

2019–2020 Annual Report

Fife Women's Aid

Empowering women and
children on the road to
recovery



Trustees' Note

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Fife Women's Aid (FWA).

2019-2020 has been a year of change on many levels and it has proven to be both an exciting and a challenging time. In June 2019, we welcomed our new Manager, Kate McCormack, who has brought a wealth of new ideas and extensive knowledge to the organisation. She has been instrumental in increasing the operational capacity of FWA by restructuring the staff teams and engaging with the team seniors to ensure improved communication channels with all the staff. She has also been working closely with the Board of Trustees to conduct a full review of FWA's policies to ensure that the organisation remains effective.

With the effectiveness and compliance of FWA at heart, this year the Board undertook a full review of its governing documents to safeguard that the organisation is operating in accordance with the Governance Code principles and current OSCR requirements, and that it operates in a transparent and accountable manner. We also continue to recruit new members to our Board to make sure that it remains dynamic and active and continues to provide support to the management team.

In February 2020 we launched our new website and increased our presence on social media to keep pace with the evolving digital landscape.

However, while all these positive changes were taking place, the global pandemic crisis that emerged in March 2020 introduced new challenges for FWA. With domestic

abuse on the rise during the national lockdown and restrictions being put into place, FWA responded immediately to ensure that our services continued to operate and prioritised the safety and wellbeing of women and children that we already support as well as the ones that have reached out seeking our assistance. Digital inclusion and accessibility have become an essential part of our operations in this new reality and we will endeavour to continue to be there for the women and children in Fife that are impacted by domestic abuse.

We would like to extend a massive THANK YOU to all our staff and volunteers who have worked in an exceptional way especially during the pandemic. Their dedication and passion have shone through and we are so proud of what they have achieved under these difficult circumstances.

We also wanted to take the opportunity to send our thanks to all our funders, and all the individuals and organisations who continue to make such a difference through their donations. Without their financial support, our work could not be achieved and for that we are forever grateful.

We are confident that FWA will continue to support the women and children in need of our services throughout these challenging times and we look forward to engaging with all of you in the year ahead.

With special thanks!

Daphne Grant
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Welcome to the 2019-2020 Annual Report for Fife Women's Aid.

I was appointed manager in June 2019 and remain as excited about this role as I was on my first day. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude and respect for those women who went before me as trustees, managers, workers and volunteers, whose hard work made the organisation the success it is today.

As always in a new job it takes time to get to know the team, the partners, key stakeholders and most importantly the women who use our service, some of whom are housed in our 35 refuges. Everything was going very well: the new strategy was under development, policies were being reviewed and the organisation engaged with the latest advances in trauma informed practice. Then the pandemic struck and everything suddenly changed.

The coronavirus will be remembered as the dominant feature of 2020. It catapulted domestic abuse into the spotlight as it became a priority issue because of the increased risks caused by lockdown and the much reduced ability to monitor women and children's safety.

To help mitigate this Fife Council and the Scottish Government made funding available to allow us to take on more refuge accommodation. We did this with the utmost speed and by the start of May we added 6 refuges to our capacity.

At Fife Women's Aid we are very aware of the risks to our children and families of digital exclusion: it is vital to have reliable internet connection and an up to date device to stay in contact with family, friends, services and access the kind of resources we all use on a daily basis. We now have wifi in every refuge as a result of generous donations from the Lumsden Club at the University of St Andrews and thanks to a grant from the Women's Fund for Scotland every family has access to a tablet.

Another adaption to lockdown is geared towards ensuring that women can always make contact with us as easily as possible. We have augmented our very busy helpline with a new facility whereby women can get in touch with us directly via Facebook. This is proving to be a useful enhancement to accessibility.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us through this challenging year. We look forward to continuing to improve and develop our services for all the women and children who need them in the coming year.

Kate McCormack
Manager

New domestic abuse legislation

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 helps to provide people affected by domestic abuse with justice and increased protection. Fife Women's Aid welcomes this.

The definition of domestic abuse has now been widened beyond the traditional focus on physical violence to include coercive control - behaviours that include psychological and emotional abuse.

Abusers sometimes share or threaten to share revealing or intimate photos or videos of their victim. This is also now a crime and covered by the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016.



At the time of writing, the Scottish Government is proposing new legislation under which domestic abusers could be barred from the homes of victims and banned from re-entering for two months. This proposal could help prevent victims of domestic abuse from becoming homeless.

