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**Bury St Edmunds
Women's Aid Centre**



ANNUAL REPORT

2020/2021

**Registered Charity No. 276883
Company Registration No. 1338724**



Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd



Philosophy Statement

Domestic Abuse is Unacceptable

People who have experienced domestic abuse have been hurt and traumatised.

Children and Young People who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse have been hurt and traumatised.

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse does not discriminate by gender, age, ability, financial status, sexuality, race or religion. Those affected by domestic abuse can find themselves existing in a world where they are isolated often frightened or hurt, their confidence and self-esteem have been undermined, where they lack control over who they see, where they go, what they do and their own money.

We recognise that every person has their own story and their own individual needs. When people are ready to reach out for help, we will work with them in partnership in a non-judgemental, caring and friendly way. We will take the time to listen as people tell us their stories. We will let them see that they have been not only listened to but heard.

We understand that to work with a person who has experienced domestic abuse we will need to provide a range of services to meet the needs of the whole person. Particularly support with their mental health and to rebuild their self-esteem. Where the person has needs that are complex, we will work in partnership with other organisations to provide individual person-centred packages of care and support.

We will work with a person, at their own pace. We recognise that not everyone is at the point where they are ready to leave an abusive relationship when they first make contact with us. We understand and support people who are terrified to stay, yet terrified to leave.

We understand that children and young people who have been victims of or who have witnessed domestic violence have been significantly damaged by their experiences. We will



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listen to children and young people, as we do to adults with empathy and sensitivity. We will make an individual package of care for each child which recognises their individual needs.

Where the risk of harm to a child or adult is high, we will work in partnership with the statutory agencies to keep children and vulnerable adults safe.

We provide a safe space for women and their children, who need to flee domestic violence, to live while we support them to rebuild their lives. We recognise the need to hold these women and children in a nurturing and friendly environment provided by a skilled staff team. We aim to support these women and children to recognise their strengths and to slowly enable them to re-build their self-esteem and confidence.

We understand some people do not need a place in a refuge when they leave an abusive relationship. They need support to enable them to stay safe, to understand what has happened to them and support to help them to begin to come to terms with these experiences. We also understand that they need a wide range of practical, housing and legal advice. Our aim is to work with the person to make a support plan and provide services which are right for them.

We support children and young people who have been abused or who have witnessed abuse to understand and talk about these experiences, to rebuild nurturing relationships with their parents or carers, to experience all kinds of play and to feel safe and secure. We understand how traumatic childhood events can have a lifelong impact on a person's feelings of self-worth and mental health.

We believe that individuals coming together with a shared understanding of what domestic abuse is, can work together to keep people safe and to advocate for the individual and for changes in society.



AIMS AND FUNCTIONS OF BURY ST EDMUNDS WOMEN'S AID

Bury St Edmund's Women's Aid Centre Ltd. is both a Registered charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. There are currently seven Trustees of the Charity, who are also Directors of the Company. The Trustees, who are all volunteers with differing areas of experience and expertise, form a Management Committee that oversees the operation of the organisation.

Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre is a caring organisation that offers advice and support to anyone who is experiencing domestic abuse.

We Offer

- We operate in the community from our Outreach Centre. At the Centre we offer both group and individual support. We offer a crèche so that children can be cared for while adults are having one to one support, counselling or attend groups. We also work one to one and with groups of children who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse. Our work with young people can take place at the Outreach Centre or in the community. Our Outreach Centre also operates a drop-in service and is a hub for our helpline service.
- We also offer Refuge accommodation to women and their children who are at a high risk of suffering harm as a result of domestic abuse. The Refuge is designed to offer a supportive friendly environment which will allow women and their children a safe space in which they can take time to begin the process of coming to terms with their experiences. We have space for up to 8 women and up to 15 children at any one time. A newly developed garden as a space to just be and experience the healing properties being in contact with what nature can provide.
- Family work with women to accept and move on from some of the children's more challenging behaviour. Intensive work with children to support them to rebuild nurturing relationships with their mothers. Support for younger children to 'catch up' with developmental milestones they may have missed. Support for



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young people who are feeling 'lost' having left behind their schools, friends, home and sometimes beloved pets.

- For all the people who use our service there are skilled workers who will listen and understand what people have experienced. Practical advice and support also signposting to financial, housing and legal services. We provide access to groups to enable people to be in a supportive environment as they explore their experiences. We provide access to counselling. A worker who will support the individual to make and work through a plan to keep themselves and any children they may have safe. We offer children and young people a safe space in which, as part of a group or one to one, they can talk about how they feel and their experiences.

