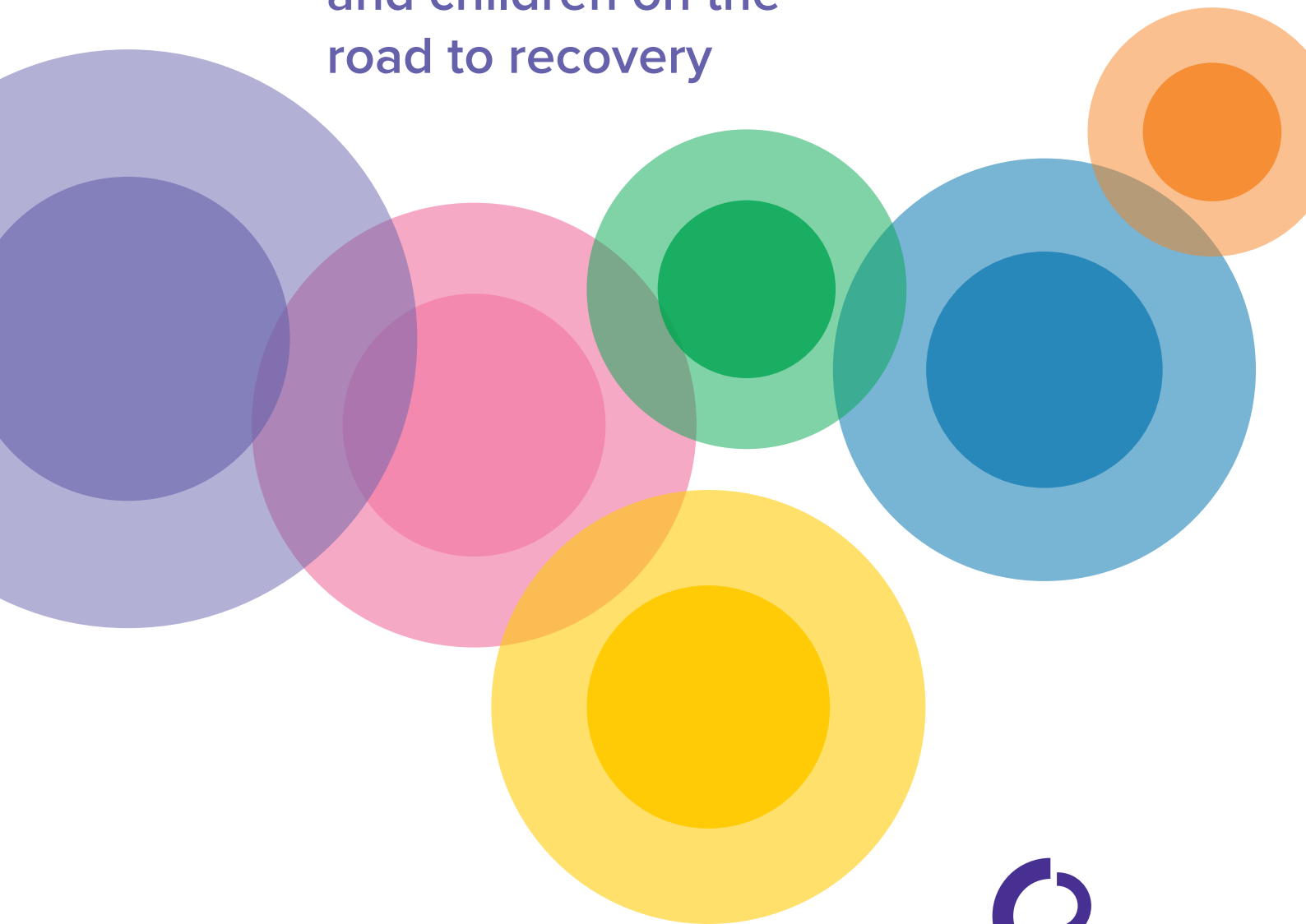
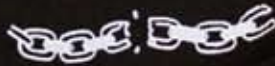


Fife Women's Aid Annual Report 2025 - 2026

Empowering women
and children on the
road to recovery





she believed she could
so she did
Stronger than her past


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WELCOME FROM CEO

Welcome to Fife Women’s Aid Annual Report 2025-2026.

