



ANNUAL REVIEW

2022-2023

Hillingdon



Women's Centre

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Introduction

Looking back at another year serving as the Chair for this amazing charity I am so proud of where we are and what we have achieved. I see the dedication and commitment from all our staff, paired with the desire to truly make a difference in the lives of the women we support in our community. Our vision is for a world where all women can lead safe, independent, and thriving lives. As you read through this report you will bear witness to the changes and the impacts, we have already made in so many women's lives as we strive towards this vision.

Over this past year we have supported 1029 women providing them with essential information and services. Around 40% of these women have received more in-depth case work with either our support advisor or DA caseworkers. These numbers represent a 9% growth on the previous year and continue to demonstrate how much our services are needed.

We want to ensure that our services are accessible to all women in the community and to this end we have expanded our outreach and have created the Women's Hub. This project has engaged with other small women's groups to provide them with additional support and the results of this was seen at our very successful International Women's Day event which was held at the Beck Theatre in Hayes.

Finally I am pleased to say that we have now completed our full review and refresh of our strategy and are able to launch the new five year plan aptly called 'Strength to Strength'. Check out our website to have a look at it!

Thank you everyone!



Sandra Robins
Chair Trustee

Core Services

Hillingdon Women's Centre (HWC) has been supporting the needs of women since 1986 as a unique service in our local community. We are a small charity run by and for women aged 18+ that offers a safe and non-judgmental space where women can freely share their concerns and get tailored support and guidance. We have established ourselves as a trusted and respected organisation within the borough. Our vision is for a world where all women can lead safe, independent, and thriving lives.

The services that we have delivered over the past year can be categorised between those which provide individual one-to-one support and those which are group-related activities.



“

I started quite unsure and scared not knowing what to expect. I now feel better equipped to face the future.

”

One-to-one Advice and Support

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Support Advisors work with and provide advocacy for our service users. They guide women with empathy and compassion in areas such as welfare benefits, finance, education, well-being, women's rights, and basic housing issues. We can also signpost and refer women to appropriate support and information through our links with community groups and the voluntary sector where necessary.

Domestic Abuse (DA) Specialist Support Service

Domestic Abuse Caseworkers provide individualised and ongoing support to women in crisis. This includes risk assessments, safety plans, emotional support, referrals to relevant agencies, and discussions about their rights and options. Linked to this, is our Pathways to Healing (PTH) Domestic Abuse recovery programme for women who are now safe but need support as they work toward building a new life, free of violence.



One-to-one Advice and Support: In numbers

1029

unique service users supported (9% growth on last year)

1554

one-to-one appointments delivered face to face or remotely

383

women accessed long-term caseworker support across one-to-one services

153

referrals obtained from professionals such as statutory agencies

195

referrals for one-to-one legal advice sessions on family, housing & immigration law. (17% growth)

30

more women enrolled onto "Pathways to Healing" across 4 cohorts

Community and Group Activities

Group Activities

Our group activities and events are aimed at developing skills, reducing isolation, and fostering sisterhood. They touch on different topics such as health and well-being and unhealthy relationships. We run several workshops and group activities in response to specific community needs.

Community Outreach Services

We know how important it is to create links with community members and groups to deliver relevant services. Our model seeks to move women from one-to-one support to the possibility of engaging with groups that will improve their confidence and support networks. This year we have strengthened our relationship with local community women's groups to ensure we work together to support women, share best practices, and amplify women's voices in the community.



In Summary

We are proud to have achieved the following outcomes:

- All women in need who have approached us for support have accessed a safe and trauma-informed space during times of crisis.
- We remain the only Women's Centre in West London that supports all women. We continue to offer an inclusive space for women to disclose their concerns confidentially without fear of being judged or disbelieved.
- We have positively improved the self-esteem and confidence of women to feel more empowered, evidenced through our STAR Outcomes Monitoring tool.
- Our one-to-one and group interventions have proven effective in the practical and emotional sense to support women to overcome barriers to thrive.
- We have provided resources for financial independence through our knowledge, and training of welfare benefits, we recognise the strain and impact that the cost-of-living crisis has, particularly on minoritised women in the community.
- Our advisors have supported women to assert their rights to access improved living conditions to live safely; consequently their children and families have widely benefited.

“

**I want to thank HWC.
It was the first time an
organisation did not
fail me.**

”

Key Projects and Achievements

Specialist Domestic Abuse Service

Our Specialist Domestic Abuse (DA) service comprises support during and after the crisis. For this purpose, we have two part-time Domestic Abuse caseworkers, one funded by Henry Smith and the other by The National Lottery. They provide emotional and practical support to women currently experiencing abuse. They aim to assess the risk and create a safety plan with the service user. Our Caseworkers will inform victims/survivors of their rights and options and support their decisions. Caseworkers will continue to offer practical and emotional support for as long as needed, this includes supporting with post-separation abuse. They will always adopt a multi-agency approach to ensure the best outcomes possible.