The Scottish legislation defines abusive behaviour as violent, threatening or intimidating, with one or more of the following purposes:

- making a partner dependent or subordinate
- isolating a partner from friends, relatives or other sources of support
- controlling, regulating or monitoring a partner's day-to-day activities
- depriving a partner of, or restricting, freedom of action
- frightening, humiliating, degrading or punishing a partner.

It is now illegal for a partner to limit your access to money, frighten you, control what you wear, make you do things you do not want to do and exert control by taking house or car keys from you. These rules apply equally to partners and ex partners.

Any offence is treated as aggravated if any of the abuse is directed at a child or witnessed by them. Fife Women's Aid is happy to see that the effect of domestic abuse on child victims is now being recognised.

“I have been able to start moving my life forward with the help of FWA, as being in a safe and secure FWA property has helped me to recover”

“It feels good that someone understands and I can tell you everything and then think about it without being told what to do. I can decide myself”

“I called the support line ... the phone support allowed me to speak through my experiences of domestic abuse ... I am going to attend counselling with FWA and am now looking forward to the future”

Conference: a Fife Women's Aid first!

Background

In September 2019, (when people could still get together!) we held our first ever conference exploring the question of how best to support 'high risk victims' because we know that domestic abuse can escalate into stalking, sexual assault and murder – and this can put children at high risk of harm.

We are grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund, which helped to make this possible.

Co-production approach

We wanted something that would excite and unite people with an interest in tackling domestic abuse and with that in mind we took a co-production approach to the planning. This meant that people with lived experience of surviving domestic abuse were central in both the planning and delivery of the event.



Workshops

We also wanted a high level of participation, so we offered a number of workshops on a range of subjects.

MARAC

Our workshop about the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) helped participants to understand the role and function of these regular, local meetings, where information about domestic abuse victims at risk of the most serious levels of harm is shared between representatives from a range of local agencies. This information is then used to develop a coordinated action plan to increase the safety of the victim and their children.

Self-care

At Fife Women's Aid we strongly believe that the power of creativity along with skills in self-care can be a useful adjunct on the road to recovery. We were therefore delighted to have a workshop about this led by Mariem Omari of Theatre Bijli – the award-winning playwright and trauma-informed practitioner. The feedback from those lucky enough to attend this was heart-warming.

Children's experience of domestic abuse

Two of our own staff, Gill and Pauline, led a powerful workshop on 'Children's Experience of Domestic Abuse' exploring how children and young people experience domestic abuse and how sometimes they can be manipulated by perpetrators and the effect of this on them. Best practice on how to support children and young people to reduce risk and enhance recovery was also discussed.

Conference presentations

We had four speakers including those with personal experience of domestic abuse.

Professor Jane Monkton Smith, University of Gloucestershire

Jane Monkton Smith's research on men who kill their partners reveals a "homicide timeline" that could be tracked by police to help prevent deaths. Jane identified an eight-stage pattern that recurred across 372 killings in the UK. Her work has been published in the Violence Against Women Journal.

DCI Debra Forrester

Debra Forrester gave a presentation on levels of domestic abuse in Scotland, the police response and the implementation of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. This was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Sally Fox

Sally – an expert by experience and an artist, poet and public speaker – gave a presentation about her and her sons' journey from domestic abuse to recovery. This included her involvement with the mental health system, the damage caused by diagnosis and the positive impact of a trauma-informed approach. She shared her poetry, which you can read on page 8.

Luke Hart

Luke is a campaigner whose mother and sister were both murdered by his father. Luke went on to set up the CoCo Awareness charity with his brother Ryan. He shared his story of living with coercive control throughout his childhood, the impact of this and his current work raising awareness of and changing attitudes to domestic abuse and coercive control. This was again followed by a very dynamic question and answer session.

Participants and feedback

We had over 80 people attending on the day including staff from housing, social work, mental health services, Police Scotland and a range of third sector agencies – and of course people with direct experience of domestic abuse.

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and appreciative. The event raised our profile, connected us with our stakeholders (including the people who use our service) and was such a success that we believe we should plan ahead for our next one once we emerge from the pandemic.



Murder Most Ordinary

There's been a murder
but nobody has been found
The scene, a domestic one.
A home abandoned,
like the Marie Celeste.
Apparently, she did her best
but couldn't take it anymore.
Being pushed against walls that were getting smaller.
Picking herself up from the floor
Waiting for the change
that didn't come.
Tired of pretending to the kids
that *Daddy's okay, just a bit uptight
stay out of his way, go and play
(let your imaginations take you far from here)*

The reality was brutal.
Something was changing,
getting worse – intensifying
Death threats were gathering momentum
First he killed the cat
She died following a torturous night
Tabasco sauce poured in her eyes.
Then he, the loving husband and father,
broke the cat's back against a brick wall
The boys, horrified and traumatised,
Understanding that to fall out of favour
could have grave consequences.