Let me set the evidence for why we do what we do.

The evidence is clear and the statistics irrefutable; across the UK violence against women and girls is pervasive and increasing. Sad to say but Fife has higher than average crime figures in this field. Every three days in the UK a woman is killed by a man.

The daily damage inflicted includes the impact on children, relatives and the wider community. Children in care, prison, medical interventions, mental health, homelessness, addiction, education, employment, long term sick, and the social and financial costs that are incurred.

Men’s violence against women is a leading cause of the premature death for women globally.

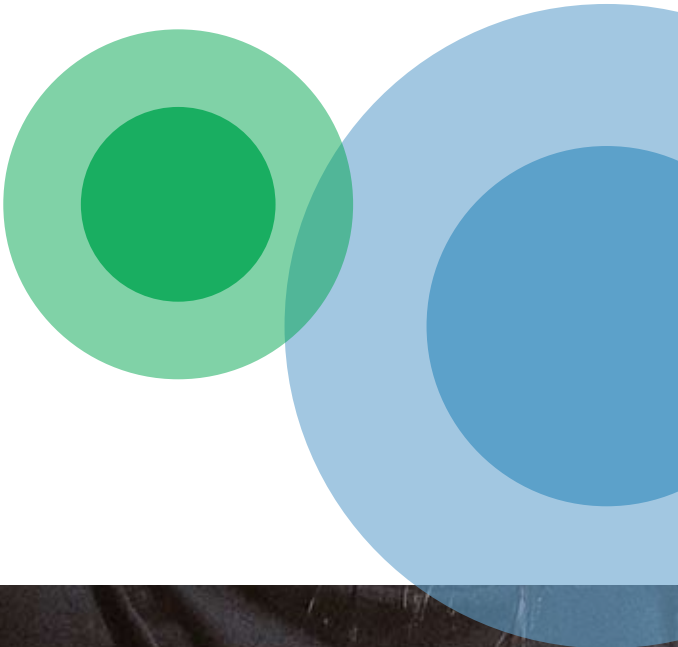
Despite these facts, we love our work. It is meaningful, fulfilling and every time women, children and families make

progress towards recovery we feel an enormous sense of pride and gratitude.

As Eleanor Longden tells us *“There is no greater honour or privilege than facilitating that process of healing for someone, to bear witness, to reach out a hand, to share the burden of someone’s suffering, and to hold the hope for their recovery”*

We live by these words.

Kate McCormack
CEO, Fife Women’s Aid



I AM
CONFIDENT

I AM
UNAPOLOGETICALLY
ME

It was AMAZING!!! The venue was wonderful, and the speakers were truly engaging. Best training event I have attended in a long time.

(Annual event participant)

Understanding each stage of the timeline and how these patterns help identify the path towards lethal violence [was so useful].

ANNUAL EVENT 2025

Our annual event always takes place during the ‘16 Days of Action’ campaign to end violence against women and children. The campaign runs from 25 November to 10 December each year.

The event allows us an opportunity to network with local and national agencies and with people who use our service.

As a learning organisation we use the event to consolidate our own learning and to share knowledge and best practice with partners across the sector. This helps to create a common language and understanding of domestic abuse, along with consistent approaches to tackle it.

This year we were very fortunate to engage Dr Brieghe Nugent and Professor Jane Monckton-Smith as our keynote speakers. They are generally recognised as being outstanding leaders in their fields.

Keynote speaker 1: Jane Monckton-Smith

Jane is Professor of Public Protection at the University of Gloucester and specialises in homicide. She has authored a new theoretical framework for tracking homicide risk in cases of coercive control and stalking that has had a wide international impact. Her book *In Control - Dangerous Relationships and how they end in Murder* introduces the concept of the ‘homicide timeline’.

