

# YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE SOMETHING TO...



**THE 2023 - 2024  
ANNUAL REPORT**

**Women's Aid**  
FEDERATION  
NORTHERN IRELAND

# WOMEN'S AID SERVICES IN 2023/24



**527 WOMEN**  
stayed in our refuges  
throughout NI



**10,955**  
Referrals made to  
Women's Aid Services



**291 CHILDREN**  
stayed in refuge  
with their mum



**7,637 WOMEN**  
received support whilst  
staying in their homes



**10 BABIES**  
were born whilst their  
mum was in refuge



**5,293 CHILDREN**  
had mums supported in  
Women's Aid services



**266 WOMEN**  
who were pregnant  
received support



**39 WOMEN**  
and 31 children with no  
recourse to public funds  
stayed in our refuges

## REFLECTIONS BY OUR CEO, SARAH MASON MBE

This year was busy and productive as we strengthened our collaborative approach to government policy, education, training, and public awareness. Unfortunately, the 2023/24 regional statistics reflect the growing demand for Women's Aid services in Northern Ireland as we continue to support women, children, and young people affected by domestic abuse.

Local services are working at full capacity to meet the needs of victims and survivors who need vital support. Funding to increase capacity to deliver services continues to be a major issue that must be addressed if we truly want to effectively end violence against women in our society and create a community where women feel safe, and are safe, in their own homes.

In partnership with Comic Relief and Children in Need, the See, Hear, Act and SAY (Social Action Youth) projects thrived this year, guided by insights from our survivor engagement group and young participants.

In the coming year, we will deepen collaboration with stakeholders to build a Northern Ireland where women, children, and young people can live free from violence.

# YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THEIR SAY AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



The Social Action Youth (SAY) project, funded by BBC Children in Need, has been a major success this year. Bringing together young people engaged with Women's Aid services across NI, the project empowered them to influence government strategy, professional development, and preventative education.

The SAY project included engaging workshops, run in partnership with Tinderbox Theatre Company, empowering young people as Social Activists. Participants worked on impactful projects, such as a website raising awareness of healthy relationships and a trauma-informed animation featuring "SACC" (Social Action Children's Champion) to help professionals support children affected by domestic abuse. Both resources will launch next year. The group also partnered with the Safeguarding Board for NI (SBNI) to create a professional learning framework and produced "Having Our Say," unveiled at Stormont on 23rd November 2023. Sponsored by the NI Assembly Speaker, the event featured speakers including Head of the Civil Service, Dr. Jayne Brady, and Bernie McNally of SBNI with the voices of young people at the heart of the event.

The SAY project brought about ripples of change at the most strategic levels. On an individual level, the project brought about so many positive changes in the young people involved and a comprehensive evaluation highlighted the distance travelled.

Comments from young people in relation to what the project meant to them included:

**"It helped me find more like me."**

**"We came together as a community to share ideas."**

**"We are being heard and making a difference."**

**"It gave us the experience to meet other young people and learn more."**



## OUR HELPING HANDS PROGRAMME



Helping Hands is a preventative education programme, developed by Women's Aid NI for primary school aged children at Key Stages One and Two. The overall aim of the programme is to increase children's understanding of feeling safe and to explore and promote behaviours which will contribute to a safe environment.

In 2023/24, with continued funding from the Department for Education, we trained a further 71 teachers to be 'Social Guardians' and deliver Helping Hands to their students. We have now more than 1,800 teachers who are Social Guardians, and over 70% of Primary Schools in Northern Ireland have at least 1 teacher trained to deliver our Helping Hands programme.



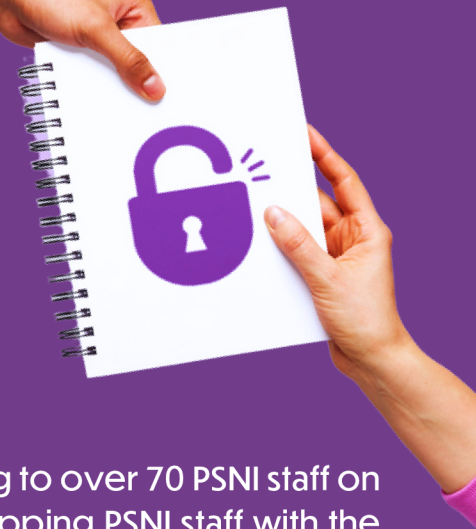
# UNLOCK LEARNING WITH THE SPECIALISTS

WAFNI continues to raise awareness of domestic abuse through specialised training across Northern Ireland. This year, we have trained professionals from the legal, education, and social care sectors, as well as the community and voluntary sectors.