It was known I was next in line, being kept in line.
So, the next time he announced in his callous tone
that I was going to die that night,
I took no more chances
Just three bin bags of clothing and toys, three little boys
and a book of Maya Angelou poems
I headed for refuge, careful to leave no trace behind.

There's been a murder
But nobody has been found
A missing person statement stamped and filed.
The woman and her children safe and sound...
Or, are they?



First Lived Experience Ambassador appointed

In March 2020 – as a way of honouring those whom we have had the privilege of supporting – we appointed Bee Parkison Cameron to a new role as Lived Experience Ambassador.

Bee's response to the appointment was:

I could never have envisaged all those years ago when I first contacted the service that I would become an ambassador for the charity. I was touched and deeply honoured when I was approached to become the first ambassador for Fife Womens Aid. This role allows me to promote the service and to help other women and their families who have suffered domestic abuse find the support they need.

We are very grateful to Bee for promoting our service on social media to such great effect during the pandemic.



New website for 2020

We have refreshed our website to keep up to date with the evolving digital landscape we work in.

The new, improved website can now be viewed on mobile devices, the design is contemporary and engaging and we have updated our content. We have also included recovery stories for the first time to encourage and inspire the people who visit the website seeking to use our services.

Social media

Fife Women's Aid are now active on Facebook Twitter and Instagram to enable us to engage effectively with the public.

Facebook

During 2020 engagement with our Facebook page has increased by 61% and at the time of writing we now have nearly 1500 followers. The reach of specific posts has also significantly increased, with some reaching 20,000 people.

Twitter

We are delighted to report that the number of people engaging with our Twitter account has increased by 100% in 10 months to 900 followers – with a proportionate increase in interactions, comments and support.

Instagram

Instagram is our latest social media venture. We set up the account in February 2020 and we now have 213 active followers.



Pets, domestic abuse and recovery

We know that pets can feel like members of the family, are a source of comfort and security and an asset on the recovery journey. In fact, some studies suggest that half of all domestic abuse survivors delay moving out to safety for fear that their pets might be harmed.

For these reasons all of our refuges welcome small, caged pets and

we are increasing the number of pet-friendly refuges that can accommodate larger animals such as cats and dogs. We now have 12 such refuges and we are willing to consider any of the non-pet friendly refuges for pets if the need arises. We want to remove all barriers that might get in the way of women and children seeking safety.



One woman stated that:

I am glad I took the time to do this for myself and think about my needs and wants and what is best for me. Put me first, then I can be a stronger and more patient and caring mum, friend to other people, if I'm looking after me.

We are very grateful to the Foundation Scotland Tampon Tax for funding this work.

Children's groups

Due to the pandemic our well-established and highly regarded children's groups also went online. Thankfully, they have made the transition successfully.

In the face to face experience the children made collective use of arts and crafts materials. To help make the online experience equally enjoyable we have given each child their own bag of materials so they can bring these to the sessions and recreate the collective experience online.

Groups, creativity and recovery

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the creative arts have an important role to play in recovery. We have tested this in group work during the past year and the feedback tells us that this approach is worthwhile.

Write to Recovery

Erin Crombie – an experienced facilitator from SAY Women – ran the Write to Recovery group work programme for us in January 2020.

The programme used a strengths-based and trauma-informed perspective to enable group members to write about their life experiences and to begin to articulate their own strengths, skills and abilities – as well as their difficult experiences.

The group exercises included writing, discussion and learning about recovery from videos such as the Nadine Burke Harris TED Talk on Adverse Childhood Experiences.

A general thread running throughout the programme was to help women see that the question was not 'what is wrong with you?' but rather 'what has happened to you?' and that this was central to their recovery.

The Write to Recovery group work continued on Zoom after the lockdown and this has also received positive feedback.

Self Care Groups

In autumn 2019 Sue Hampson from Safe to Say ran groups on self-care in Dunfermline, Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy to help make the work more widely accessible.