We use Jane’s research to train our staff because it is practical, applicable to everyday life and it can save lives. Not only can it help services to intervene intelligently and effectively - it can also empower women to assess objectively how safe their relationship is.

Violence against women and girls is one of the most misunderstood and mythologised areas of criminal behaviour.

The homicide timeline identifies the patterns and behaviours that lead to intimate partner femicide or - in plain English - the killing of a woman. We now know that what would appear to be arbitrary and random is in fact predictable and follows a pattern.

These insights have given us the evidence-based tools with which we can analyse and assess the level of risk to the women who use our service.



The 8 stages of the homicide timeline

The common global factor in intimate partner femicide is coercive control.

This can involve a range of threats including stalking, enforced loyalty, gaslighting, financial abuse and sexual abuse. It is not limited to physical violence. There is no loss of temper or ‘red mist’. It is cold, calculated and goal-directed towards trapping the woman in the relationship.

The eight-stage homicide timeline outlines a predictable pattern of escalating control, leading to murder.

- 1. History of control or stalking:** Pre-relationship patterns of dominance, or abuse with previous partners. Traits of jealousy and possessiveness. A possible criminal record.
- 2. Commitment whirlwind:** Relationship progresses very quickly. Declarations of love, moving in, proposal of marriage. Woman is ‘swept off her feet’.
- 3. The relationship:** Features coercive control, isolation, restrictions on freedom, quick temper, non-fatal strangulation, pushing, shoving, tracking.
- 4. Trigger event:** Separation or the threat of it, pregnancy, financial trouble, or anything that threatens his control or evokes his sense of injustice and thoughts of revenge.
- 5. Escalation:** Controlling behaviours intensify. Post-separation abuse. Begging and crying, which turn to threats. Fortunately, most women get out at stage 5.
- 6. Change in thinking:** Homicidal ideation. Things can go calm or intensify. The decision is made to kill, take revenge: ‘If I can’t have you, no one can’.
- 7. Planning:** Buying weapons, researching methods, stalking to find opportunities. Planning occurs in 80% of killings and proves that the ‘red mist’ spontaneous, ‘crime of passion’ narrative is a myth.
- 8. Homicide:** The murder has many variations. Can be a ‘hidden homicide’ faked to look like suicide or staged as an accident – for example, a mysterious fall.

Not all cases follow every stage precisely, but the pattern helps us see escalating risk.

I am so much more aware now of red flags and how to raise awareness and support others.

Three questions

The following three questions help practitioners (or women at risk) to quickly assess (or self-assess) how safe the relationship is:

- 1. Does the problematic behaviour follow a pattern?
- 2. Is it causing the victim to change their routine and activities? This could be for example how they dress, or who they meet.
- 3. Is the person fearful or afraid?

Feedback

Although the subject matter was challenging, the response from the practitioners who attended from a range of agencies was extremely positive:

It was informative and impassioned.

The amount of unreported rape and abuse cases [was shocking].

I found the whole event fascinating. Learning about the homicide timeline was truly eye-opening. I had no idea how strong the links between coercive control and homicide are.

The timeline was a stark reminder about the risks that the women we work with are facing and how – as professionals – we can try to intervene at the various stages of this timeline.

Before this presentation, I had never thought of coercive control as an umbrella term ... that it doesn't just stop when the person leaves, that post-separation abuse is just as much of a concern as domestic abuse.

Having been in an abusive relationship in my past, this event helped me to make sense of what I experienced, and to realise why I have carried this with me for decades.

The victims of abuse should never feel that they are to blame. I can finally release the shame that has lived inside me for decades.

I felt heard. I had no friends, family and no home, and I had a baby. I was fleeing from violence. I didn't expect to have this help. I was so lucky.

Keynote speaker 2:
Dr Briège Nugent

We were delighted to involve Briège Nugent, an independent qualitative researcher and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Salford. Over the past 20 years she has worked for the government, private, academic and third sectors, examining poverty, homelessness, social services, relationships, substance use and social exclusion. Briège carried out an evaluation of Fife Women's Aid MARAC service and shared findings at the event.