During the 2022-2023 period, we received 313 referrals related to Domestic Abuse; this was a combination of both professional and self-referrals, from which we supported 283 women. We monitor women's progress using the Empowerment Star tool, which assesses nine different outcome areas that have been found critical to work on women's empowerment. Including safety, accommodation, support networks, legal issues, health and well-being, money, children, work and learning, empowerment and self-esteem.

When reviewing Star outcome data with "progress made" on this service, we evidence that 100% of women have progressed in at least 2 Star outcome areas. Significantly, 92% of women could recognise progress in 3+ outcomes.

736

appointments related to current or historical abuse supporting 247 unique service users

65%

of all service users have experienced or are experiencing Domestic Abuse

176

referrals made to counselling partners, Domestic Abuse agencies, MASH, voluntary sector and partner solicitors.

Key Projects and Achievements

Pathways to Healing Programme

With funding from the L&Q Placemakers Fund, we continued to deliver the Pathways to Healing programme for another year providing four further cycles to 40 women. This post-crisis support over six weeks allows women to recognise the impact of abuse on their lives and understand how domestic abuse is perpetrated through power and control, using a gender perspective. We encourage participants to recognise that they are not at fault or to blame for the abuse that they experienced.

Again, the impact of this service is measured using the Star Outcomes tool at the start and end of the programme. This way, we could measure the “journey of change” with participants across the year. This year we measured the progress of 30 of the 40 women enrolled on the programme. Unfortunately, as 10 women had low levels of engagement, we could not obtain a “second-star” reading for them.

The most significant area of progress on the Empowerment Star was in their "self-esteem and empowerment" where users assess their self-confidence/self-worth. A total of 97% of service users progressed in this area. Equally 90% of users identified changes in their "support networks" and “safety,” likely due to many expressing how they have personally benefited from the group, by connecting with other survivors. Furthermore, our Star data highlights improvements in other outcome areas such as “health and wellbeing” in which 80% of users identified positive changes. It is also important to note that we had a low rate of service users “dropping back” in their star readings, this was explicitly concerning “legal issues” and “work and learning.”

“ I enjoyed meeting the programme facilitators- they are warm, approachable and empathetic. I also liked meeting the other people, it made me feel more confident socialising again. ”

Key Projects and Achievements

Women's Hub

We started this project with the knowledge that most community groups don't have the opportunity to connect. We understand the need for networking and co-production and so preserving these women's groups is crucial. We wanted to use our experience in the community and our partnerships with statutory agencies to bolster these groups to ensure they continue to function and thrive.

To learn more about these needs and what brought these women to the different groups, we organised focus groups with women from three women-led groups, Austin Sewing Club, Afghan Women's Support Group and Hinda's Hair and Beauty Spa. We also included our women's group at the centre, Positive Energy in this research. We feel most proud of the connections we've built and strengthened with these women's groups throughout the project and their trust in us to open up and share their stories. Simple, targeted grassroots groups led by the women who know their communities best can significantly impact hundreds of women's lives. The group was an important reminder that despite all the ways we see ourselves as different from one another, similar themes connect all women.

This group has helped to expand our reach in a way that funding restraints previously had not allowed. Community outreach has become a natural extension of our work. Through our conversations with these groups, we are compelled to continue our work for women in the community.

“

I just went because I needed some positivity in my life and I thought it might help. It's just an hour out of my life, or out of my week, when I can just forget about everything else. I can meet other people that are kind of going through, not always the same, but are going through something, but most people aren't they.

”

Impact and Outcomes

At Hillingdon Women's Centre we know that holistic services providing trauma-informed support with relevant information can have real benefit on women's lives. We know women's vital role as professionals, mothers, and carers. Ironically, we are still treated as second-class citizens in many spaces.

The intervention of our centre creates benefits for women themselves and their families. And we are sure that healthy, thriving, independent women can make a significant impact the community.

Our support workers have contributed to potential safeguarding issues by liaising with MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub), the Stronger Families team and the Police. We have also partnered with the Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service team (the most frequent professional referrer) and MARAC to provide wrap-around support to victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse.

Our services have provided support for a longer term than any other organisation, ensuring women overcome the crises and get a healing space to move forward. We aim to ensure women become independent, regain their self-esteem and thrive. By providing a holistic approach, we aim to prevent future struggles and equip women to navigate future challenges by themselves. This approach impacts their mental health, and well-being for the future.



