

AYLESBURY WOMEN'S AID

Annual Report for the year ending March 31st, 2020

The purpose of Aylesbury Women's Aid is

'to provide high quality services supporting women and children experiencing the effects of domestic violence by providing them with safe temporary and emergency accommodation and by giving information, other practical assistance and emotional support to those accommodated in our refuges and those living elsewhere in our local communities'

INTRODUCTION

Aylesbury Women's Aid continue to offer good quality temporary refuge accommodation, outreach, IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor), counselling and aftercare services, information, support and advocacy to women and children who have been subject to abuse in their relationship, usually by a male partner or ex partner but occasionally a female partner or a close family member.

The Buckinghamshire Domestic Violence Integrated Contract commenced on the 1st April 2016. This contract is being carried out in collaboration with Wycombe Women's Aid, although Aylesbury Women's Aid are the lead organisation. The initial contract was for 3 years with a possible further 2 years. It was confirmed that we would be given a further year and we will continue to provide the service next year as part of the second +1 year.

The Youth Worker has continued to see young people in schools as part of the contract originally given in 2017. We have also received confirmation that this will continue next year.

However regardless of the developments within the organisation, or the political situation at any given time the principle aim remains the same and that is to give women the information and support to enable them to make their own choices in life so they and their children can escape the violence and live their lives free from fear.

REFUGE SERVICES

The refuge offers a safe place to stay for women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence and who need to leave their homes. The service includes self-catering communal accommodation, provision of emotional and practical support for women and children before, during and after their residence at the refuge, accompanying to court and other appointments, emergency provisions, risk management and support plans for residents.

In the last year 60 women and 67 children have been accommodated in the refuge. This is a similar figure than the previous year. 66% of the women were aged between 21 and 40 years of age which is a slightly lower figure compared to the previous year. 49% of the children that stayed in the refuge were under 5 years old which is lower than the previous year.

Only 26% of the families staying in the refuge were from Buckinghamshire as for most families fleeing domestic violence, it is not safe to stay in their local areas. Aylesbury Women's Aid found space for 73 families from the Aylesbury area in refuges across the country. This is lower than previous years due to increased contact from agencies (e.g. Housing, Social Care) requesting numbers for refuges outside the Aylesbury Vale.

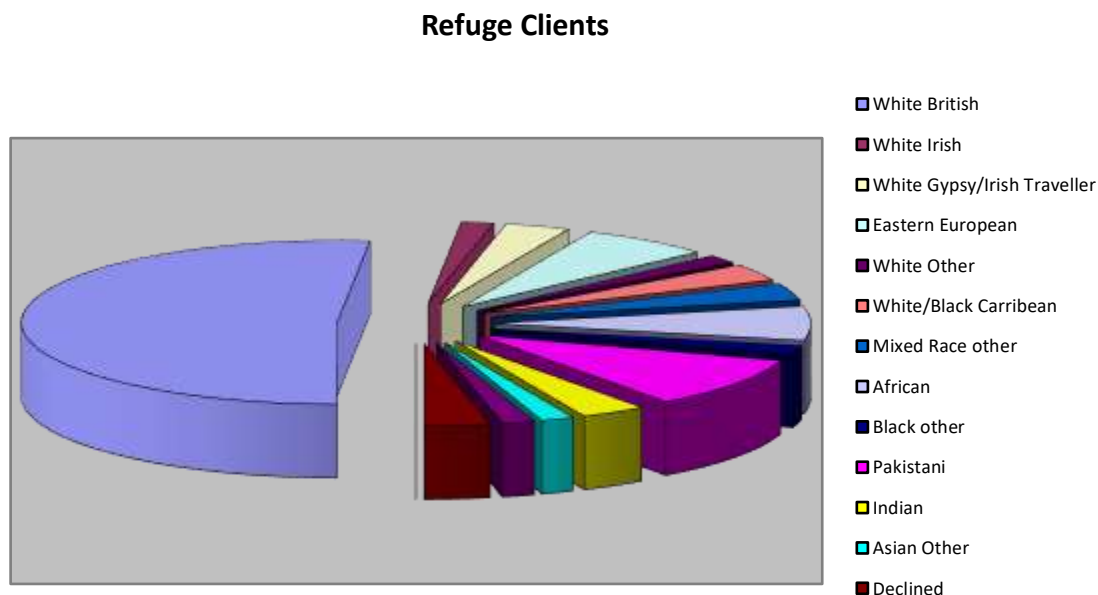
The occupancy rate was 93%, it is rare that we have a space for more than a couple of days as refuge space nationally has decreased considerably in the last few years. 131 families had to be refused space as the refuge was full or the space was not suitable for the woman. This is a higher figure than the previous year. The average length of stay was 11.32 weeks. This is because there has been a shortage of move on accommodation in the area. 13% of the residents were either moved onto temporary accommodation by Aylesbury Vale District Council or permanent accommodation by the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust or other Housing Associations in the Aylesbury Vale area. 23% of families were moved into temporary or permanent accommodation outside of Aylesbury Vale. Other residents moved on to other refuges, private rental and relatives or friends. 3% did return home with no extra protection, a significant decrease on the previous year