Evaluation of Fife Women's Aid contribution to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

It is important to keep in mind the context in which we at Fife Women's Aid provide our services, including MARAC. We know that less than 24% of domestic abuse incidents are reported to the police. Alongside this five in six women who have been raped do not report it.

Against this background MARAC brings together services from across sectors to discuss individuals at the highest risk of serious harm or murder because of domestic abuse. A plan is then developed to reduce risk and make survivors safer. Fife Women's Aid's role in MARAC is to ensure that the voice of the victim is heard and central to decision making.

In order to evaluate MARAC in Fife, Briège interviewed twelve women and five young people. She also interviewed ten Fife Women's Aid staff and five staff from social work, housing and the police.

In 2023/24 across Scotland, 96% of MARAC cases involved a male perpetrator

and female victim, and most were aged between 30-40 years old. 722 children were also affected. Over 50% of cases involved stalking. 86% of perpetrators were already known to the police.

Women speak about being physically and mentally harmed by domestic abuse, with many feeling it will have a lasting impact, some feared for their lives with some of them wanting to end their lives as a result.

The impact of Fife Women's Aid support

Women and children viewed the relationship they had built with the Fife Women's Aid worker as key to them understanding the abuse, building confidence and self-esteem, and being able to 'start again'.

One woman supported by our Housing First Service reported that she now 'feels safe' living in her own home.

She has decorated it exactly the way she wants it and sees this as a powerful affirmation that she can live a better life without her abuser, despite him telling her repeatedly that she could never do this.

Without Fife Women's Aid I would not have been able to get away from the violence.

You have shown me that there are good people in the world and that I can trust people.

Other women acknowledged how Fife Women's Aid workers helped them to emerge from their isolation to become part of a community, and to access counselling and art therapy.

In addition, Fife Women's Aid Court Support and Advocacy service also supports families to assert their rights - an increasingly importance service as legal aid shrinks.

Impact of MARAC

Briege's evaluation highlights the plight of women at risk of death because of domestic abuse, and the range of services and support that we offer to help them to be heard through the MARAC process.

Women talk about life 'before and after' MARAC: from feeling isolated and fearing for their lives to regaining loving relationships and feeling relaxed and happy.

Our service was praised by MARAC partners for the trauma-informed, effective support it provides to women and their families.

Feedback

She said it was good for me to say how I feel. It's easier for me to talk about feelings now. I do know more... She said it was safe to speak. I could say anything.

He took everything that I had that made me secure. Now I am in a really good place, I have my own wee house... I'm in a safe, healthy environment. I've a relationship back with my son.

I never knew post-separation abuse existed until this.

The kids used to have to hide in the cupboard.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the staff and especially the women who took time to take part in this research. They wanted to be heard and are passionate about this service continuing and expanding to reach women who want and need this support.



Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference

protecting victims of domestic abuse

I felt involved, my worker was really good at making me feel like I was respected, and she really understood me and what I was going through.

**JOIN THE DOTS EVALUATION BY
DR BRIEGE NUGENT**

Context

Join the Dots operates within the context of 64,000 recorded abuse offences in Scotland each year. We know that these official statistics are only the tip of the iceberg. Approximately one fifth of children in the UK are affected by domestic abuse.

Join the Dots was launched in 2021 in response to the need for child-centred family support. The evaluation sample involved 16 young people, 12 mothers and seven staff. The research focused on understanding the type of support that mattered to the women and young people and the impact it had. It also assessed what they wanted to change or develop.

Key findings: statistics

Between June 2024 and June 2025 Join the Dots:

- supported 319 children and young people
- gave whole-family support to 45 families
- provided intensive support to 20 families
- supported 93 children in refuge
- enabled 18 families to participate in wellbeing meetings through the support of their worker
- supported 12 children on the Child Protection Register
- of these, seven children and young people were being looked after at home and one was in kinship care.