In collaboration with PSNI, WAFNI also delivered specialised training to over 70 PSNI staff on the Domestic Violence & Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS), equipping PSNI staff with the confidence and knowledge to further help support victims and survivors.

Our training continues to be in high demand across all sectors, and we hope to continue this momentum with our specialised training on the implementation of Safe Leave in Northern Ireland. Safe leave is intended to be used for issues relating to abuse which could include obtaining legal advice, finding alternative safe accommodation, attending Court, etc. For many survivors, work is their safe space. By adopting Safe Leave, employers foster trust, support, and a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse in the workplace.

**Ready to make your workplace #SafeLeaveReady?  
Scan the QR code to learn more!**



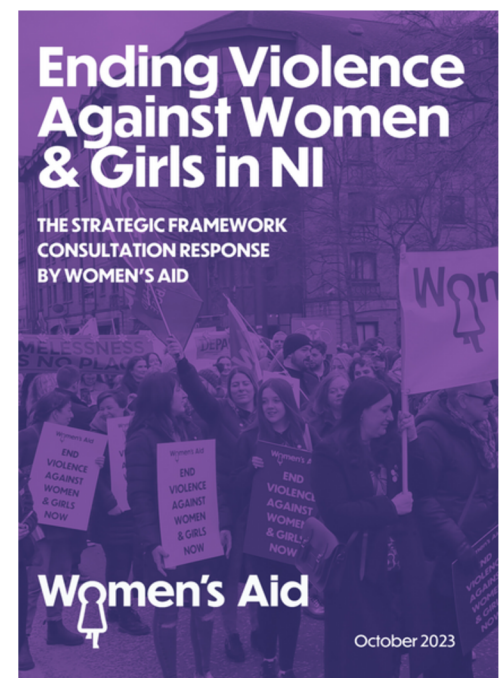
## POLICY & ENGAGEMENT FOR A SAFER NI

Despite the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly in most of 2023/2024, Women's Aid continued to champion the voices of women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women through our policy and engagement work.

We played an active role in the co-design process for the long-awaited Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy for NI which we lobbied for, submitting a comprehensive response to its draft framework.

We also campaigned extensively for a dedicated children and young people's pillar in the updated Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy for NI, driven by the lived experiences and insights of young people from the SAY Project. Their voices brought this critical need to the forefront, and we thank them for helping to make NI safer for future generations.

Our most vital engagement work remains amplifying the voices of victims and survivors. We continue to have an active regional Survivor Engagement Group, and we are incredibly grateful for their commitment to bringing about change.



# SMALL BUT MIGHTY: MAKING CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Women's Aid



The 8 local Women's Aid groups throughout Northern Ireland are the vital specialist support service for women, children & young people affected by domestic abuse in the heart of your community.

They make a meaningful difference every day to those who they work with. Here is just a highlight of some of their fantastic work in 2023/2024.

## ABCLN

Their 'Older but No Safer' project seeks to increase awareness and provide greater protection for older women experiencing domestic abuse. Domestic Abuse Specialists provide one-to-one therapeutic support, groupwork and courses specifically for older women.

## CAUSEWAY & MID ULSTER

Attended the King's Coronation in recognition of their amazing work.

They also moved to new expanded premises in Cookstown to increase opportunities for group work and training activities and further community engagement.

## FOYLE

Opened its social enterprise Café Central in the heart of the city which not only serves up delicious breakfasts and lunches but financially supports work with victims of domestic abuse.

## ARMAGH DOWN

The Safety & Healthy Relationship Advocate (SAHRA) project, stepped in to its second year, supporting post-primary students affected by domestic abuse and trains staff on its impact.

## NORTH DOWN & ARDS

Launched their one year pilot Safe Relationship Awareness Project, a 6-week educational programme for young people in post-primary schools and community groups to learn about safe and healthy relationships.

## FERMANAGH

Were bowled over by the incredible support from the community, raising funds through activities by knitting groups, coast to coast bike rides, winter sit-outs, and one community alone raising £11,800 from a street collection.

## BELFAST & LISBURN

Hosted their annual conference in Titanic Belfast on the 'Silent Voices', affected by domestic abuse and were honoured to receive 'Women's Support Group of the Year' in the NI Women's Awards 2023.

## OMAGH

Facilitated 12 group programmes this year and a refurbishment of the refuge took place which provides a safe and welcoming space for the women and children availing of this vital aspect of the service.



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- 6** Foyle Women's Aid  
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- 7** North Down & Ards Women's Aid  
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- 8** Omagh Women's Aid  
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- 9** Women's Aid Federation  
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## WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR VALUED PARTNERS:

