

# A YEAR IN *Review*

HWC ANNUAL REPORT  
2020-21



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# INTRODUCTION

## Reflections from the Chair

**Looking back over the past year (April 2020 to March 2021) it is amazing to witness the changes that the charity has undergone. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had a significant impact on Hillingdon Women's Centre (HWC), as it did on other Third Sector/Not for Profit Organisations.**

The initial worries and concerns brought on by closing the Centre, and furloughing staff, was soon replaced by the strength and determination of our staff, volunteers and trustees as we rallied to continue providing a much-needed service to our community.

The enforced isolation, health and financial worries saw a dramatic rise in support calls made to HWC with demand almost doubling than that of previous years. In particular, those relating to domestic abuse rose from 50% of all calls in prior years to 65% last year. With the Centre closed we had to adapt to new ways of delivering our services and onboard new staff to meet the increased demand.

This annual review is an opportunity to share some of the amazing achievements of our staff and the impact they have had on our service users. My thanks to everyone who rose to the challenge, got engaged, and delivered an amazing set of outcomes.



*S. Robins*

Sandra Robins  
Chair Trustee and Treasurer

# INTRODUCTION

## Strategy and goals

### OUR OBJECTIVE

The charity's primary objective, as defined in our articles of governance, is to promote any charitable purpose for the benefit of women resident in Hillingdon. This objective includes: the advancement of education, relief of poverty, protection of health, facilitation of recreation and leisure time, and improvements in social welfare and conditions of women's lives.

### OUR VISION

Our vision is to be a recognised organisation within the community that provides a safe space to enable women to thrive and overcome various barriers they experience. This will be achieved through the following goals;

- We aim to be **recognised within the local community** as an established point of contact for women in need of assistance. We are continually building new and developing our existing relationships with partner organisations to facilitate joint project activities as well as two-way referral opportunities.
- We will offer an **enhanced work experience** for all staff through clearly defined development and training options enabling them to acquire and put into practice new skills.
- We will **maintain a financial plan** that ensures an income to meet the predicted expenses and enable a reserve fund for unplanned expenses.
- We will provide a **holistic range of inclusive services**, in line with our core principles of Advice, Empowerment, Opportunity and Sisterhood. We will enable women; to rebuild their self-esteem, overcome barriers, develop coping mechanisms, develop new skills, establish new friendships and support networks, and provide an opportunity to thrive.

65%

OF OUR SERVICE  
USERS  
HAVE EXPERIENCED  
OR ARE  
EXPERIENCING  
**DOMESTIC ABUSE**

# OUR CORE SERVICES

2020-2021 at a glance

Hillingdon Women's Centre provides a women-only safe space that focuses on supporting vulnerable women (18+) in Hillingdon and surrounding boroughs. HWC provides a community service that focuses on empowering and supporting women in need.

A unifying theme across our initiatives is that we are: 'Women Enabling Women'. This theme is fortified by our charity values of providing **Advice, Empowerment, Sisterhood and Opportunity** to all women. With these values at our core, women trust us to help them when they decide to come forward and seek support.

HWC provides comprehensive services that are trauma-informed and help women to navigate their lives beyond an immediate crisis including:

- general information and advice
- practical support for survivors of gender violence
- counselling services
- legal advice
- wellbeing and employment workshops

We also work alongside other community organizations addressing Violence Against Women and Girls. (VAWG)



**132 women**  
were referred by  
professional  
agencies



# OUR CORE SERVICES

## What we offer

### INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (IAG)

We provide practical and emotional support for women who are in need of information, advice, and guidance. Our Support Advisor works with and empowers our service users to take control, guiding women with empathy and compassion in areas such as: education, employment, wellbeing, maternity rights, form filling, advocacy, and basic housing cases. We can also signpost women to appropriate support through our links with community groups and the voluntary sector. During the period 2020-21,

### **1,041 one-to-one interactions with service users**

were dedicated to providing support in relation to welfare benefits, counselling, destitution, donations, isolation, employment, form filling, general information, housing and group activities.



**"Would recommend any women that have problems to come to the women's centre because it is amazing"**

Service User Satisfaction Survey Testimonial (2020)

### LEGAL ADVICE

Our legal advice service operates thanks to local voluntary solicitors. We offer legal advice pertaining to Family Law, Personal Injury and Housing. We also work in partnership with the [Ashiana Network](#) to provide specialist Immigration Advice for women who have experienced or are experiencing any form of VAWG. This is offered on an appointment-only basis and has been delivered remotely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

In total, we provided access to **147 one-to-one legal advice sessions**

# OUR CORE SERVICES

## What we offer

### SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE

Our services are trauma-informed and confidential; we know that every situation is different. Our Case Worker completes a risk assessment, conducts a safety plan with the service user and discusses her rights and options. She can make referrals to appropriate services with the service user's consent and will support her every step of the way. We will never push women into making a decision that they are not comfortable with.