The average length of support was six months. As a result of this support:

- 86% of families reported feeling that their confidence and self-esteem had improved

- 82.5% reported improved feelings and behaviour
- 77% reported having improved family relationships
- 60% reported feeling safer
- 39.5% reported that they had improved housing

Key findings: qualitative experiences

Families revealed that they led complex and traumatic lives as a result of abuse. Some women had experienced lifelong abuse and said that it affected their everyday lives in a negative way. Some young people had stopped going to school as a result of its impact.

Teaching young people about healthy relationships and helping them to speak about their emotions are two of the key components of the Join the Dots Service.

Everyone who was interviewed felt that because the workers did not shy away from having difficult conversations, it helped them to break the silence on the trauma and abuse they had experienced.

Families valued the range of in-house support services that Fife Women's Aid could offer. These included court support, family support, befriending, counselling and art therapy. They also valued their relationships with their key worker because they felt that they really listened and understood them, validated their experiences and were positive and easy to talk to.

Women, children and young people also reported looking forward to days out and having new experiences together that they would otherwise not have been able to afford. They also valued, where relevant, information they were given about neurodiversity and the toys that the service sourced specifically for children with disabilities.

I feel heard, seen, understood and believed. I feel with support I could maybe get through any day.

Impact

Some women thought that without the support of the service, they would be dead. Now, however, they were looking towards a hopeful future.

Everyone said that the Join the Dots service had helped them to develop their confidence and self-esteem, and that that this was helping them to realise their potential.

Everyone who was interviewed said that they were now happier in their lives. Some women who had not left their home in years were now engaging with the local community with help from their support worker. One young person and their mother managed to come off their medication. Three young people and one mother were moving into higher education - something that wouldn't have been possible without support.

Changes or improvements?

Overall, families really appreciated the service and said they would recommend it to others. Many would have preferred the support to last longer than six months.

When young people were asked to rate the service out of 5, some gave a score of 10.5 to make the point that no rating system could do the service justice.

Staff

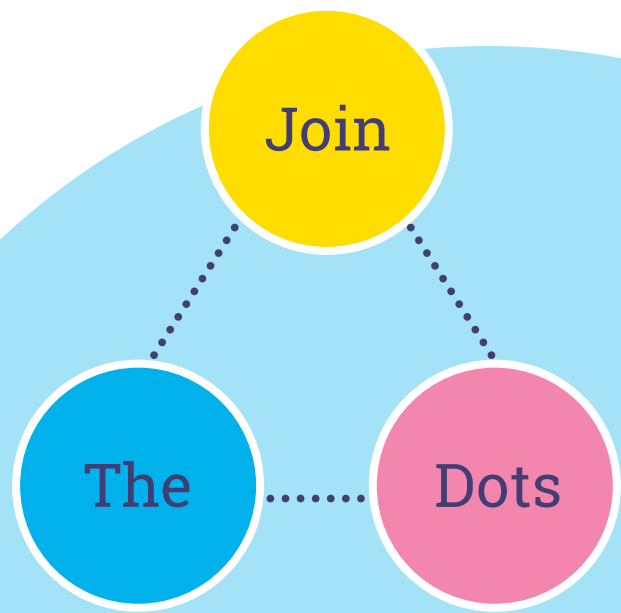
Staff appreciated the flexibility they were given within the service to respond to the needs of families and make connections. This could involve breaking down the initial distrust families sometimes have about support and dealing with complex cases often featuring poverty and intergenerational trauma at their core.

Conclusion

This research highlights just how much the Join the Dots Service is benefiting the families it supports. The service enables individuals within the family and the family as a whole to recognise the trauma they have been through and to process it, but not to be defined by it. As a result, they emerge stronger.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the staff, children, young people and mothers who chose to participate in this research. They did so because they are passionate about Join the Dots and want other families to benefit from it as they have done. For many, it has been transformational.



DRAMA: I OF THE STORM

Context

We believe that every woman affected by domestic abuse, coercive control and violence has a story worth hearing, and that creativity and performance can give them a voice and a platform to tell that story. On stage they can experiment with new narratives, reconnect with themselves and others, gain self-confidence and begin to see their own potential.