10% of the women who stayed in the refuge were still married or living with the partner when they came to the refuge.

52% of the women identified themselves as White British with the other 48% identifying themselves from many different ethnic groups. (See Figure 1) 10 women identified themselves as being disabled.

As you can see from the chart below families came from many diverse groups. It was heartening to see how well they all got on together – sharing their experiences that were all very similar considering their vastly different backgrounds and proof of how domestic violence can affect all women regardless of economic status, culture, religion, age or ethnicity.

Figure 1



IDVA (INDEPENDENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVISER) AND OUTREACH SERVICES

Staff members work on both these services simultaneously as they are very similar. The IDVA service is an independent domestic violence advice service that works in partnership with criminal justice and other agencies as part of the MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) process in order to give advice, information and support to medium/high risk victims of domestic violence about options to improve their safety and that of their children. High risk cases are discussed at MARAC which the IDVA/Outreach worker attends.

The Outreach service is available to any woman living in the Vale of Aylesbury who are either living in a violent situation or who are working through the effects of past domestic violence and who are not currently living in refuge accommodation. Services include support, information, one-to-one counselling and group work sessions, telephone advice and support/advocacy to attend family and criminal courts.

Aylesbury and Wycombe Women's Aids have run the IDVA service collaboratively since 2009. Aylesbury covers the Aylesbury Vale and Chiltern Districts whilst Wycombe cover Wycombe and South Bucks Districts. Male referrals are passed on to a male IDVA. Many clients are originally referred to the IDVA services and then continue to use the Outreach services as safety is just one of the issues most women have to deal with when leaving violent relationships. The two main issues women have to deal with are child contact and the need for emotional support.

In 2019/20 the Outreach services assisted 236 women and 41 women attended counselling sessions. The IDVA service supported 200 women and 11 men. IDVA's continue spending time at the police station attempting to contact clients quickly after the reported incidents. 68% of the women were aged between 21 and 40 years; 3% under 21 and the remaining 29% over 40 years of age. Women using the Outreach and IDVA services are more likely to be over 30 years of age than clients staying in the refuge. This is because when women are older they are often more established in their employment; own their own home and any children are at a crucial stage of their education. All these things can increase the difficulties in leaving the area and starting again.

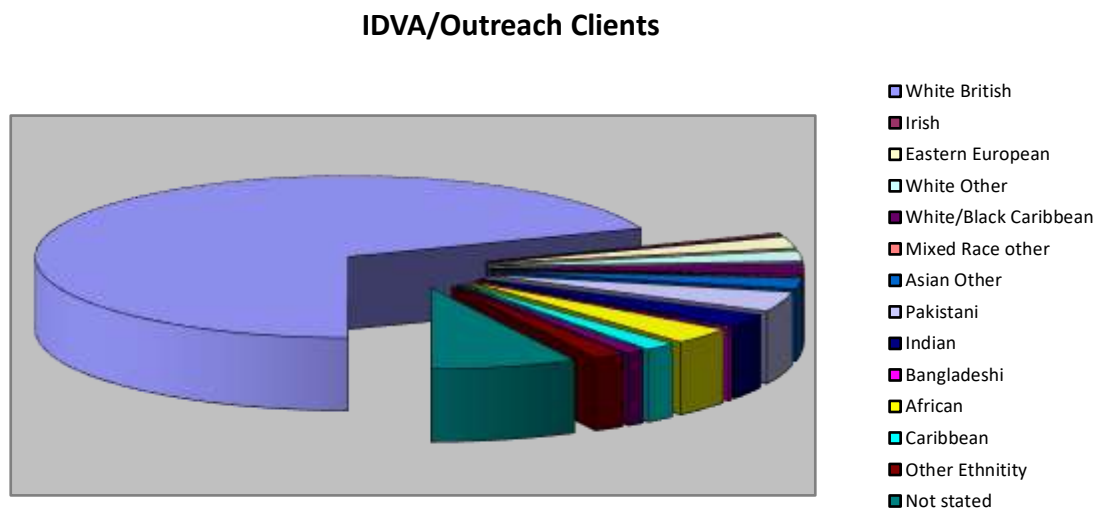
91% of IDVA referrals were made by the Police and MARAC and 76% of outreach referrals were made by the woman herself. Only 31% of the Outreach clients and 18% of the IDVA clients are still living with the perpetrator at the time of referral. Continual harassment and violent threats are one of the main problems for women who have chosen to leave or managed to get the perpetrator to leave and this can continue for years.

