debates about things that they never really found time for on the agenda at Westminster. So domestic abuse was up there in the early days of the [Scottish] Parliament. Poverty, you know, children, all of the things that some people would describe as women's issues that [...] I think they are society's issues. But suddenly there was the space and the time to talk about these things. And the space and the time [...] to then do something about it. [...] I was encouraged by the fact that at the very beginning and right the way through women across party have actually all come together on this agenda and have put politics to one side [...] they've used that powerful grouping to do what they can on service delivery, on increased staffing and resources, and on improved legislation, you know, and things like the domestic abuse courts wouldn't have happened otherwise. So that's a very powerful thing to have. And I think it's only there, not because we have right-on men, but because there is a critical capacity of women in the Scottish Parliament and that's stayed that way." – Jackie Baillie, MSP and former Strathkelvin Women's Aid volunteer.

Having a Scottish Parliament also offers the opportunity for a greater degree of contact between survivors of domestic abuse and MSPs:

"Some [survivors accessing Women's Aid services] wrote about their journey and a few of them went with Heather [Williams, manager of Ross-shire Women's Aid] on a bus to the Scottish Parliament. They were unbelievable. They couldn't get over this. It's not that long ago. It must be, maybe, four or five years. Maybe not even as long as that. [...] They went on the bus all dolled up and they all had their make-up done. It was fabulous and they had a whale of a time, couldn't believe that they were important enough to be at the Scottish Parliament talking to MSPs and apparently, I wasn't there as I say, but apparently some of [the MSPs] were crying when they read [the women's work]. So that's where we need to be, right at the heart of it because it's very powerful and they were so brave. So, so brave." – Marilyn Ross, former Ross-shire Women's Aid worker.

The Scottish Parliament held a debate on how to end domestic abuse in Scotland during its first year and announced increased funding to develop support services for women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. A National Partnership to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland was formed, resulting in the first national strategy in 2000. Scottish Women's Aid was a lead member, along with other anti-violence against women (VAW) organisations, in the development of this strategy to include and address all forms of VAW, and it was the first time such groups had taken a policy-making role in government.

The Scottish Government, with the input of Scottish Women's Aid, published a number of papers on domestic abuse in the 2000s and 2010s, and in 2014 launched Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.

Today, Women's Aid services in Scotland receive the vast majority of their funding from the government. However, this isn't without its own set of challenges:

"The big problem that I have with the government is funding. And I think that can be very disheartening to groups, that it's either a yearly basis or if you're lucky you get three years. And it's so disheartening, you know. [The government's decisions] made for future funding are always left to the last minute. So you've got staff saying, 'Should I apply for another job?'. We've lost staff in here, and other people, and other organisations, have went on to more permanent kinds of jobs and kind of funding. [...] I feel that is the thing that has been quite draining over the years. I thought we'd established there's a need for it. Why do we have to keep on establishing there's a need for these services? And how you're going to deliver these services. So I find that can be quite wearing." – Hazel Bingham, former East Ayrshire Women's Aid worker.

To have domestic abuse in its myriad forms recognised in legislation, to have discussions in Scottish Parliament about the effects of domestic abuse, and for Women's Aid services to receive cross-party support, were completely unimaginable outcomes when Women's Aid in Scotland was established in the mid-1970s.

During the last 40 years, the Women's Aid movement have fought to introduce legislation and policy which protects the freedom and safety of women, children and young people in Scotland. This work has produced revolutionary, tangible results, transforming Scottish law and society for future generations. The work is ongoing, and the movement's relationship with the Scottish Government will continue being negotiated, but tremendous progress has been achieved.



Illustration in Scottish Women's Aid newsletter, Summer 1993. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

The Future of Women's Aid in Scotland



“It’s so important that women have their own history, as we’ve so often been written out of history, and in particular the Women’s Aid movement in Scotland reflects this magical combination of women taking local action and creating – transforming, really – a country.”

Dr Marsha Scott, CEO of
Scottish Women’s Aid.



Edinburgh and Lothian
Women's Aid poster displayed
in Edinburgh bus station
advertising services for women,
c. 1977. Courtesy of Scottish
Women's Aid.