The performance of *Dancing on Eggshells* in 2024 - the first venture by Fife Women's Aid into using drama in this way - was an overwhelming success.

We built on this to stage *Phoenix Rising* for International Women's Day in March 2025.

Yet again, the feedback was so positive that on 2 April this year we presented *The I of the Storm* at Rothes Hall to an audience of practitioners, survivors and allies.

Collaborative working

We commissioned professional drama facilitator Vickie Beesley to work collaboratively with the women, to help them put their experiences into words and actions.

The process in this safe environment gave the women invaluable experience of skills such as teamworking and cooperation and the opportunity to contribute to the end product.

It also helped them to reconnect socially and to end their isolation, resulting in a realisation for both participants and audience that their silence had at last been broken.

Such has been the power and success of these collaborations that we intend to make drama a continuing part of our recovery-focused work.



Excerpts from the script

[RISING UNSTABLE AIR]

The start of a wobble. Stress is building.

- Woman 1:** A messy house. A ripped hole in the bedroom carpet. An empty box of cigarettes.
- K:** A child that just won't sleep. A dog peeing on the front door mat. Having to do the fucking dishes again.
- J:** Always watching the time. Being spoken to like shit. Self-confidence rock bottom.
- W:** A funny joke at your expense. Lies, lies, lies. Why is nobody listening to me?!
- A:** Clothes that don't fit. A manager that doesn't understand. A complete lack of support.
- J:** Fake friends.
- E:** An overwhelming court system.
- K:** A loss of control.
- J:** A loss of everything you love.
- W:** The state of the world.
- A:** Unsafe. All the time unsafe.

[BUILDING SUPPORT (WITH THE AUDIENCE)]

- E:** You are my best friend of 20 years who's not getting rid of me now. You're the support worker, always there for me, making sure I'm not on my own. You're the neighbour who calls round with a big slice of cake. You are the feeling of a clean pair of pyjamas.
- K:** You are the stranger at the bus stop who shares a funny joke. You are my postie who has seen me at my worst and still chats, smiles with no judgement. You are a well-timed trip to the beach. You're the art therapist who helped me believe I could change and that I should be kind to myself.
- W:** You're a walk with my dog. You're the breathing exercises I've learnt. You're an afternoon in nature. You're the sound of children laughing. You're the teacher who offered me support and guidance.
- J:** You're my tapping exercises calming me down. You're my colouring book. You're my to don't list. You're the medication I need. You're the groups I go to, that help me feel part of something.
- All:** You are Fife Women's Aid who saved my life.

Evaluation responses

What aspects of the performance were the most powerful for you?

- The courage of the women! The way they conveyed their stories. Letters to themselves!
- The letters and the spider web. It was all powerful! Had me in tears.
- That together as women we can achieve anything.
- The absolute bravery of the women.
- I think the whole performance from the catwalk with the messages on the tops to listening to the letters was amazing.

What did you learn about the impact of domestic abuse?

- Their friendships are essential to recovery.
- It's a storm!
- The different aspects of life it impacts.
- How overwhelming everything can be and how everything becomes too much.
- It is hard to recover from this repeated trauma.
- Women can build on resilience and find themselves again.
- Women can come out the other side and achieve what they want.
- The different tactics of perpetrators and how this impacts women.



What did you learn about recovery from domestic abuse?

- That with the right support and people, anything is possible.
- That even the smallest things can help – a smile, clean pjs & music.
- Support is the first step to help recovery.
- It's hard and extremely difficult but it can be done.
- Every little gesture matters, and we need to remember to be kind to ourselves.
- Everyone is on their own journey with own goals, 'recovering' at own speed.
- Women are strong and are enough.