We Seek

- In all the services we provide, to offer a high-quality service to everyone we work with. To remain aware that every person, who uses our service, is a unique individual and that it is our role to support and enable that person to begin to come to terms with experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse.
- To work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations to provide the best possible service to all the people who are in contact or receiving a service from us. Also, we seek to build closer working relationships, after the period of Covid19, with these organisations.

We Aim

- To remain a flexible, responsive organisation focused on the needs of the people, children and young people who use our service. We aim to learn from everything that has happened in the time of the pandemic to provide services in smart and innovative ways.



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Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd

DIRECTORS/TRUSTEES

Chair Person	Maureen Byrne
Vice Chair	Christina Dye
Fiona Harbron	Secretary
Elizabeth Larcombe	Treasurer
Ruby Sayed	Trustee
Jackie Burnett	Trustee
Pat Leach	Trustee



JEANNIE BLOOMFIELD, PATRON



Last September a letter dropped on my mat from the Women's Aid in Bury St Edmunds asking if I would consider being a Patron. To say I was overwhelmed at such an honour, is an understatement. I began to feel whether I was up to the job and would I let you down because having been to the Outreach and

Refuge several times I was in awe of such a dedicated group of people who weren't there to just do a job but were fiercely passionate about helping women and their children build a new life after being victims of domestic abuse.

I discussed it with my husband and family and they encouraged me to accept. I rang Maureen the Chair who immediately put me at ease and I accepted and promised to do my best to help and be there whenever needed.

This is what my fifty years campaigning is about and I feel I have come home to be part of the army to fight for what is right.

In 2009 I became a Partner of Women's National Commission under the guidance of Chair, Baroness Joyce Gould and during this time I also became a member of its Abuse against Women Committee. I have been working with the Global Foundation for the Elimination of Domestic Abuse (GFEDV) and spoken at meetings alongside its Founder, Baroness Patricia Scotland. This has enabled me to work with other partners and to evaluate the effectiveness of different policy solutions to domestic abuse.

Key to my work has been making representations on several occasions in the House of Lords both for the provision of free legal aid for women who need it and as a Member of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI). The NFWI is part of the Justice for all Coalition, which is a group of charities and organisations against the proposed changes in Legal Aid for victims of domestic abuse.

I made presentations in the House of Lords when the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 was going through Parliament. I have campaigned in films, in the media and spoken on Radio 4 Women's Hour.

The thing that struck me the most is the Resettlement Service that you provide. This is so vital because when I moved into my new home, I had no idea how to run it, how to



shop, how to pay bills and so forth because as a victim it is so comforting to know that you are still there to guide them for as long as they need it.

You have made the children feel safe again with all the facilities you provide with toys in abundance, and a beautiful garden with lots of outdoor activities. I believe at the moment the children are growing sunflowers and are having a competition to see who grows the tallest one.

During the coming year the Domestic Abuse Bill will become Law. The Domestic Abuse Act will provide further protections to the millions of people who experience domestic abuse and strengthen measures to tackle perpetrators.

For the first time in history there will be a wide-ranging legal definition of domestic abuse which incorporates a range of abuses beyond physical violence, including emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse.

I am passionate about the crucial support offered by this Charity and I will do whatever I can to support such a valuable service.

I hope you will join me in supporting the Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre in 2021/2022 and beyond.

Jeannie Bloomfield



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



Like the rest of the country last year was the most challenging experience for us to abide by Government regulations, in respect of the pandemic, at the same time ensuring we were protecting our families in the refuge.

During 2021 we had a planned a progressive strategy to keep our families and staff safe at the same time continuing to provide support, advice and guidance with very complicated situations experienced by residents.

I can report on behalf of the Board our team performed over and above any expectations. They maintained communication day and night with the residents. All were very aware the problems that lockdown created, especially for those with mental health issues.

Last year we advised we were looking forward to increasing our team. This has been a huge success. Our new employees have brought with them skills and experience that have been a tremendous support and contributed to our first-class service.

I am pleased to report our Training Programme is a successful ongoing provision for staff, Board members, residents and our Outreach service users.

We continue to provide a counselling service for staff and residents which has had positive feedback with regard to the success of the programmes.

With the election of 4 Board members, at our AGM, we will at last we have a full Board of Trustees and we look forward to working with them and welcome their experience and expertise.

My colleagues will submit their reports that will include the current financial report and donations received. The generosity of our donors is often over whelming, it makes such a difference to what we can provide for our families which, in turn, will bring days of fun and laughter and extra play facilities for our children.



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We have great exciting plans for the future, staff and residents having an opportunity to make their contribution. These initiatives will raise the profile of the Refuge, reach out to our community, other agencies and supporting collaborative working relationships.

The Board, without a doubt, wish to thank our Trustee Pat Leach for the tremendous input over the past months.