“

I started my online store, am taking it one day at a time but I believe I will stand on my feet again.

”

“

[I] Am not yet whole again and I don't think I will ever be, but you have given me the tools and the strength to keep going.

”

Case Study: Lily*

Lily came seeking support with child arrangements. She had left her ex-partner because she felt their relationship wasn't working out. On her initial assessment with the DA caseworker, they unpacked her ex-partner's behaviour and how it still affected her life. She was unsure if it was even abuse, she went through, as she was now living away but still receiving abusive texts/emails. The DA caseworker explained to her that abuse could come in different forms and is not only physical.

Lily disclosed that there had been physical abuse in the marriage and thought this to be quite normal. They discussed what abuse can look like and how it can escalate; she needed to understand that there was still a risk even when they were no longer together. He still controlled her social life and finances and threatened her life if she did not comply with his wishes. The DA caseworker explained that this is coercive control.

The risk assessment deemed Lily's case as high-risk. Most current abuse had been over the phone or through text messages, so she did not see it as important enough to alert the police. The DA caseworker urged her that making a police report would be the best step forward for her and her child's safety.

Once the police became involved, the DA caseworker could take more steps forward and referred her to one of our partner family solicitors to get support with her child arrangement. When the solicitor confirmed support, the DA caseworker would perform welfare checks with Lily, ensuring she was safe. She had a clear safety plan that could be updated if anything changed.

The DA caseworker also liaised with the police to keep up to date with this case; she also explained that there had been issues in the past with the officers who came to speak with Lily. This time the police were able to stop the perpetrator from contacting and harassing Lily.

She is now safe, and her child arrangements have been agreed to a level she feels comfortable with. She can now live independently without worrying about her ex-partner harassing or harming her.

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

Case Study: Nancy*

Nancy had been in an abusive relationship for almost eight years. The abuse escalated just after she got to the UK in 2021. The ex-husband would control every aspect of her life, including her clothes and where she could go.

During one of the incidents, he called the police and asked them to remove her from the family home. After that day, she was more scared, knowing what he could do and how little the agencies believed in her.

Nancy's situation left her with depression and severe anxiety. She lived in constant fear of being harmed or deported. Her immigration status depended on him, and he used that to threaten her. He stole her passport; without it, it would have been almost impossible to secure her status and entitlements.

Unfortunately, the only way to get a new passport was to return to her home country, as her consulate did not provide that service. However, that was not an option. Nancy's safety was at stake due to a threat of 'honour'-based violence from her in-laws. On the other hand, she would not have been able to return to the UK.

With the support of our DA caseworker, Nancy got her immigration status changed to Indefinite Leave to Remain, which gave her access to public funds and safe accommodation. She also joined our Pathways to Healing Programme, where she learned and started healing from this abusive relationship.

When she first came to us, Nancy was extremely shy and anxious and spoke quietly. Since receiving our support, she has come out of her shell and is back to her old confident self. She is currently working on building a new life in this country, eager to take all opportunities.

*Name changed to protect confidentiality



“ You loved and cared for me when I didn't love myself anymore. You saw my strength and potential when I had lost sight of it. ”

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Having systems in place that collate information on service user needs, and the changes that we have made in their lives, are critical in demonstrating the value of the charity. Our monitoring systems continue improving such that we can measure growth or trends using similar metrics and show more robust evidence of our work.

Our frontline workers grow in experience daily; they have also created extensive networks with local professionals. Although women may start their journey with one specific concern, our staff can often identify other areas needing intervention. With this in mind, action plans follow a holistic perspective and will have long-lasting results.

We know that our approach generates actual, long-lasting results. We understand how important it is to mitigate the risks during crises; however, we have to acknowledge that trauma has effects that can hinder women's healing and further development. For this reason, we are willing to provide longer and tailored interventions.

We have learned much about flexibility to provide our staff and service users with a safe environment. Our frontline workers have also developed their creativity to ensure women are safe and use all opportunities around them. Being a small organisation positively affects teamwork; in many cases, frontline workers work collaboratively to ensure concrete and faster results. This is also an opportunity to learn about each other and share best practices with the team.

The cost-of-living crisis has been one of the biggest challenges as it has affected the increasing demand and complexity of the cases. It has also impacted us by increasing our core costs. Fortunately, we continue diversifying our funding sources and creating new partnerships to continue delivering our services with optimal quality.

Our Funders

Our ability to deliver our core services and special projects depends entirely on grants and donations. We are keen to ensure that the kindness and support of others is fully recognised and appreciated, for without it, the charity could not continue. We therefore would like to thank the generous funders who invest in the work we do by provisioning of grants.

