



**Women's Aid South Lanarkshire
and East Renfrewshire Domestic Abuse Project**
Confidential information, support and safe Refuge
for women, children and young people who have
experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

Company Number SC385178 · Registered Charity Number SCO41781



April 2020 - March 2021 WASLER Annual Report

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APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021

WASLER: WHAT WE DO

WASLER serve our local communities in South Lanarkshire (SL) and East Renfrewshire (ER) supporting women children and young people who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

Working in partnership with our local statutory agencies WASLER deliver various gender-based violence (GBV) training inputs, attend raising awareness events and sit at strategic levels within SL and ER.

In direct support of Scottish strategies, WASLER seek to contribute to the elimination of all gender-based forms of abuse and violence including the commercialisation of women and, societal disenfranchisement of women.

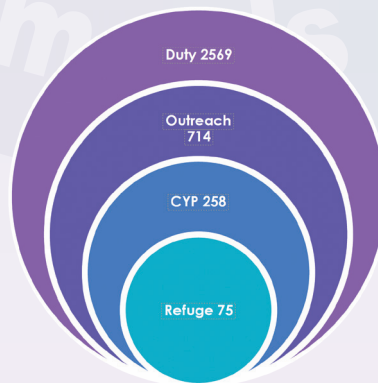
WASLER provide various direct and indirect supports and are active in seeking added funding to support holistic support for women, children and young people. This includes arts groups, groups focused on rebuilding self-worth and peer support groups which help women take their place and demand a voice in the society we live in.

WASLER direct support is mirrored across South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire and includes (but is not limited to):

- Refuge accommodation
- Outreach support for women
- Children and young people support
- Healthy relationships in schools
- MARAC co-ordination and participation
- Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS)
- Caledonian women's support work
- Duty and information drop in support

WASLER work in close partnership with key statutory and non-statutory agencies in address of domestic abuse and GBV; partnership working is integral to making change and ensuring the safety of all GBV victim/ survivors.

Promoting a 'Safe and Together' approach to delivery and discourse relating to domestic abuse, WASLER are focus on advocating victim/ survivor's rights. We seek an environment where perpetrator's behaviours are the responsibility of the perpetrator alone. An environment where women are not held responsible for perpetrators choice to abuse, or their abusive parenting choices.



WASLER Service User Data 2020-21



We are all aware of the fact that Covid-19 has increased the risk of harm for women and children experiencing domestic abuse, particularly with abusers at home during lockdowns and restrictions, and using technology as a tool to abuse. Our fears at the start of the pandemic about this increased risk were realised. We may now have all lived through the height of the pandemic, however the need now is to ensure the issue of domestic abuse including coercive control continues to be high on the agenda.

We wish to thank our incredible staff and teams for adapting to a new way of working, being innovative and responding to unprecedented challenges. We are immensely proud of the work that our staff do and the feminist values they advocate as they work on the front line of service provision to some of the most vulnerable women and children. The dedication and commitment our staff continued to display during the height of the pandemic and thereafter has been remarkable. We are aware that there is no going back to life before Covid-19, but we know that our staff and teams will continue to rise to the challenge and work tirelessly, as they always have, to carry on our service and support women and children to live a life free of abuse.

The Board has continued its work to strengthen the governance of WASLER over the past year, drawing on the diverse set of skills and experience of each trustee. We remain committed to WASLER and to supporting all our staff while they continue to keep women and children safe from harm. Domestic abuse against women and children is preventable and we have the best chance of eradicating it when we work together and have the resources that we need to achieve this goal.

Pauline Stratford and Laura McKnight
WASLER Co Chair, Board of Directors



2020-21 was a year nobody could have predicted, anticipated or expected.

As an organisation we do annual organisational risk assessing where staff being struck down by influenzas' is as far as we could contemplate, and even that we always thought was looking to consider an extreme situation. Well. It is safe to say that we are reconsidering the likelihood of proposed unlikely scenario's now.

Like all working environments this year's usual challenges were superseded by the unfathomable consequences a global pandemic has on gender-based violence and abuse.