We have recently employed a Senior Service Manager, who has a wealth of experience that has already seen positive changes. We thank you all.

We are hoping that our volunteer group will increase over the coming months, if you are interested, please apply and join us. We would love to meet you.

Good health, best wishes to all.

Maureen Byrne

Chair of the Board



SERVICE MANAGER'S REPORT

This has been a strange year for everyone. Throughout all the different levels of restrictions we have endeavoured to provide an empathetic, friendly response to all the people who have contacted us or used our services. Our staff team have gone above and beyond in their commitment and dedication and we recognise we are fortunate to have such a great team.

As lockdowns came and went, we noticed a different pattern of calls to our helpline and referrals to our services. As lockdown eased referral rates and calls went up. The referrals and calls presented higher risk situations for us to respond to. This could be the result of people being locked down with their perpetrators unable to find a way to leave safely or to reach out for help. We are also noticing that many people who contact us or who are referred to our services have increasingly complex mental health needs. As we move to review our Business Plan these are factors that we need to consider.

For long periods of this year our Outreach Centre was closed to visitors and groups. We moved groups, like the Freedom Programme and our coffee morning, on line and counselling was also available on line. This worked for some people who found it easier to engage without being in the same room as others. For others, particularly some of the children it was much harder to make connections without having face to face contact. We have learnt a great deal about how to be light on our feet as a staff team. This is vital learning for the future, as the new Domestic Abuse Act comes into force and the way that services are provided may change.

Life has been particularly tough for women and their children who have used our refuge service. When women come into the refuge, they are vulnerable and often frightened, the children are confused, upset and the young people say they feel 'lost'. To then have to spend seven days in isolation in a part of the Refuge where they can't feel part of the Refuge community or the local community in Bury St Edmunds made this move a lot more challenging for our residents. Normally it is



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fundamental for our staff team to make people feel welcome and to provide a home like environment. This has not been possible in the same way. Now that we have found a way of keeping residents safe from Covid19 via lateral flow testing when new residents arrive, we can avoid this isolation and the atmosphere in the Refuge is much more positive and nurturing. This also means we can provide the usual number of Refuge places.

In the last year we have not been able to work with other organisations or bring creative opportunities to our service users in the same way. We have instead concentrated on mindfulness for children, young people, adults and the staff team. We have Wellbeing Wednesday each week when the children living in the Refuge have an activity and the adults are encouraged to play a part. We have been helped with this by the redevelopment of our Refuge Garden. It is now a safe space to relax for the residents while the children can play and explore.

In the next year we plan to recruit more volunteers to work with us to provide opportunities for them to grow and experience what supporting victims of domestic abuse is like. Our volunteering opportunities range from being a handy person, support with gardening to learning how to answer helpline calls. We also need to recruit a team of volunteers to manage our donations and also to do locally based fundraising.

Pat Leach

Trustee



REFUGE SUPPORT SERVICE

We are Victoria and Lauren and we are Refuge Support workers. Our role is to support women as they come into the Refuge and during their stay with us. We run house meetings each week to allow our residents to talk about issues in the Refuge. We also have one to one sessions with residents to look at issues to do with finances, benefits, legal issues, contact issues also issues to do with mental or physical health. We support the women to register with local GP's and to get access to other services for example dentists. We also support women to find their way about in a new area and how to make links in the community for example being able to access courses at the college or English as a second language support. One of our most important roles is to be available to listen to residents when they need or want to talk to us. We are both quite new in post and have only known life in the Refuge during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have asked the women about their experiences during the Pandemic and lock down. We also asked how they found accessing domestic abuse services and refuge.

Some of the feedback we received was that once they had been given our number staff were helpful and they were able to access refuge easily and they were supported by our organisation to do so.

One woman said her daughter had made several attempts to get help through the council and other agencies but was either told she would have to make an appointment or was fobbed off. This had deterred her from leaving earlier. She said if it wasn't for my daughter's persistence I would have given up and just stayed.

Another woman said it was extremely overwhelming but once she was able to get into the Refuge, she felt she could be herself again. She said the pressure had been lifted and she has found all staff to be approachable. She said for example, I was at the supermarket and I had lots of shopping, I was unable to get a taxi back to the Refuge. I started to get stressed I called the Refuge and spoke to Kay to help me, she said don't worry someone will come to collect you. Victoria arrived in the minibus - I am so grateful.

Lauren asked another woman who is 18 years old how it was for her being so young? She said she was really worried before she came in about how everyone would be but she said its lovely and her experience of refuge is really positive.



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We spoke about whether the women knew we existed before they needed our help, a few said they didn't and had accessed us through the police or another organisation.