Evaluation showed that the women who had attended the groups felt that they:

- were more relaxed and healthy
- were less isolated and alone
- had increased their confidence
- were more able to cope with the impact of stress
- had increased their ability to self-manage
- had benefited from naturally arising peer support

Poem from the Write to Recovery group

Isolated at home with only my thoughts
Life was terribly hard
Then the opportunity came in the form of a 'zoom'
To talk and explore and the chance to grow

We were asked to write down what our hopes would be
So we could see how far we could grow
So I had a moment and began to wonder
What could this do for me

So my first thing was to be comfortable and be able to trust
Then came a safe place to share what I wrote (if I could)
Next was just people to interact with and not feel so alone
And most important of all was to learn who I was again

The anxiety was real and the panic set in
A new way to interact with my peers
But very soon the feelings started to ease
And I was glad that I had joined

So week after week we met up on the screen
And relationships started to grow
And soon my creativeness started to show

All too soon a sad topic came up
As 'endings' was the end of the show
But what I had gained and how much I had grown
Made the 'ending' much easier to swallow

So Monday mornings are bleak with the loss of my 'zoom'
But I have to remember without endings new things can't start to grow
So it was time to build on those hopes and myself
Time to start something new



Policy review and update

Although Policy reviews are not the most exciting part of any Annual Report, they are nevertheless essential to maintain an efficient and effective organisation that meets its statutory requirements.

To this end we have increased our policy review process from every three years to every two years in line with the Scottish Governance Code for the third sector, with an annual review taking place for our safeguarding policies.

During 2019-2020 we have reviewed our Adult Protection, Child Protection

and Safeguarding policies to ensure that they are in line with changes such as the end of the named person role.

We have reviewed our Pets policy to accommodate what we have learned since starting to have pet-friendly refuges.

We have also introduced some new policies (particularly in relation to HR) such as a Performance Improvement policy and Time Off in Lieu policy.

Finally, we have introduced a Remote Access policy so that we could deal with the impact of the pandemic.

Funding

We would like to thank all of our funders who make it possible for us to provide support:

Fife Council Public Social Partnership for Homelessness
Fife Council Social Work
Fife Council Housing
NHS Fife
the Scottish Government Violence Against Women Fund
the National Lottery Community Fund
the Henry Smith Charity
the Robertson Trust
the Gannochy Trust
the Volant Trust
the Alexander Moncur Trust
Foundation Scotland
Children in Need



Also good news is that our highly valued Court Support and Advocacy Service was awarded a further three years' funding from the Henry Smith Charity.

The Children in Need funding for our Family Support Service came to an end and we were so pleased to receive two years' funding from National Lottery Community Fund to enable us to continue this crucial service from November 2019.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Scottish Government, Comic Relief and the Women's Fund for Scotland who have all provided additional financial support to assist us to manage the impact of the covid-19 pandemic.