Repeated lockdowns resulted in many women, children and young people being effectively imprisoned with their abuser. For those women not living with the perpetrator, lockdowns also took their toll as their abuser was now fully aware that they were at home. All noted survival techniques required a re-write and moments of relief were lost. Women's aid services were ever more required. Agility of the organisation was evident early on as WASLER garnered its response to Covid-19 as we moved onto various virtual and physical environments.

Support never stopped during the pandemic. Staff were selfless in their bravery and prioritisation of women, children and young people. It is the norm in this sector to see staff give more in the face of adversity; be that funding threats, job loss threats, directed abuse from perpetrators, the relentlessness of abuser's creativity in their tactics etc. This year however was a different level of focused bloody-mindedness to help support those we work with, be that women, children and young people or indeed each other.



Unsurprisingly not only did the organisation meet the challenges faced but it did so in a creative, responsive and energetic way. The energy of facing challenge is often seen in the eyes of those working in our field. The energy remains as a legacy of Covid within the organisation.

Our support reached 4256 women, children and young people this year. Partnership work strengthened as local authorities committed to development of their workforce via Safe and 'Together training' and as always, WASLER staff ploughed on in their prioritisation of those we support.

Heather Russell
WASLER Chief Executive Officer

4256 Women, Children & Young People Supported in 2020-21

WASLER's Vision: A world Free from Fear

DON'T

Don't shout at me
Don't swear at me

You used your words to threaten, scare and charm me.
This was just the start of your abuse.

Don't gaslight me so I question my own thoughts and reality

Don't lie to me, cheat on me, laugh at me and belittle me.

By undermining me, you feed your own pathetic, weak ego.

Don't think you can continue to abuse me, to inflate your sense of importance.

Don't think abusing me is acceptable, in order to make you feel powerful.

Only the weak do that.

Don't think you can continue to mistake my kindness for weakness

Don't use alcohol and stress as excuses for being an abuser

Don't harass and manipulate me into debt, then punish me for it.

Don't try to turn my family against me.

Don't take my phone from me

Don't lock me out of my house

Don't lock me in a room when I am pregnant.

Don't push me

Don't hit me

Don't slap me

Don't punch me

Don't bite me

Don't drag me across the floor by the hair

Don't kick me

Don't smash my head repeatedly off the bathroom tiles.

But most of all:

Don't think you have destroyed me

Don't think you can control me anymore.

I am a strong and determined woman

You cannot change that.

Just as you cannot change your weakness.

Poem written by an amazing woman using our service 2021

Refuge Service South Lanarkshire

Summary

- **53** Women in refuge
- **58** CYP in refuge
- **84%** Overall Occupancy

During this reporting period our focus was fire-fighting daily through the challenging COVID pandemic.

Reflecting on the previous year and the achievements within the Refuge Service, the most notable success is we worked tirelessly to keep a service running to keep the Refuge doors open. We continued to support service users face to face at the height of the pandemic ensuring we provided much needed safe accommodation to women and children.

COVID 19

The pandemic unsurprisingly impacted the refuge team. As a team we were forced to adapt to new ways of delivering support ensuring safe guarding remained paramount and property management remained H&S compliant.

Practice under COVID

We continued to receive referrals during the pandemic and the total received for the reporting year was 156 with 23% of the referrals admitted.

For admissions to refuge to continue the team had to source PPE equipment, develop and implement pre-admission COVID 19 checks and streamline all paperwork. The team continued to work operationally as admissions were tagged teamed with the Refuge Manager and the Refuge Support worker picking up support via telephone thereafter.

Additional challenge

The effects of COVID on staff resulted in the team being depleted for periods at the height of the pandemic as we tackled long COVID and staff who were themselves under the 'high-risk' category.

This however did not stop the delivery of much needed support to women and their children. The team adapted creatively, developing new techniques and worked closely picking up support remotely after admissions.

Socially distant support walks were born from this as new woman into refuge were met outside and given local area knowledge and support. This was a huge success and became a popular request for support from Refuge Service Users.

The cost of COVID

During Q1 and Q2 there was minimal movement in refuge and permanent offers of Housing from the local authority were not received in full until Q3. This then resulted in a mass exodus with 13 departures in Q3 and Q4.