The women said that it was harder being in an abusive relationship during lockdown and highlighted the need to get out.

Our service users have still benefited from the services Women's Aid has had to offer during lockdown but it has been different from the usual experience of coming into Refuge. For example, counselling has been done via zoom rather than face to face, but has still been open for residents to access. Some residents have preferred to wait until face-to-face counselling became available again, but the majority of residents have accepted the offer to do it via Zoom instead. Being in refuge has allowed the opportunity for the residents to come and see support workers after counselling via Zoom, if it has been a difficult session.

Lauren and Victoria

Refuge Support Workers

*"thank you for helping us
through rough times "*

*"Thank you for helping us and
keeping us safe"*



OUTREACH SERVICE

This is the first year I have had to write my Annual Review from scratch, every other year I have been able to borrow parts of previous reviews and add a little personalisation...

Over the past year we have had to adapt how we work and we have risen to the challenge and embraced change.

Gone were the face-to-face meetings, getting to know our clients' personal stories, we could no longer listen and advise how to stay safe face to face so we adapted.

We continued to run the Freedom program to women in their own homes using Zoom, we learned to listen to the women's tone of voice when supporting them on the phone giving us a better understanding of how they truly were.

Sometimes we were just an ear to listen to their fears and discuss where the best place to buy toilet rolls was during the initial first few difficult weeks.

During lock downs we successfully worked with other agencies to help women and children flee from abuse supporting their emotional needs and safety needs by finding them safe accommodation either within local housing or other refuges.

Slowly things are returning to normal and we are seeing clients face to face again, our groups are beginning again and we can move forward working as we always have face to face with our clients using both old and new skills we have learned over the past year.

Things we have learned from this last year are the importance of who we are and what we can achieve when we adapt and make changes together as a team to keep people safe.

Tracy

Outreach Support



Case Study

M is a white British woman in her twenties. M had made a number of calls to the helpline. She was in great distress and sometimes was not able to talk. M was given time and gradually she was able to share more about what was going on in her life. M was allocated an outreach worker so that she could talk to a consistent person. M was very reluctant to share any information about herself. For some weeks she would only give her first name and say she lived in Suffolk.

M and her worker made a safety plan. M disclosed that she was pregnant and she did not want to tell her partner as he would insist she gave up work. She had not seen her GP as she was concerned her partner as her next of kin could access her medical records. M was given advice and was supported to see her GP. M knew she could not stay in this relationship if she were to have a child. M made a plan to leave with her outreach worker.

M disclosed a history of being abused as a child by her father. She continued to talk to her outreach worker frequently. M was very anxious about going to hospital for a scan. On a previous occasion staff had asked lots of questions about an injury she had. M was worried about the staff calling the police. The outreach worker took advice and was able to reassure M about what the role of the staff at the hospital was and that information would not be shared with her partner without her consent.

M continued to be distressed and quiet for long periods. M's outreach worker had to respect this and work very sensitively with M to enable her to go at her own pace. When M had her scan she found out the baby had no heartbeat. M blamed herself and felt she was not worthy of being a mother. M felt she did not deserve a life free from abuse.

Contact between M and her outreach worker was frequent, M began to work on the Freedom Programme on a one-to-one basis. M and her outreach worker talked about all the options around how M could leave. M wanted to be able to continue with her job and wanted to be able to take her dog wherever she went.

When M left, her partner's initial response was to be kind and understanding. M felt the urge to return. M's support worker used elements of the Freedom Programme to work with M to recognise cycles of abuse. When M refused to return her partner made threats



to hurt and kill her. M was able to work with her outreach worker to review and update her safety plan.

Work with this service user has had to be done carefully and sensitively. M needed to feel she could trust her outreach worker and to be given a great deal of space and time before M was able to share what was going on in her life. When M was so distressed that she was not able to engage, the outreach worker had to find ways of making her feel more at ease for example by talking about her dog. M's outreach worker had to understand M's concerns about sharing information with other professionals. Then by taking advice on how information is shared the outreach worker was able to encourage M to engage with health professionals. The outreach worker had to work with great skill and empathy to adapt the Freedom Programme, to empower M. To help and support M to recognise that she could leave her abusive partner and that she deserved a life free from abuse and fear.



YOUNG PERSONS' SUPPORT REPORT

We know that 1 in 7 children and young people are affected by domestic abuse and moving forward we felt that it would be incredible to continue the work that we started as a pilot study, especially having identified the importance and the positive impact it can have on such vulnerable young people. Although the pandemic has been incredibly tough, we have still managed to maintain a good level of service and offer many young people the support they need. Although our face-to-face service within schools has been on hold, we have taken the opportunity to be creative with how we work and embraced new opportunities.