Our support can continue for as long as it's needed. We work with low-medium risk cases and liaise with local safeguarding teams and agencies such as the Police, MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference), MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub), Hillingdon IDVA team (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates), Mental Health team, etc.

- We provided over **650 interventions** related to current or historical abuse.
- **256 referrals** were made to agencies such as: MASH, counselling partners, Domestic Abuse agencies, voluntary sector and partner solicitors.

### PATHWAYS TO HEALING

Pathways to Healing is a group support programme for survivors of Domestic Abuse who are no longer in a relationship with/living with a perpetrator. This is a six-week programme of group workshops that provides the opportunity for discussion to understand Domestic Abuse, its impact and how to take positive steps to move forward to build a new life free of violence.



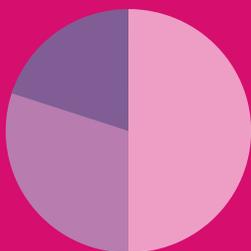
# OUR CORE SERVICES

## What we offer

### GROUP ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Our group activities and events are aimed at developing skills, reducing isolation and foster sisterhood among the participants. They touch on different topics such as health and wellbeing, employment skills, arts and crafts, and healthy relationships. During the pandemic restrictions some have been delivered remotely with very good results.

**Our Employ20 programme provided employability advice and support to 21 women**



- **50% in training**
- **30% in work**
- **20% not in work/training**

**65% of Arts & Craft workshop participants remarked improvements to their overall wellbeing**



65%

### VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Our volunteer programme offers learning and experience opportunities for women to develop a professional career while giving back to the community. This has been developed and improved over the last year.

### WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY NETWORK

With the support of the London Borough of Hillingdon we organised the closing event for International Women's Day: the Virtual Screening of the documentary "What doesn't kill me" by Rachel Meyrick. 63 people registered for this event. After the screening we hosted a Q&A session with the director attended by 20 people. The discussion was really interesting, the audience were engaged and came with pertinent comments and reflections.

“

**Thank you for a wonderful workshop today. It was most inspiring... Thank you for all your help and the expertise you shared with so much professionalism.** ”

Feedback from a workshop participant (2021)

# KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Specialist projects overview

DOMESTIC ABUSE PROJECTS	PROJECT AIM	OUTCOMES AT A GLANCE
<b>Specialist Domestic Abuse Service</b>	One-to-one advice, guidance and advocacy with a specialist DA Caseworker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 115 women supported from Aug 20-Mar 21</li><li>• 92% felt supported and provided with relevant information</li></ul>
<b>Pathways To Healing</b>	Online group based DA recovery programme supporting survivors who are now safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 women in pilot - 100% now recognise that they are not to blame</li><li>• 23 women have enrolled since the successful completion of the pilot</li></ul>
<b>Workplace Safespace</b>	Consultancy and training for local employers to support staff experiencing DA and improving policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 200 employees trained</li><li>• 48 trained organisations</li><li>• 14,000 employees reached</li></ul>

**The staff were very welcoming and caring. I was upset when I was leaving but they reassured me and made me feel very welcome. Very happy with the service provided.**

Service user satisfaction survey feedback (2020)



# KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Projects in detail

### SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE

Although we have been offering elements of support services for those who have suffered domestic abuse in previous years, grant funding from the [Rosa Fund](#) has enabled us to recruit our own dedicated Domestic Abuse caseworker to provide specialist and longer term support. We are now able to provide casework services instead of signposting/referring women to other agencies.

At this point, we are only able to undertake low to medium risk cases, as we do not have the capacity to work on high-risk cases. All identified high-risk cases are referred to the MARAC and Hillingdon IDVA team. Our Domestic Abuse caseworker has extensive experience working with vulnerable women with different layers of complexity.

We ensure our Case Worker is provided with continuous training to keep up with any changes, improve our service and most importantly to have a trauma-led perspective.

Since starting with us in August 2020, through to end March 2021, our caseworker has held 309 one-to-one interventions with 115 service users, successfully helping them through their individual trauma and crisis. From their feedback;

Furthermore, of those being measured through the [Outcomes STAR tool](#) all show positive improvement in at least one of the 9 areas assessed.



of users on this service feel that they were provided with relevant information and left us feeling more supported



of women using this service expressed satisfaction with the support and tools provided by Hillingdon Women's Centre.

# KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Projects in detail

### PATHWAYS TO HEALING



We have developed our own Domestic Abuse recovery programme. It was vital to us to create a space for survivors of Domestic Abuse to be able to share their experiences, learn about healthy relationships and focus on self care strategies.