85% of clients using the Outreach and IDVA Services resided in the Aylesbury Vale District with the other 15% coming from Chiltern District.

69% of the IDVA/Outreach clients identified themselves as White British and of the other 31%, 9% of these identified themselves as Asian and 2% as white other. This percentage has been slowly increasing over the years and I think it can be assumed some of this increase is due to continuous employment of an Asian speaking IDVA/Outreach Worker. 15% identified themselves as disabled.

Please see chart below for breakdown of ethnicity

Figure 2



BREAKDOWN OF SERVICES (OUTREACH/IDVA)

Calls to and from clients for information and/or support	6990
Clients visit to office:	
Support Meetings	288
Solicitor's Appointment	234
Counselling	442
Advocacy phone calls/letters	700
Accompanying to court, solicitors etc.	24
Number of Case Conferences attended	8
Number of CIN meetings attended	7
Number of Core Group meetings attended	14
TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS	8877

The Freedom Programme co-ordination of programmes all over Buckinghamshire is run from the Outreach Centre. 97 women attended the Freedom Programmes in Aylesbury and surrounding villages. Aylesbury Women's Aid provided 5 different Awareness Days for various professionals

CHILDREN'S/YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICES

67 children were accommodated with their mothers in the refuge. 49% of these children were under 5 years of age; 36% were aged between 5 and 10 years of age and the remaining 15% were over 10 years of age.

In an average week the Child Development Worker facilitated between eight and thirteen structured group sessions for different age groups. The Child Development Worker also assisted mothers with finding school and nursery places and she also supported the mothers when there were issues with their children.

The Child Development Worker facilitated the 'Helping Hand's Programme' for children in primary schools and this has been very successful. The success of offering the programme in schools has meant that

schools need to book their programme a couple of terms in advance. Between April 2019 and March 2020, 21 groups were held in schools with 160 children attending.

The primary purpose 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”*. A member of staff from the school assists the facilitator when it is held in a school

A total of 15 awareness Raising workshops for young people were held at a Secondary Schools in Aylesbury Vale. 327 students attended these.

MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

In addition to our direct service provision Aylesbury Women’s Aid worked with a number of partner agencies to ensure co-ordinated service delivery and a strategic response to the needs of women experiencing domestic violence, for example:

- Attendance as members of the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC)
- Providing trainers for the Champions
- Involvement with Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) as advocates for our clients when their abuser is discussed.
- Participation alongside statutory sector partners and service commissioners as a member of the Domestic and Community Violence Strategy Group.
- Members of the Homelessness group
- Attending Task and Finish Group to raise awareness in the community

FINANCE

The new Buckinghamshire County Council Contract reached its 4th year. This contract which is fulfilled by both Aylesbury and Wycombe was initially for 3 years, with a possible option of a further 2 years. Confirmation has been received to extend for a further year. This contract includes funding for supporting women in the refuge, IDVA services and some outreach services; Children’s services which includes work with children in the refuge and in the community and Freedom Programme Coordination across the county.

Bucks County Council also awarded funding for a Youth Worker. The contract has since been renewed for a further year.

The accounts are healthy and although there is an under spend this is needed for work to be completed at the new Outreach Centre

CONCLUSION

It has been steady and successful year although new funding contracts have been challenging at times.

The staff and Trustee teams remained committed and there has been a lot of support throughout the year from individuals and organisations and this has been invaluable.

I feel confident that the charity is in a very good position, strategically, politically and financially and hopefully this will continue.

And, lastly but not least Aylesbury Women's Aid extends their thanks to all our partners, churches, other organisations and individuals for all their support and gifts throughout the year.

April Benson
Director of Services
Aylesbury Women's Aid

October 2020