Pre-Pandemic we offered:

- Domestic abuse awareness sessions to young people and those working with young people
- Life skills modules within the Riverside young parent housing project, at all three local venues.
- Training to Family Support Practitioners in Forest Heath
- 6–8-week programme for vulnerable girls
- Creation of a specific safety plan that can be used with young people
- Attendance at Freshers week, West Suffolk College
- Impact of Domestic abuse on children session with Designated Safeguarding Leads from the Samuel Ward Academy Trust.

Intensive support is tailored to each individual and is offered around historical issues with a trauma informed approach, exploring childhood experience and feelings and emotions around domestic abuse. Alongside this, further support is given around promoting healthy relationships, making positive choices, and identifying unhealthy relationships such as red flag behaviours. Including work around safety, boundaries, and consent.



This is one young person's story which she wants to be shared with others.

Bella's Story

"For a very long time, I didn't think that life had a purpose.

I never knew what being truly happy felt like. I just remember seeing everyone around me having a life with no worries. I always wondered why that couldn't be me.

Why did I have to hide what I was going through? why was I scared? why was it all happening to me?

I started to get bullied at a young age, and because of that, I preferred to hang out with adults. I knew they wouldn't judge like kids my age would.

I had to become mature at a very young age for many reasons. I just wish it could've been different.

Witnessing my mum get abused was probably the worst thing that ever happened to me. she got mentally, physically and emotionally abused. seeing your mum get abused by your dad is probably something that i wouldn't wish anyone to see.

It's horrible. it's like little pieces of your soul get chipped away.

it's hard. it really is and what did i feel after that you may ask?

well, firstly it was sadness and feeling trapped like you have nowhere to go you want to scream but you can't.

but after several times of witnessing it, i felt numb. i felt like i didn't deserve to be here.

after years and years of promises, my mum and i had enough of it.

2020 wasn't the year we expected it to be, but it turned out to give us the best thing ever. freedom from a person that didn't deserve us or to be in our lives.

well, the main point in this is that kindness is always the best thing ever. i had to go to school, feeling mentally exhausted, and had to deal with people being mean and just saying things that triggered what i witnessed. i had to pretend i was happy and put a big smile on my face. it killed me inside. i felt like i was lying to everyone around me- well, i was. i couldn't say anything.



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nowadays, little things still trigger my memory but i know that because of everything i went through, it made me who i am today. im proud of myself for overcoming everything life has thrown at me. it was and still is rough, but i'm slowly managing to go through it.

so please, think before you say something to someone cause you never know what someone's going through. a simple smile or 'hi' could make someone's day.

2020 was a hard year, but hopefully, 2021 will be better".

Rachael

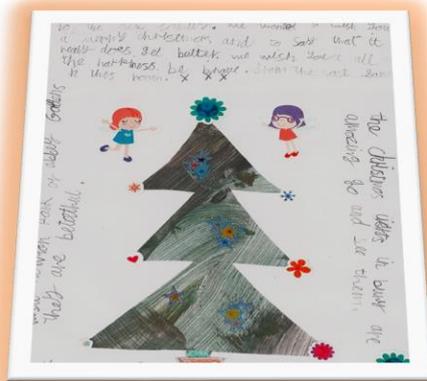
Young Person's Support Worker



CHILDREN'S SERVICE

Our aim is to make the children's stay as enjoyable as possible, to build strong and secure bonds to restore children's confidence, self-esteem and development through play and planned sessions whilst in our care.

We also support mothers with a wide range of subjects including schools, behaviour, homework, nutrition and engaging with local agencies.



We provide an After-School Club where the children can access help with homework and play games. Children discuss everyday issues, how they are feeling, what's going well, what they are finding challenging. The activities are child led. The children discuss themes and things they would like to do, helping to plan sessions and displays.

Child support workers also provide Drawing and Talking 1:1 sessions. The purpose of this method is to encourage children to draw with a person with whom they feel comfortable at the same time each week. The trusted person will ask a number of non-intrusive questions about the drawing and over time a symbolic resolution is found to old conflicts and trauma is healed.

"Thank you for helping us and doing nice things and for making us have fun. You put our minds on fun things."

"Thank you Sarah I love you and I will miss you."

With the under 5s we use Tapestry to record the children's developed goals and follow their journey with us in the Refuge. The older children make a scrap book of the different activities they have been doing.