The Speaking Out project set out to discover, explore, and celebrate the 40 year history of Women's Aid in Scotland. This was not only to recognise the successes of the movement's history and communicate them to the network and a wider audience, but also to fortify and inform the movement as it continues its work.

Women's Aid has changed the face of Scotland forever, and for the better. Despite numerous setbacks, challenges, and struggles, the movement has achieved radical change in the attitudes and responses to domestic abuse from almost every facet of society.

Our current economic and political climate all too readily seeks to identify impact in only physically quantifiable terms – for example, the number of women in refuge, the number of reported incidents of domestic abuse, the number of calls made to a helpline. Statistics like these are useful in understanding the scale of domestic abuse, but they only go so far. The Speaking Out project aimed to offer evidence of the impact Women's Aid has had in Scotland beyond these numbers – in terms of transforming individual lives, in making people in positions of power think twice, of persistence in the face of what looked like an impossible task.

It's bittersweet to celebrate an anniversary of this work. Ultimately, Women's Aid workers would like to work themselves out of a job. The Speaking Out project celebrates the history of the movement not because we'd like there to be another forty years of it, but because the last forty years have been so successful.

Throughout the project, women involved with and affected by Women's Aid in Scotland pointed to the elements that made the movement successful – the dedication and determination of individual women, the sisterhood between the women involved, the creative thinking as challenges arose – and most of all, the utter refusal to accept the reality as it stood for women, children and young people across Scotland.

Thanks to the tireless work of women within the network over the last 40 years, domestic abuse is a widely recognised and increasingly understood social issue. So, now that we have the attention of the public, the media, statutory agencies and politicians, what steps do we take to eradicate domestic abuse? Can we do it in our lifetimes? What challenges are coming our way, both from inside and outside the movement?

On the 26th October, 2017, Scottish Women's Aid held the annual Member's Conference for the Women's Aid network. The project team asked workers from across the country what they felt the future held for Women's Aid in Scotland.

There was acknowledgment of young women coming into the movement with fresh energy and ideas, and how important that is to the continuation of working to end violence against women. One worker commented that there was a resurgence of feminism in young women after a period of time where she believed they had been misled into thinking equality had been achieved. Seeing young women join the movement made her hopeful for its future, and she referred to herself and other women in the movement as 'flame keepers' for the next generation.

There was a desire to build on successes of the past – one worker felt that we should draw inspiration from the movement’s achievements in changing attitudes within the police by applying a similar approach to the criminal justice system – advocating for mandatory training of sheriffs and other people within the system coming into contact with domestic abuse survivors. Workers also expressed how important they felt it was to continue building on the accessibility of the movement, ensuring that Women’s Aid services are open to all women, and all children and young people.

Upcoming challenges were also acknowledged. Women spoke of their frustration at how rife inequality continues to be in today’s society, and how political developments continue to oppress women across the world. Some workers voiced concern for the direction of service provision for women – one spoke of how she felt the movement has reached a point where it needed to use the knowledge of its forty year history to define its specialism in distinct terms, or else be at risk of being merged into a range of services with less focus on women, children and young people.

These opinions align wholeheartedly with those captured in the project’s oral histories – a proud acknowledgement of the battles won along the way, coupled with a frank awareness of how far there is yet to go.

Women’s Aid in Scotland will continue to work towards ending both domestic abuse and its cause – women’s inequality – through working with survivors to create the most beneficial and effective services possible, partnering with other feminist organisations to identify and challenge women’s inequality in every part of society, and to publically dismantle the myths that surround the violence women experience at the hands of men.

The past informs the present – understanding our history allows us to face our future with resilience and a sense of community. We hope the Speaking Out project has been successful in drawing together evidence of the transformative power of Women’s Aid and its many achievements. The work of the last 40 years achieved more than many thought possible. No matter how far the movement has to go, we are significantly closer than we were to a safer, better, and fairer world for women in Scotland.