Without usual practice of regular physical attendance at refuge by staff and the usual hands-on support there were notable breaches to occupancy agreements. In some cases, refuge rules were not adhered to and unauthorised visitors moved into refuge during the pandemic, creating further risk to service users, staff and neighbours.

These challenges were addressed and are unsurprising given the extreme circumstances imposed on all through-out multiple lockdowns and COVID restrictions. This unfortunately came hand in hand with refuge accommodations requiring part refurbishment required when VOID.

Expert by experience:

On a final note, this quote received by a Refuge Service User highlights the support provided during the last year:

“The support I have received since moving into Refuge in the middle of a pandemic has gone above and beyond my expectations. I was extremely scared and vulnerable when moving into Refuge following a serious assault from my ex-partner. My Refuge Support Worker has always been there to put me at ease and support me in various ways while ensuring that COVID rules were being followed. At the start, she applied for funding for a laptop for me, this allowed us to see each other and continue intensive Support sessions via Zoom, as I was feeling so lonely in Refuge on my own during Lockdown. Having the laptop meant that I could also contact and see my friends and family regularly over Zoom, this was a “life saver” for me. When restrictions were eased a little, we began meeting for “Socially Distanced Support Walks” This was enjoyable and it gave me the push to get out of the Refuge, as I had been getting too used to staying in on my own. With support from RSW, I have since joined a local walking group, which I would have previously never considered. It has been great to now have regular face to face Support Visits in Refuge. My Refuge Support Worker has also liaised on my behalf with other agencies during this time and kept me informed always. When asked to describe how WASLER has changed my life, I always think of what my late Mum used to say “Do not judge yourself by what others did to you, just keep being you and everything will work out fine.” I can honestly say that my time in Refuge has allowed me to find myself and feel confident. I never thought I would say this, but I really like myself and I am proud of ME. Thank you WASLER.”

Refuge Service User
Hamilton October 2020



Total of refuge spaces	26
Total accommodated in refuge	35
Total refuge requests (breakdown as follows)	156
Did not attend for refuge assessment	18
Lack of refuge space	1
Lack of suitable refuge size	2
Refuge not suitable due to safety	4
Refuge not suitable due to mobility issues	1
SU declined support	30
Placed on waiting list	5
No further contact from initial referral	45
Moved outwith South Lanarkshire	4
Other accommodation sourced	9
Signpost to another W.A	1

Outcomes

- Over the reporting year, 78% of women in refuge reported an improvement overall in health and wellbeing and safety.
- Refuge Occupancy for the reporting year 2020-21 84%.



Lynsey Queen
Refuge Manager

Outreach Support South Lanarkshire

During this period, we worked with 557 women who had experienced or were experiencing domestic abuse from their partner across South Lanarkshire.

- 143 within the Caledonian Women's Service
- 356 within our Outreach and IDAA (Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate) Service and 62 of them were supported through the Duty service
- 22 who were working within our group work only
- 36 as referrals to MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) only

Covid Consequences

What a year this has been for all of us, everything has had to change and respond to the continued demand for the services whilst keeping our service users and staff as safe as possible throughout the pandemic.

We did this by continuing the service over the telephone and by meeting over virtual platforms and only in essential support for the most vulnerable and at-risk service users were we able to meet face to face with strict safety measures in place throughout.

Groupwork

Freedom Group work was delivered throughout the pandemic via Zoom. We delivered 3 daytime groups, 4 evening groups where over 60 women took part. The feedback from the women who participated was that it met their needs and broke down some of the barriers which would have prevented them from attending before. This included childcare, travel and the ability to keep themselves safe by keeping their cameras and microphones off where necessary to maintain their confidence and anonymity.

During this time, we also delivered our first ever Freedom Forever group where we concentrated on the women themselves and not their experiences. We looked at ways to improve their confidence and self-esteem, their abilities to be assertive and their plans, hopes and dreams for their future. As part of the programme the women put together a vision board which they keep as a plan to work towards when the group has ended.



Outcomes

- **93%** of women who completed an empowerment star, reported feeling safer.
- **84%** described an increase in their health and wellbeing.
- **89%** stated they felt empowered and had a positive effect on their self-esteem.

Lorraine Brennan
Outreach Manager

Children and Young People (CYP) Support South Lanarkshire

At a glance....