Stronger Families is continuing to run with the Mothers' Group on a Tuesday and Child sessions on Thursdays. Mothers and children are encouraged to talk about their feelings, emotions and experiences in a safe environment, to help both to process and better understand the abuse and violence they have witnessed. At present due to working mums and Covid 19 we are trialling a new online approach, we have now set



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up a new bulletin board (Padlet), mums can see the weekly sessions and then on a Tuesday morning staff are online or available to take calls and answer any questions. Padlet is also interactive, comments and feedback can be left on the board. The children still come to see us with face-to-face sessions on a Thursday afternoon.

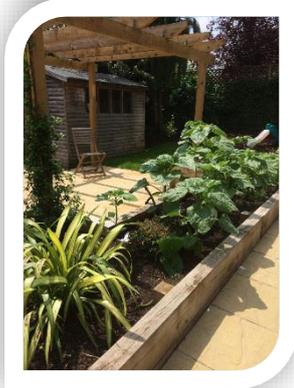
"Thank you for helping us and keeping us safe".

We run Helping Hands for the younger school children on a Tuesday. This group is for Children to explore their feelings, learn how to deal with strong feelings safely. How to keep safe and adults who they can trust.



Even with the Covid restrictions in place, we have a brand-new garden which has been turned into a lovely relaxing space for adults and children.

The playroom area has a fenced off decking area. This will allow us more safe outside play experiences with the children.



Sunflower Bed

The children are growing sunflowers which they like measuring each week.

"I thank Sarah because she is kind"



Children's playhouse



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During the school holidays we have had to make changes to our Activities due to Covid restrictions. We were in a bubble so could go out as a group.

- A wellbeing trip to Field of Dreams to meet and interact with the animals.
- We managed a very muddy trip to Windy's Pumpkin Patch where the families got to pick their own pumpkins and explore the muddy maize maze.
- Also visited the World Exhibition at the Arc and even attended the outdoor theatre production of a Christmas Carol for the older children



Ixworth House invited the families to the house and gardens over Christmas. Where they had a tour of the house, lunch and hot chocolate, they even put presents and chocolate coins under the Christmas tree for the children.

The Children enjoyed a drive round the local area looking at the Christmas lights.

Father Christmas despite Covid still managed to visit the children. Keeping at least 2 metres away from the children, as he sat and talked to them. The children enjoyed asking him questions like "how does he deliver all the presents in one night"



We have had some amazingly generous donations of toys, games and activities for the children this year. KidsOut sent an age-appropriate box of toys to every child receiving our service. We would like to thank the local Rotary Club, Spin Masters, the WI and local people who have support us by purchasing things from our Amazon Wishlist.

Overall a very different year but even with the Covid restrictions the families have made happy memories.

**Sarah and Louise,
Child Support Workers**

"thank you for helping us through the rough times and for caring for us with work and emotional" (this is how the child wrote it)



RESETTLEMENT SERVICE

I work with the women and their children who are resettled into the community from the Refuge. This work is so varied I do everything from furniture removals and plumbing in washing machines to sorting out safety plans and continuing to work with the women and their children in terms of their self-confidence and making links to their new communities.

This is the story of a woman I have worked with this year.

K fled domestic abuse during lockdown with her teenage daughter. K uses English as her second language. On starting the resettlement work I found out that at the property they had fled from, had a joint tenancy and was privately rented. K and her husband had shared the bills and she gave him the money towards these bills. I discovered that the rent had not been paid for six months and that none of the bills had been paid. This sort of financial abuse happens often but the impact it can have on women and their children is not understood.

The letting agency and landlord had taken K's husband's name off the tenancy and that they would look to take K to court for the whole debt. The reason they gave for taking his name off the tenancy was that he was returning to his home country, therefore leaving the whole debt to K. This debt would stop K from being re-housed by the local council.

I worked with the council to get a DHP (Discretionary Housing Payment) put in place to get the debt cleared. This was hindered by the letting agencies not responding to emails from myself or West Suffolk Housing. Anglian Revenue also involved their legal team as they were increasing the debt even though notice had been given by K. I also worked with K to sort the other debts which she had been left with; council tax, water rates and utilities bills along with a loan we found he had taken out in her name.

We worked with Step Change to get the debts reduced to an affordable payment each month. The Anglian Revenue team sanctioned the discretionary housing



payment for the debt on the previous tenancy. With this completed K was able to bid on properties allowing her to move forward with her life.

K was offered a property in the area. As there was a lockdown in place, she was unable to look around the property in person, but she was sent a video clip of the house. I took K out for a drive to the house and we walked around the area. I provided practical and emotional support to K and her daughter as they left the refuge and continue to do this.

Applying for the DHP alongside working with Step Change made it possible for K to obtain a property and settle in a home with her daughter. I supported K to

get a job which has seen her grow in confidence and increase her spoken English. K is starting to build her network of friends, therefore reducing her isolation. Her daughter has completed her GCSE's and is looking to attend sixth form. She has made a good network of friends and has also spoken at the local college regarding the effects of domestic abuse on children and young people.