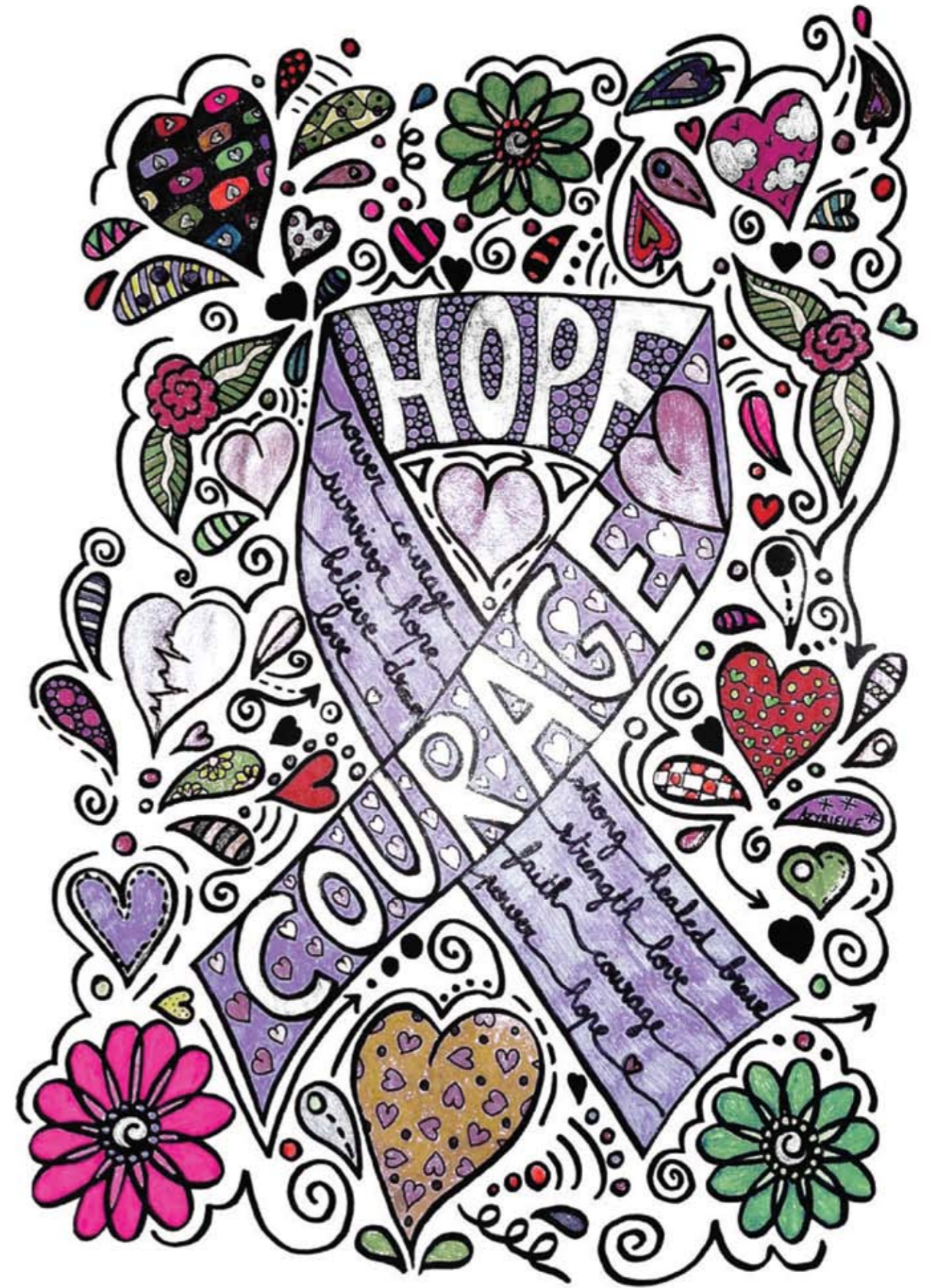
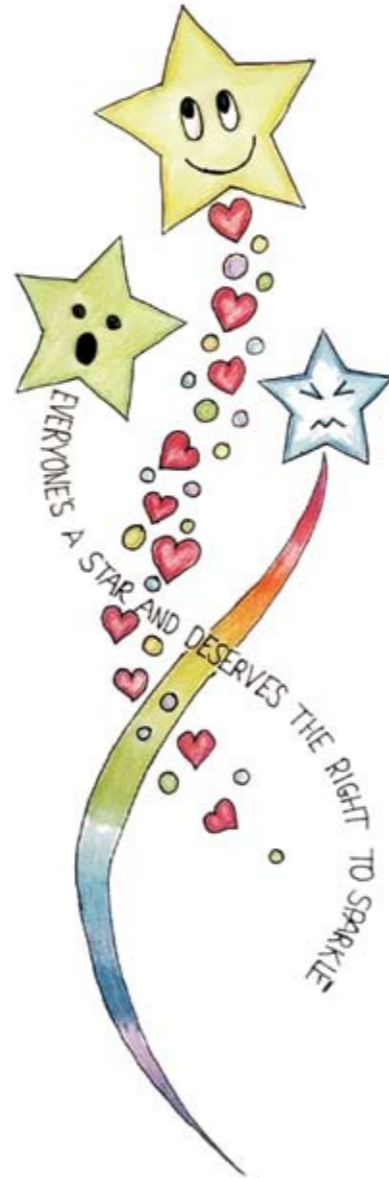
Donations

We would also like to express huge gratitude to all the individuals and groups who have supported us by making donations during the year and beyond to support the increased level of need that has arisen as a result of the pandemic. Your generosity and kindness has dramatically improved the situation for many families.

Being believed and having the support for me and my children has helped us heal and come to terms with our experience, and has given me the confidence to go on. I have now started a college course in social care and would like to help others. The whole process has made me feel safer and more confident”

We were delighted when our Befriending Service was awarded an additional three years' funding by the National Lottery Community Fund. The Befriending Service is an important element of the Safe, Secure and Supported at Home project led by Fife Council.

The fantastic art work shown overleaf has all been produced by women, children and young people we support.



Get in touch

Please ring 0808 802 5555 to talk to a support worker in confidence about your options and our services. The line is open weekdays between 9am and 5pm, and an out-of-hours service is available from 6pm until 8am Monday to Friday and 24 hours at weekends.

For more information about the services we offer and to read stories from survivors, please visit our website www.fifewomensaid.org.uk

You can also find out more about what we do from our Facebook page or on Twitter and Instagram.



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