Total CYP's supported	165
Girls	85
Boys	79

The CYP team received 97 referrals. Most of these were self-referral and the next biggest were referrals received from social care.

By age groups

0 - 5	13
6 - 10	72
11 - 15	67
16 - 20	13

Support in a CYP Covid world

This year has been challenging due to the Covid 19 pandemic, however the CYP team have remained focused on delivering a relevant and accessible service.

A flexible approach has supported us to continue to see the most vulnerable children and young people in the community and at school as well as over video calling.

We continue to have a good relationship with schools across the area enabling us to see children safely. Working together to ensure we risk assess for each visit and support schools to help us understand any challenges faced during these times.

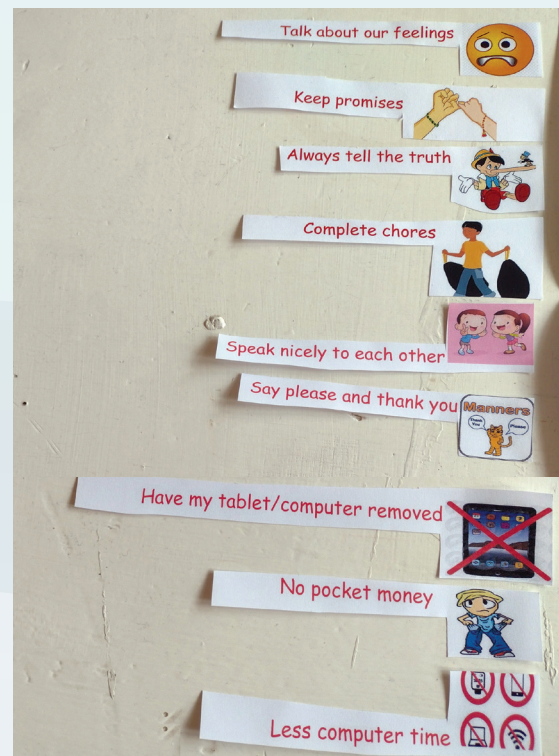
Workers also met with families and young people in the outside community using social distancing. Being out and about in the community has allowed families, especially the CYP's to appreciate their community spaces more and build confidence for safety planning and managing their own risk when at the park, going to the shops or just playing out.

Response to identified support need.

This year we successfully bid for funding to introduce whole family support. We now have 1.5 workers delivering support to children and parent/carers that is holistic in its approach: working on areas such as routines and boundaries in the home. This is an area that is impacted greatly when domestic abuse has or is being experienced.



Example of work completed with a child using Play Doh



BK Pictorial House Rules

Waiting lists still bite

To negate the ever-increasing waiting list, we introduced 6-weeks triage support. This helped us ensure support was being delivered as early as possible from the point of referral, addressing the immediate risk, and supporting families to be safe and increased turn over for children and their families being involved with our service.

CYP team's focus

Adapting our service provision made us think outside of the box. During the first lockdown, we posted out resources to families and sent out wellbeing boxes to our CYP's to support them during this difficult time. Art and craft packages proved popular and helped families to keep occupied resulting in calmer households. All the while we remained mindful that delivery of therapeutic work still needed to be child led and delivered according to their learning style as well as circumstances at home.

We accessed funding from the Scottish Government initiative to help ensure vulnerable families are digitally included. Following our successful bid, we have supplied 53 devices to 36 families across the South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire areas. These devices were Chromebooks, Apple ipads and wi-fi devices. All were very gratefully received by our families with children in the home. Feedback received indicates the devices have helped our families greatly.

Quotes from families who received devices -

"It has been great for having choice with the kids, they can go into tutorials, Netflix and youtube with no worry about data. I only had limited data which would run out. This doesn't happen now. We are all much happier with this."

Lorraine Harris
CYP Manager

East Renfrewshire (ER) Support Service Team

In summary

17 families
supported in
refuge

157 women
supported in
outreach service

93 children &
young people
supported in
CYP service

517 contacts to
our helpline

Outcomes

"Couldn't have got through lockdown without it. Made me feel like I still had support even when everyone was to stay away all the time."