"Oh my, Kay. I can't tell you what this means to us.

Turns out you are our Knight in shining armour and have been ALL along.. you have been the one that's done everything for us Kay and I cannot thank you enough.

Honestly I have no words. Finally i feel hope"

"Kay is my favourite, you're sparkly and Shiny and magical" A child Kay

Christmas Dinner thank you:

We all had an utterly fantastic time on Friday, you are all incredible. The effort that you put in to making these occasions so special for the residents is amazing and we were truly blown away. The games, the food (best I've ever had, very, very posh and we were very impressed and spoil!) and the Christmas spirit by all the staff. Whoever ends up at BSEWA, although in such difficult circumstances, are very lucky because I doubt anywhere else puts in so much effort and love to what they do.

Honestly we were buzzing when we got home and the girls were buzzing all weekend (thanks for that haha) ! It set us up for Christmas build up perfectly.

Kay

Resettlement Support Worker



FINANCE REPORT

In common with many charities, restrictions and safe working practices necessarily imposed due to the Covid-19 crisis have presented significant funding challenges which are, to an extent, on-going. Working to a robust risk assessment, new residents isolate for a period before entering the common areas of the Refuge which has resulted in a reduction of occupancy and hence Housing Benefit, the charity's main income stream. Fortunately access to Covid-19 emergency funding from several sources has relieved pressure on reserves and we are very grateful for the fantastic support received from our main funders, Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner, Suffolk County Council Public Health as well as Suffolk Community Foundation, West Suffolk and Bury St Edmunds Town Councils, and the incredible generosity of many members of the public and some local companies.

Due to that support and careful cost management, the result for the year shows an overall surplus of just under £22,000 far exceeding expectations mid-year partly due to generous discretionary income in March 2021. In addition, and again due to some wonderful support, we have managed to fund and complete the refurbishment of the refuge garden for the benefit of resident families and their guests.

Income and expenditure for the 12 months to 31st March 2021 amounted to:

Income	£380,445	(2020: £350,422)
Expenditure	£358,451	(2020: £376,855)

In the main Refuge accommodation is funded from Housing Benefit which for 2020/21 amounted to £84,095 on an occupancy rate for the year of just 60.5%, well below budget. In addition, Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre continues to receive financial support from Suffolk County Council Public Health Directorate for our Refuge services by way of a support grant of £79,772, supplemented this year by a Winter grant of £5,000.



Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd

Our Outreach services and project work are in part funded by grants and donations. Grants and contract income amounted to £152,681 and comprised:

Grants	£
Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner - Resource centre funding	60,000
BBC Children in Need - Children's support staff costs	30,461
Covid-19 emergency funding from the following:	
Suffolk Community Foundation through the following funds:	
Suffolk Coronavirus Community Fund	5,000
Hopkins Charitable Fund	4,500
Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner Covid-19 funding	18,920
Arco (Bury St Edmunds) Coronavirus Community Grant	1,000
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Covid-19 Emergency Support Fund	11,140
Tesco's Bags of Help	500
National Lottery Coronavirus Community Support Fund	2,000
Funding for the refuge garden refurbishment project:	
Bury St Edmunds Town Council	5,000
West Suffolk Council - Locality budgets of Cllr's M Marks, E McManus, J Mason, and D Nettleton	2,250
Suffolk County Council Cllr's D Roach and K Soons	2,250
Lord Belstead Charitable Settlement	2,000
Funding for Child and Young person's Support Project	
Suffolk Community Foundation through the following funds:	
East Anglian Co-operative Community Cares Fund	4,600
Other grant received	1,000
Bury St Edmunds Town Council Cllr's D Higgins and N Iannelli - Popham	2,060
	£152,681



Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd

Donations received throughout the year amounted to £47,957 including Gift Aid. These are broken down as follows;

	£
Restricted Donations	11,575
Unrestricted Donations	35,637
Gift Aid	<u>745</u>
	<u>£ 47,957</u>

Intangible income - Voluntary staff

The charity remains dependent on services provided by volunteers. Without these volunteers, wage costs would be much higher, and we are very thankful for the time volunteers give to the Charity.

The value provided by volunteers is not costed for the purposes of the financial statements.

Reserves Policy

The Charity's reserve policy is to hold unrestricted net current asset reserves equivalent to four to six months of projected operating costs to cover any temporary shortfall in cash flow that may occur due to the timing of receipts.

Unrestricted net current assets at the end of the financial year were £201,265 (2020: £196,505).