“That contrast between 1982 and around about 2007, unbelievable. To have the overview, to see that is quite something. You know, I feel in some ways quite privileged ‘cause I know that younger workers or workers who are involved more recently sometimes go, ‘We’re never getting anywhere’, and I’m thinking, ‘We are. We are, we really are. And we’ll go on getting places’.” – Lily Greenan, former CEO of Scottish Women’s Aid.

Acknowledgements



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The project team would also like to use this opportunity to thank all of the project volunteers and oral history interviewees for dedicating their time and energy to the Speaking Out project. We hope you are proud of the results.

For more information about the Speaking Out project, please visit www.speakingout.womenslibrary.org.uk. If you have any questions regarding the publication or project, please get in touch at info@womensaid.scot.

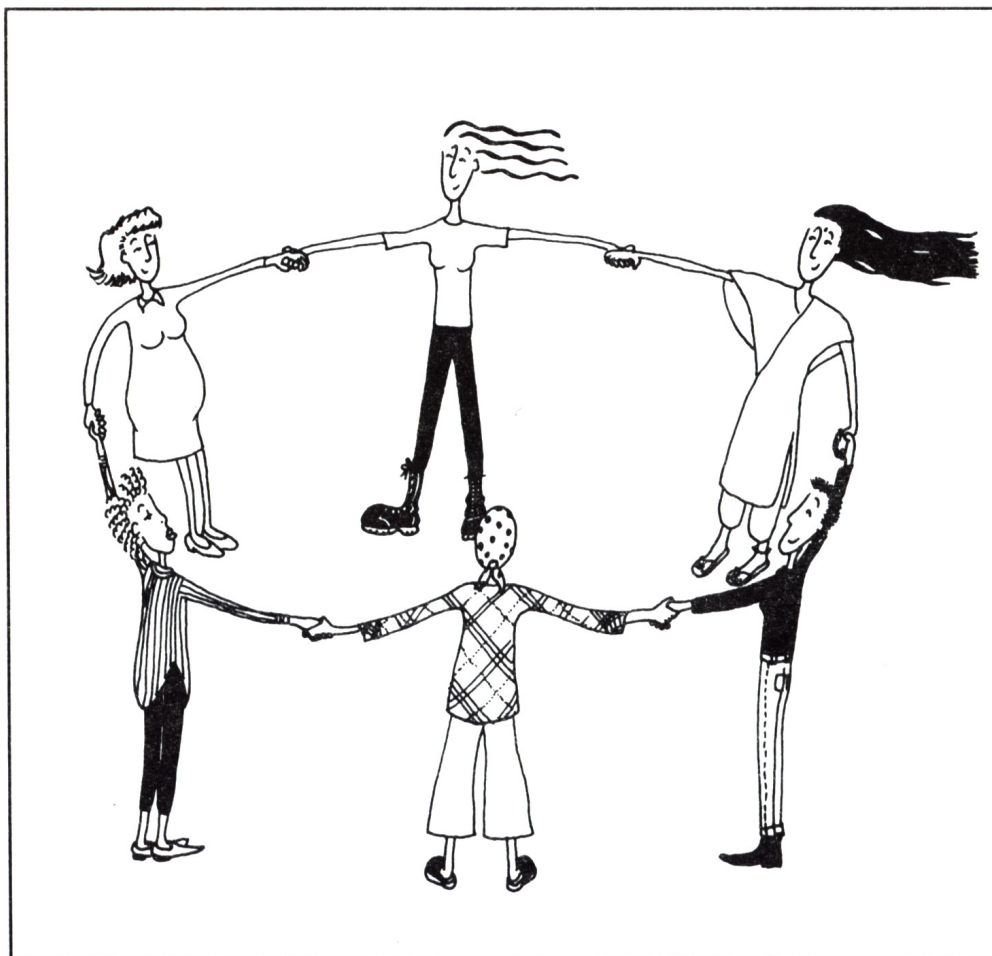


Illustration in Glasgow Women's Aid annual report, 1994-1995. Courtesy of Glasgow Women's Library.

SPEAKING OUT:

RECALLING
WOMEN'S AID
IN SCOTLAND