**"Support from Women's Aid has been a precious lifeline to me.
Always at the end of a phone."**

**"Women's Aid support has been life changing for myself and my children.
We were able to step out of an abusive situation. With their help, I was listened
to, guided and reassured at every step of the way."**

**"My support worker has been incredible from the start. She gave me time,
advice and emotional support I so badly needed."**

"An amazing service doing even more amazing work. Thank you."

Survey feedback

Covid response

During the Covid crisis, we delivered vital support and safety services to women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse, especially to those experiencing increased risk and the isolation of lockdown.

Staff adapted to new ways of working and were creative in their delivery. As our working worlds moved online, we quickly embraced the Zoom and Teams meeting as the new norm (when internet connections allowed), and service users were also offered video support along with phone support.

Women with additional needs and issues were at increased risk of harm during the pandemic and this was reflected in our direct support. Older women, women with problem drug or alcohol use, minority ethnic women and women with mental health issues were impacted by social isolation and the limited availability of support services. Increased financial hardship and financial dependency on abusers was also an issue due to the economic impact of covid.

Support provided

High levels of practical support were much appreciated by women using our services – additional home security, mobile phones & top ups, supermarket vouchers and toiletries helped alleviate financial difficulty and increased safety. Refuge remained available and women and children were accommodated when we had space.

Added work for the team - operations

We also moved office during the pandemic. We are now operating our drop in and helpline from The Foundry in Barrhead providing face to face support and drop in facilities for women seeking information or support. This venue is easily accessible and safe for women seeking our help.

Despite COVID, we were able to further develop our services with the introduction of a well being group in the Rouken Glen Centre. During the summer months, the group met outdoors with the focus on recovery and moving on from domestic abuse. Activities include stress management, nutrition, gentle exercise, positive self-talk, and complimentary therapies. Women enjoy the mutual support and the opportunity to prioritise their own health and well-being amid the Covid crisis.



New staff to our East Renfrewshire team

We welcomed new staff to the team with additional funding received during COVID, assisting us to meet the increased demand on core services. It is hoped this increased capacity is continued, ensuring women get support when they need it most.

Duty Worker

“ Well here I am - 10 months into the new role of duty worker, still learning, still loving it, and gaining so much experience. I think I am still blown away at how well the service has been running and coping excellently through a world pandemic.

I feel privileged to be part of this organization.

Yes... our role when supporting can be sad, taxing to hear about terrible situations and yet wonderful in the knowledge that we have the time, tools, and training to meet the needs of our service users.

The most rewarding part of the role is watching , seeing, and hearing our service users getting stronger and growing so much from those initial calls.

Having a strong and supportive team / manager is a bonus, I have learned so much from our team and they are always eager to help or assist when needed.

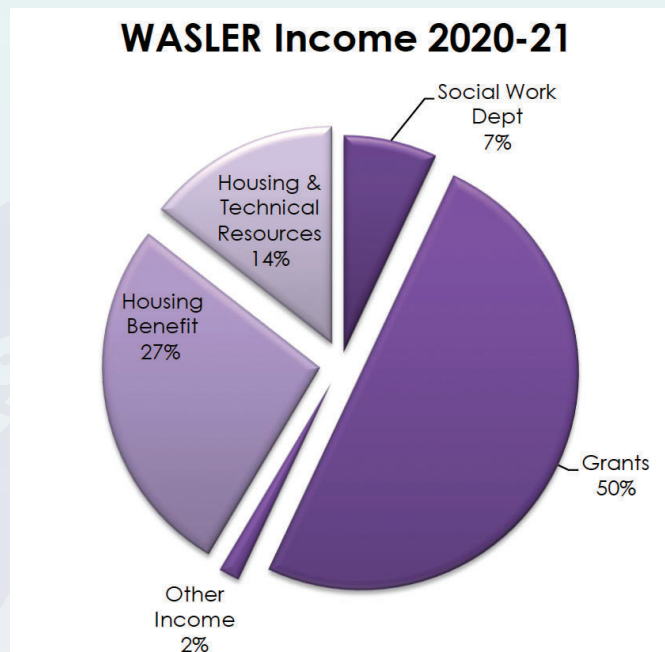
I have also been lucky enough to be involved in our wellbeing group , meeting my SU`s face to face for the first time was lovely and watching these strong ladies interacting with each other and having such fun, its so refreshing