- London Borough of Hillingdon (helped cover our core costs)
- The National Lottery (costs for DA Caseworker)
- Henry Smith Charities (costs for a second DA Caseworker)
- L&Q Placemakers Fund (contribution to Pathways to Healing programme)
- Ecclesiastical Movement for Good Fund (Community Outreach Project)
- Civil society roots 3 round 1 (The Women's Hub)

We would also like to give a big shout out and thanks to the local organisations and individuals who made donations to Hillingdon Women's Centre. Including NATO Spouses, Barratts Community Foundation, Sparx Ltd, The Women's Institute, Luke Kingston Triathlon, and St Giles Church etc.

Every single penny contributes to the running of the Centre and the delivery of our services.



Financial Summary

In the year ending March 2023, we spent **£167,276** 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 through restricted and unrestricted funding and smaller donations from our supporters. Late payment of an invoice in the prior year resulted in a deficit of £24,028, however that and the success of our grant applications has resulted in a surplus being declared for this year. This enables us to achieve our required level of reserves as defined in our reserves policy.

A detailed breakdown of our revenue and expenditure is below:

Revenue	Year End Mar 2023	Year End Mar 2022	Year End Mar 2021
Grants - unrestricted	£114,054	£35,000	£62,000
Grants - restricted	£50,000	£54,991	£127,566
Donations and Fundraising	£17,121	£13,259	£7,690
Other	£350	£350	£350
JRS			£4,131
Total Revenue	£181,525	£103,600	£201,737
Expenses			
Staff Costs	£132,737	£100,808	£86,222
Establishment	£8,500	£12,720	£4,737
Office Expenses	£1,813	£4,331	£4,191
Professional Fees	£12,226	£6,453	£5,597
Partner Organisations	£12,000	£0	£43,566
Capital Costs		£0	£6,007
Total Expenses	£167,276	£124,312	£150,320
Depreciation	£3,316	£3,316	£1,814
Net Surplus/ Deficit	£10,933	-£24,028	£49,603

Looking Ahead

We plan to continue our current services to ensure they are meaningful and robust. During 2023-2024 we plan to connect more with community groups and continue to grow a support network of women in the Hayes area. With a second Domestic Violence caseworker, we are ready to reach and support more women and expect to extend our offer to the Pathways to Healing Programme. New roles have been developed to improve our fundraising strategy and finalise our new strategic plan.

We have completed our strategy review and implemented our new five-year plan, 'Strength to Strength.' This plan builds on the core services that we have running today and aims to introduce a new aspect linked to DA prevention. We want to support this theme by delivering awareness workshops for all women. These will help women better understand what constitutes abuse, how to recognise the signs of an unhealthy relationship and where they can turn to for additional support.

The next year promises to be a busy one but at Hillingdon Women's Centre we are up for the challenge.



Acknowledgements

We couldn't have achieved any of what we have without the generous income provided by major funding organisations and grantmakers and 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
- Afghan Women's Group
- Austin Women's Sewing Group
- Hinda's Hair and Beauty
- REAP – Interpreter Services

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 challenging times.

Our Staff:

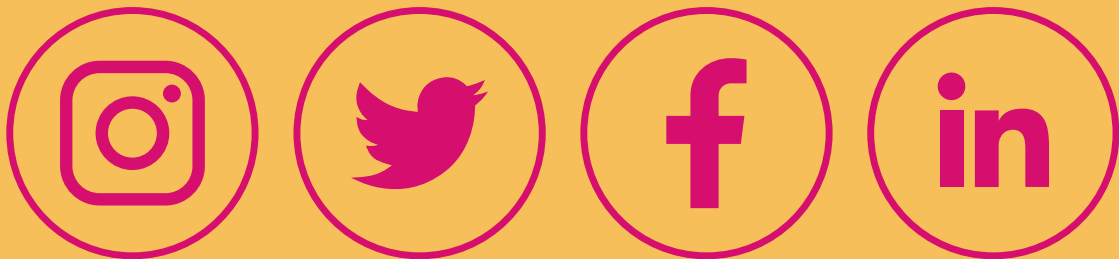
- Vicky Lechuga
- Melanie Aston
- Bnita Parbhaker-Sohal
- Jacqueline Dos Santos
- Deisy Carillo
- Bola Taiwo
- Sehrish Iqbal
- Kayci Powell
- Veronica Kelly

Our Volunteers:

- Sarah Gledhill
- Sophia Sadiq
- Akhila Koichery Veedu
- Siobhan Bellis
- Ruby Freeman
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- Marianna Portela

Hillingdon Women's Centre

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Registered with