Pathways to Healing is a 6-week programme delivered in small groups online. The workshops empower women to begin to address their trauma, understand power and control and gender, learn about healthy relationships, recognise victim blame, set goals and understand the importance of self-care and wellbeing. Support also includes 1:1 sessions at the beginning and end of the programme with our programme facilitator. This programme is designed to support survivors of any form of Domestic Abuse, who are now safe. The development of the programme and delivery of the pilot was funded by London Community Fund Wave 3.

“  
It was really nice being part of the group discussions, listening to others and sharing my thoughts made me feel I am not alone.  
”

The pilot enabled seven survivors to decrease their isolation, address the impact of their trauma and start the process of self-discovery by improving confidence, developing resilience strategies and focusing on their future ambitions. Using the '[Star Outcomes Tool](#)' we measured the change in Empowerment scores of our users, demonstrating the quantitative impact in areas such as self-esteem, support networks, safety and health and wellbeing.

**100%** of participants made progress in at least 2 outcome areas

**100%** of women reported improvement in self-esteem and empowerment

**86%** of women reported improvements in their support networks

# KEY PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

## Projects in detail

### WORKPLACE SAFESPACE



[Workplace Safespace](#) is a free specialist and consultancy training programme aimed at employers, from all sectors and sizes. It is designed to train and support organisations on how to support staff who may be experiencing Domestic Abuse. The Ministry of Justice has funded this project with support from the [London Community Foundation](#). The training is provided by specialists from Hillingdon Women's Centre, the [Sharan Project](#), [Belina GrOW](#) and the [London Borough of Hillingdon](#).

The training is spread over 3 modules and organisations who sign up have access to our monthly networking sessions, a dedicated Domestic Abuse advisor and the opportunity to sign up for Workplace Safespace consultancy services. The training discusses a number of issues including but not limited to: Domestic Abuse, warning signs, managing sensitive disclosures, forced marriage and honour based violence. We are not asking employers to tackle this head on, but instead we encourage employers to follow a 3-step procedure.

Hillingdon Women's service has diversified and is not only working to tackle Domestic Abuse by providing frontline work. We think it's paramount to work towards prevention and make the community aware and ready to respond in case they are in contact with someone experiencing abuse. In partnership with our partner organisations we created the Workplace Safespace initiative.

- 87% participants agreed that the training could be applied in their workplace
- 90% participants confirmed they had a better understand of how to support a victim/survivor

“The main take away was normalising these conversations. Breaking down these barriers and holding ourselves accountable to drive awkward conversations which could potentially lead to saving a life.”

Feedback from a Workplace Safespace Module Participant (2021)

# IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

## What we have achieved

It is important to us that our services are effective in supporting and empowering women, congruent with our charity values. We regularly monitor our service user feedback in order to shape our service options. Surveys are sent to all women who have visited the centre for the first time. Following an analysis of the most recent feedback of our Service User Satisfaction survey (2020), the findings demonstrated that:

**99% of women** felt welcomed by friendly staff when they interacted with us

**92% of women** who came to us for help felt that they were provided with relevant information and left feeling more supported

**93% of women** expressed satisfaction with the support and tools provided by HWC

**“I call this place heaven! Angels working here. Thank you XXX”**

**100%**

of service users were satisfied with the information and advice received at HWC.

**100%**

of service users were satisfied with the social activities they attended at HWC

**100%**

of service users were satisfied with their counselling appointments at HWC

**“Good service. Like a citizen’s advice service for women only.”**



# CHALLENGES

## And lessons learnt

### INCREASED DEMAND AND WORKING PRACTICES

The unfortunate reality of COVID-19 and multiple lockdown periods meant there was an increase in Domestic Abuse cases and demand for our services. This meant we had to quickly adapt to new ways of working and find innovative ways to continue to meet service user needs. We quickly adapted our work practices to fully remote working and continued to offer support and run projects remotely.

### FUNDING

An increased demand in our support services meant we had to draw on support from our funders and supporters to help us cope with new challenges. With generous grants and support from donations we continued to manage our workload, onboard a new case worker and work with our partners to deliver meaningful projects in our community.

### EMBRACING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Digital technologies and provisioning the right tools for our staff and volunteers have enabled us to work remotely throughout the pandemic. Zoom calls have become our default meeting spaces. Focusing on effective communication and collaboration between our staff enabled key messages from our service users were received and we were able to continue to provide our services remotely.

### INCREASING DIGITAL REACH

Covid-19 has also accelerated our use of digital channels to reach out to wider communities and continue to generate awareness of our services. We have focused on improving our digital presence by revamping our website, posting regular updates on social media and increasing our fundraising efforts via online campaigns as well as launching our online [‘Opportunities to Thrive’](#) donations campaign.

### RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

By increasing our social media presence and reach we were also able to attract volunteers and supporters who were interested in offering their services for HWC. We also built a structure via a dedicated onboarding programme and training to all our volunteers. We are confident that as we continue to invest in improving our volunteer engagement program we will be able to attract more support.