As of 31 March 2021, reserves cover was 6.3 months. Unexpected and generous discretionary income received very close to the year-end pushed closing reserves just over the policy threshold.

Auditor

Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid's accounts are audited by Knights Lowe Limited of Bury St Edmunds and I propose we continue to use their services as our charity auditor.

Future Plans

The organisation aims to ensure that current services are fully funded, and we can increase our capacity to deliver those services. The current situation due to the Covid-19 pandemic continues to present particular challenges and, as restrictions are



progressively eased, we expect a significant increase in the demand for our services in the coming months and years. We also continue to look for opportunities to increase our work with teenagers and young adults having secured funding for the next few years.

As always, we thank all who have supported the Refuge in helping us meet our financial commitments. This year has been no exception with generous cash donations, Christmas gifts, toys, toiletries, clothes, and Easter eggs. We have been overwhelmed by people's generosity.

Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues and our Trustees who have supported me in my role this year.

Derek Gadd

Finance Officer



HIGHLIGHTS

- **A Vegan Christmas Dinner was cooked for the residents by Jess at Samu Kitchen;**

We all had an utterly fantastic time

- **The completion of the garden at the refuge by Green Nature.**

Grant funded by:

Bury St Edmunds Town Council

West Suffolk Council - Locality budgets of Cllr's M Marks,

E McManus, J Mason, and D Nettleton

Suffolk County Council Cllr's D Roach and K Soons

Lord Belstead Charitable Settlement

Before:



WOMEN'S REFUGE - GARDEN PROJECT



After:



- **Reopening number 24, Outreach Centre to groups as Covid 19 restrictions have eased.**



Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

At our outreach Centre No24

- Volunteer Co-ordinator
- Child Care Assistant
- Helpline Operator
- Group Support
- Sorting Donations

Support Network Volunteers

We are in urgent need of help with the following:

- Fundraising Events
- Bucket Collections

Contact us on:

Padlet: <https://padlet.com/BSEWomensAid/Volunteers>



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge Thank You to all of our supporters, big and small, local and further afield, who have donated money, time and many lovely items!

Our Volunteers

Aquarius Singers

Asda

Bellway Homes

Bury Lions

Bury Rotary

Cook (frozen food)

Farm Foods

Field of Dreams

Gatehouse

Green Light Trust

HC3

Ixworth House

Jess at Samu Kitchen

Kids Out

Rickshaw Riders

Round Table

Tesco

The Buckingham Emergency Food Appeal (BEFA)

Theatre Royal

TK Maxx

Toolbox

Tostock Animal Park

Unite the Union

Vineyard Church

Waitrose

Wooster's Bakery



We would also like to thank our donors who choose to remain anonymous. Without the continued support of our donors, we would not be able to offer the high level of services and support to the people that need them.

If you would like to donate in any way, please visit our website

www.burystedmundswomensaid.org.uk

<https://www.justgiving.com/bse-womensaid/>

or call us on 01284 753085



Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd

WEBSITE

Stay up to date with our news and events at:

www.burystedmundswomensaid.org.uk

Twitter:



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BSEwomensaid>

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Interested in hearing more about our work? We are happy to provide a speaker for your organisation or group, please call us on 01284 753085 or email at

admin@burystedmundswomensaid.org.uk

CURRENT SERVICES

We provide many services which are accessed by women from the local community and from outside Suffolk:

23-bed Refuge

Telephone Advice Helpline

Outreach Service

12-week Freedom Programme

Survivors of Domestic Abuse (SODA)

Male Victim Support

Resettlement Support

Child Therapy Service

Counselling Service

Weekly Coffee and Craft Morning



FUTURE PLANS

Our organisation has learnt a lot in the last year about being responsive to changing situations. We have embraced the new technologies for meetings, group work and one to one sessions. As we move forward out of Covid19 restrictions our plans are to build on the good parts of using technology, in terms of flexible service delivery, while we continue to offer opportunities for our service users to meet us face to face.

The Domestic Abuse Act is about to become law. This Act will place new responsibilities on Local Authorities and Housing Organisations. We recognise this could affect our funding in the longer term. We need to be aware of this threat and make plans to meet it. In order to do this over the next few months we will be revisiting and updating our Business Plan.

We have begun an active campaign to recruit more volunteers. We recognise the value that volunteers bring to an organisation and also the life changing effect volunteering can provide for individuals.

We also plan to reach out more to our partner organisations, statutory and voluntary, to rebuild the links we have to the community and to move forward as an organisation which is embedded in the community it serves.



Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre Ltd



Advice Helpline:

01284 753085

E-mail: admin@burystedmundswomensaid.org.uk
Website: www.burystedmundswomensaid.org.uk
Post: PO Box 715, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 9HQ