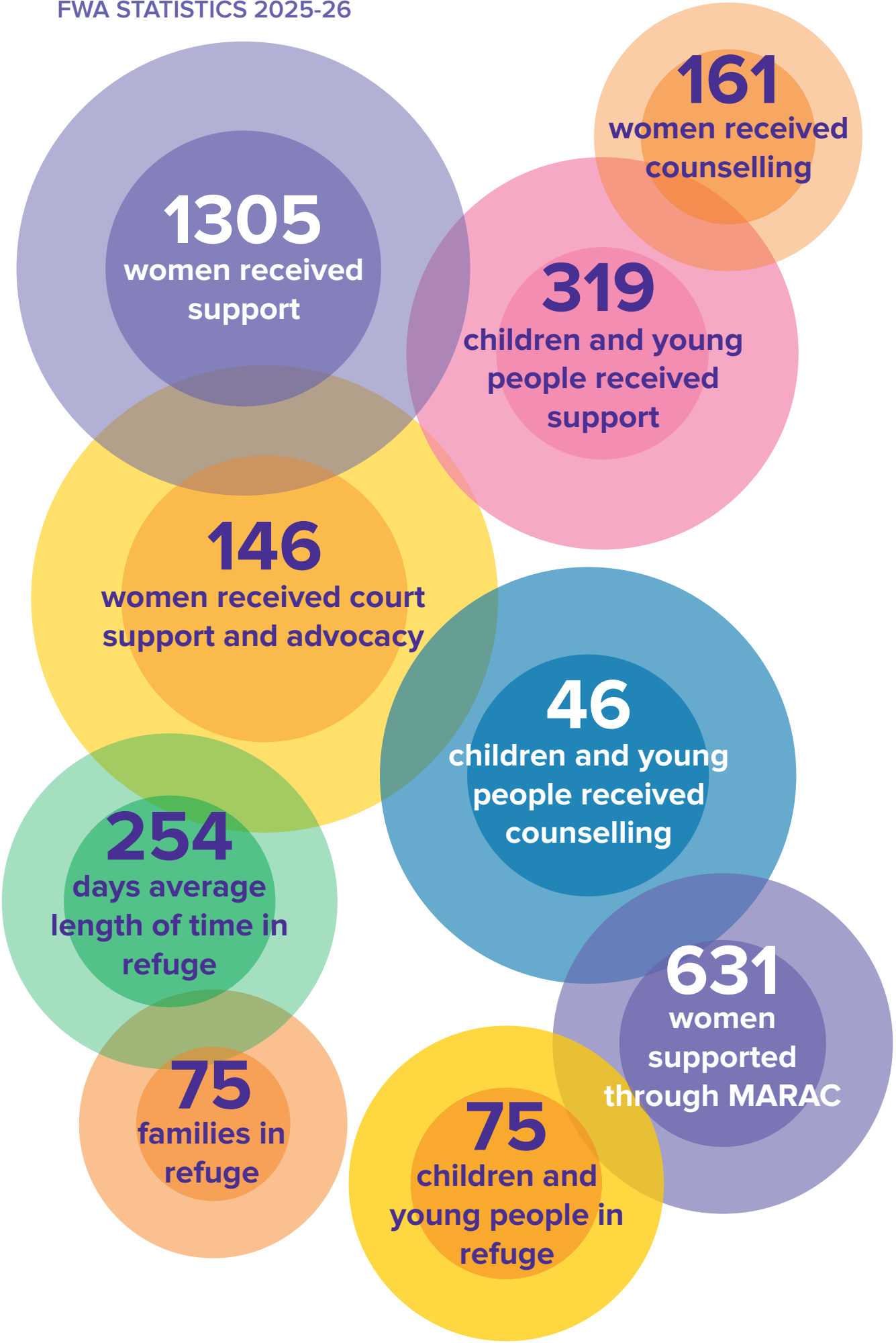
What could have improved the event?

- Nothing
- Nothing. I wish more people could have seen these brave and beautiful women's performance.





FWA STATISTICS 2025-26



I couldn't have done this on my own. Fife Women's Aid are my lifeline, my reason to keep going.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

We published our 2025-2030 strategy in 2025, with the following key priorities:

- Placing women and children at the heart of our work
- Acting on survivors' needs and wishes
- Providing holistic, trauma-informed support
- CPD, training, internal and external support for staff

Making a difference to the lives of women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse is at the core of everything that we do. It is within this context that I am writing my first Trustee Report as the Chair of Fife Women's Aid.

During 2025-2026 we put these priorities into practice by supporting over 1,300 women and more than 300 children. Behind each of these statistics is a very human story of strength and hope. Cumulatively, these stories illustrate both the scale of need and the vital importance of our work.

Our refuge spaces have continued to provide safety and stability for families at a time of crisis and for many, this is the first step towards rebuilding their lives in a secure and supportive environment. In addition, we continue to support women and children beyond refuge: through outreach, advocacy and court support, where women are not only supported through complex systems but empowered to find their voice and rebuild their confidence; through counselling, where trauma can be understood and processed and healing can happen at a comfortable pace; and through specialist support to

help children and young people make sense of their experiences.

I am well aware that this breadth of support and its positive impact doesn't just happen by chance: it is the result of the dedication, skill and compassion of our staff and volunteers.

In particular, Kate McCormack is navigating Fife Women's Aid successfully through an increasingly complex and demanding landscape, and her strong and compassionate leadership is not only laser-focused on the needs of the women and children we support, but is also helping the organisation to evolve and develop.

The success of Fife Women's Aid's work was recently recognised and given a huge vote of confidence in the form of a legacy from the estate of Elizabeth Totten. With Kate's guidance, the Board is exploring how best to invest this so that the women and children we support will receive maximum benefit - both now and in the future.

Thank you to Kate and her team for the continuing commitment, skill and professionalism that inspired this legacy.

Trustees Natalie, Sarah, Laura and Christine stepped down from the Board this year. We would also like to thank them for their valuable insights, expertise and commitment to the organisation, and wish them all the best for the future.

We also welcomed a new Trustee during 2025-2026. Eleonora brings valuable experience and skills, and her appointment reflects our commitment to building a diverse Board that will support the organisation as it grows and evolves.

They help people see the real me. I am starting to feel that I am valued and safe.

If you know anyone who would be interested in joining our Board, please contact Kate or me for a chat. We would love to hear from you.

Our strength lies in our people and in the inspirational work they do - day after day - to support women and their families and help them to move forward with hope.

It is a privilege to serve as Chair of this organisation and to work with Kate and the other Trustees to support and promote its key priorities.



Karlin Rodgers
Chair of Board of Trustees

THANK YOU!

We want to pay tribute to the unwavering support that makes our work possible. Our gratitude goes out to the generous and committed individuals, communities, and organisations across Fife and beyond that offer us all kinds of support and encouragement.

The volunteers who support us, the trustees who give freely of their time, our funders, donors and our lived experience ambassador.

We also wish to thank our strategic charitable partner, the prestigious Old Course Hotel and Spa in St Andrews. They generously support us with donations and other opportunities and resources that make a positive and welcome difference to the lives of survivors.

Thanks too to our team of dedicated workers who carry the hope for recovery even in the face of the relentless harms caused by violence against women and girls.

Faced every day with the consequences of men's violence against women and girls, they still work tirelessly and positively with women and their families to promote their recovery.

We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts.

Get in touch

Women's support line - Freephone: 0808 802 5555 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm and 6pm-8am and 24 hours Saturday and Sunday).

Children and young person's support line – Freephone 0808 801 0422 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm and 6pm-8am and 24 hours Saturday and Sunday) or send us a message via Facebook Messenger on [@jointhedotsfwa](https://www.facebook.com/jointhedotsfwa) (6pm-2am Monday to Friday and 9am-2am on Saturday and Sunday).

Business line: 01383 732289

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 X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook Messenger.



Fife Women's Aid is a charitable company limited by guarantee Co. No. SC316350

Registered Office: Unit 4, Lomond Business Park,
Baltimore Road, Glenrothes KY6 2PJ

Registered Scottish Charity SC011689