# OUR FUNDERS

## Thank you

The COVID-19 pandemic has been very difficult for everybody and has caused financial constraints to most businesses and not for profit organisations nationwide. We are especially grateful to all our generous funders who stood behind us and invested in the work we do by provisioning of grants.

The grants which we received in the form of unrestricted funding enabled us to continue delivery of our core services, along with project-based funding we were able to introduce new and expanded services. We are extremely grateful for the support we received that enabled us to not only meet our challenges, but also to ensure ongoing stability and continuity of service through contribution to our reserves fund. We extend our sincere gratitude to our funders:

- London Borough of Hillingdon (helped cover our core costs)
- Gilead Sciences (helped cover our core costs)
- Garfield Weston (helped cover our core costs)
- Gwyneth Forrester Trust (helped cover our core costs)
- Coop Community Fund (helped cover our core costs)
- MOPAC MOJ Covid 19 emergency fund (delivery of the Workplace Safespace program),
- ROSA Covid 19 Fund (recruitment of a DA case worker),
- The National Lottery Covid 19 (purchase of safety equipment and products to facilitate reopening of the centre)
- London Community Fund Wave 3 (development of the pilot of Pathways to Healing Program)
- Clothworkers Fund (capital grant to upgrade and replace IT Equipment and office furniture)



# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

March 2020-21

In the year ending Mar '21, we spent **£150,320** on our work to support women requiring our services, delivering programmes via our partner organisations and managing our core costs. This work was made possible via grants in the form of restricted and unrestricted funding.

We also are fortunate to have received donations from our supporters. Increase in funding meant we were able to hire and retain staff to deliver our services in challenging times.

A detailed breakdown of our revenue and expenditure below:

REVENUE	YEAR END MAR '21	YEAR END MAR '20
Grants - unrestricted	£62,000	£30,000
Grants - restricted	£127,566	£21,550
Donations and Fundraising	£7,690	£13,488
Other	£350	£880
JRS	£4,131	£0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>£201,737</b>	<b>£65,918</b>

EXPENSES	YEAR END MAR '21	YEAR END MAR '20
Staff Costs	£86,222	£48,874
Establishment	£4,737	£5,655
Office Expenses	£4,191	£1,627
Professional Fees	£5,597	£3,983
Professional Organisations	£43,566	£0
Capital Costs	£6,007	£0
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>£150,320</b>	<b>£60,139</b>

<b>Depreciation</b>	<b>£1,814</b>	<b>£1,814</b>
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<b>Net Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>£49,603</b>	<b>£3,965</b>
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# LOOKING AHEAD

## Whats next for Hillingdon Women's Centre?

Looking into the future post-covid of the challenges that lie ahead, we are aware that we'll continue to face challenging times and we also anticipate that more women will seek support from our services in areas related to safety, housing and finances. We want to be prepared for these challenges by continuously investing in staff training so they are well prepared and have the most up-to-date information to support women in need. We are also building new partnerships to cover the needs of our service users and generate new funding opportunities.

We know that we'll eventually return to work and need to work on a strategy to ensure that all our staff members have a suitable space to provide one-to-one appointments and that the Pathways to Healing sessions are delivered in a safe and confidential space.

We are planning to continue our existing services to make sure they are meaningful and robust. In an effort to support this initiative, we are planning to recruit two more part-time staff members to provide front line work and group activities in the community. We are also preparing for a full come back under safe conditions and development of at least one outreach location in the community. All our actions have been carefully set in our strategic plan 2020-2023.

**“All the information was great, went away with an action plan. Great service!”**

Service User Satisfaction Survey Feedback (2020)

“

**The support worker should be compassionate, someone a victim feels she can open up to. Melanie was just that. I felt I could open up to her, and take her value advice. She is really helpful.**

”

Pathways to Healing Participant feedback (2021)



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Our supporters

We couldn't have achieved any of what we have without the generous income provided by major funding organisations and grant makers, as well as the many and varied smaller donations from our supporters. More importantly, we thank our partner organisations who together with our staff have helped us deliver projects and services throughout the year.

Partner Organisations:

- [London Borough of Hillingdon](#)
- [Sharan Project](#)
- [Belina Grow](#)

Last but not least - a huge shout-out to our staff and volunteers who support our daily operations and keep our initiatives running supporting women through the challenging times during the pandemic.

### **Our Staff (past and present)**

- Vicky Lechuga
- Melanie Aston
- Kathryn Sole
- Fran Northcott
- Bnita Parbhakar-Sohal
- Isobel Sutherland
- Deisy Carillo

### **Our Volunteers (past and present)**

- Cynthia Otote
- Isfahaan Nur
- Danielle Fairless
- Princess Williams
- Zainab Khan
- Charlotte Thompson
- Emily Eastburn-Pentreath
- Lucie King