All the lovely comments of appreciation from the services users are priceless and make every thing we do all worthwhile. ”

Christine Miller
ER Manager

WASLER Business Team (BT)

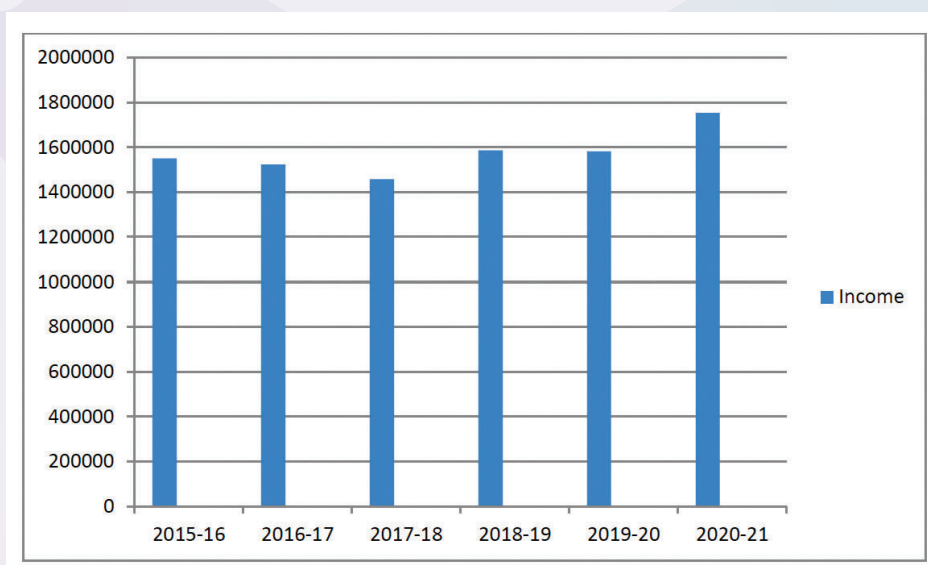
The primary focus of the Business Team remains securing funding whilst also supporting organisational development and operations.



Priority of funding and financial sustainability

Funding and financial sustainability continue to prove to be a challenge. There continues to be a reduction in funding opportunities as well as increased competition. Retaining staff can be difficult due to the length of contracts awarded and the uncertainty of funding opportunities being renewed.

Income from 2015 to 2021



Income from 2015 to 2021

	12 months to 31-03-2021	12 months to 31-03-2020	12 months to 31-03-2019	12 months to 31-03-2018	12 months to 31-03-2017	12 months to 31-03-2016
Income	1,777,189	1,582,487	1,581,272	1,458,834	1,522,820	1,548,695
Surplus/ (Deficit)	104,737	(10,162)	(82,269)	(157,943)	(74,560)	70,169
Bank Balance	637,945	623,794	622,541	745,799	905,928	980,916
Balance Sheet Value	742,712	637,975	648,137	730,406	888,349	962,909
Restricted Reserves	148,374	60,239	88,644	116,583	162,289	113,407
Designated Reserves	279,718	282,530	254,273	269,152	248,314	296,926
Unrestricted Reserves	314,620	295,206	305,220	344,671	477,746	552,576

WASLER work to a 3-month reserve account.

Full accounts are available on request from our head office at
Level 3, 20 Princes Square, East Kilbride, G74 1LJ

Jean Stevenson
BT Manager

free from fear



WASLER would like to take this opportunity to thank

The work that we completed over 2020-21 was only possible with the support of our funders, donors, volunteers, partners and citizens of South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire, who all made a valuable contribution. Thank you.

East Mains URC
Stardust Child Boutique
Old Parish Church
Gavin Ampleford
St Mary's Parish Church Motherwell
Motherwell South Parish Church
Hamilton Ladies Rugby
FCDO
Rotary Club Cambuslang
Hamilton United Reform Church
Stewartfield Parish Church
Righthead URC
Gas Confirmation Co Ltd
Giffnock South Parish Church
Scamps Hamilton
Howdens Joinery
IWD swim
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