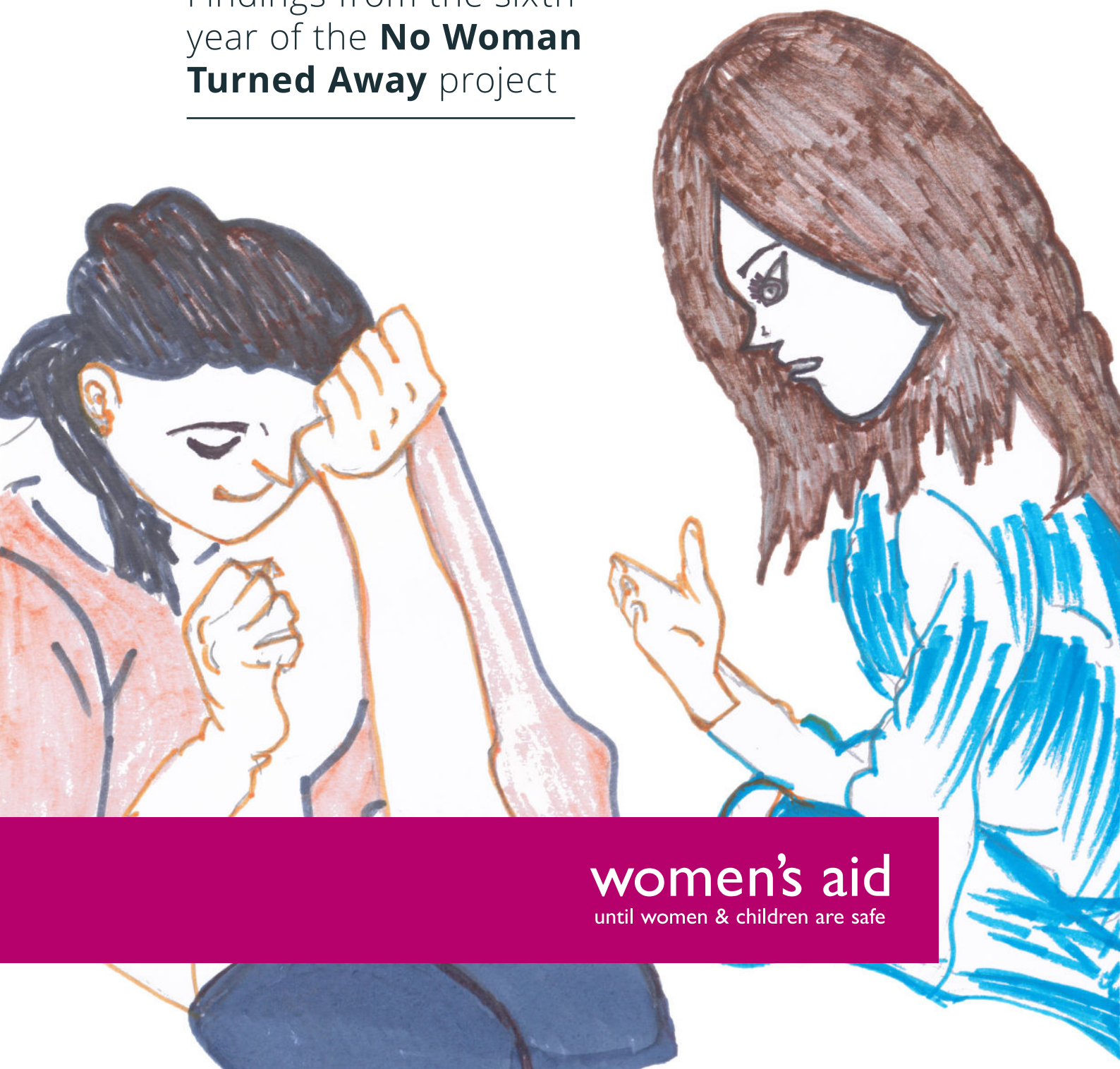


NOWHERE TO TURN 2022

Findings from the sixth
year of the **No Woman
Turned Away** project



women's aid
until women & children are safe

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We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the survivors who were supported by the NWTa project and who provided the data that this report draws on. A special thanks also to the survivor and professionals who shared their experiences with us for this report.

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Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Over the past 47 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs.

We are a federation of just under 170 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. We hold the largest national data set on domestic abuse, and use research and evidence to inform all of our work. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Our support services, which include our Live Chat Helpline, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people in their first relationships), the national Domestic Abuse Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

www.womensaid.org.uk, www.loverespect.co.uk

Dedication

This report is dedicated to the women whose experiences of seeking safety from domestic abuse are detailed here.

Cover

Cover image from *Nowhere To Turn, 2019*. The artist is a survivor who participated in our research which used arts-based methods to explore survivors' experiences of searching for a refuge space.

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184 women were supported by the No Woman Turned Away project this year



34.9% of the women who were supported were **Black and minoritised women**, reflecting the **structural inequalities** that they face when escaping domestic abuse.

What happened while waiting for a refuge space?



60 experienced **further abuse** from the perpetrator

24 experienced abuse from (an) **additional perpetrator(s)**



40

sofa-surfed



6

women **slept rough**



10 were **physically injured** as a result of an **attack** by the perpetrator(s)

The NWTa project support



The NWTa specialist practitioners provided an average of **4 hours and 57 minutes** of support to each survivor.



Women referred on the basis of **NRPF** were supported for **five days longer** on average than women who were known to have access to state benefits at the point of referral.

+
Main areas of specialist support

housing

referral and signposting

immigration support

emotional support

children

finances

safety planning

mental health

Some outcomes



25.5% secured a **place in a suitable refuge**



19.0% found **emergency accommodation**



83.1% of the 124 survivors we were able to ask reported **feeling safe** after having been supported by No Woman Turned Away.



84 women went on to be supported by a **local VAWG organisation**



74 women went on to be supported by a **non-VAWG organisation**

Introduction

Nowhere to turn 2022

The findings within this report demonstrate the key role that the No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project plays in supporting survivors facing barriers to gaining a refuge space to access safe accommodation. Adding to our evidence base from previous Nowhere to Turn reports, this inquiry brings to light the barriers and **structural inequalities** that many survivors are forced to navigate when seeking safety from domestic abuse.

This report evaluates the NWTa project over the year of 2021 (1st January 2021 until 31st December 2021). We examine the support provided to the survivors helped by the NWTa project during this period, what happened to them whilst they waited for a refuge space, and the outcomes of this assistance. We present the information we have learned from this evaluation along with evidence-based recommendations.

Structural inequality describes the inequality in opportunity, treatment or status for some groups of people embedded in social structures such as health, education and justice, which reflect and reinforce ingrained prejudices. It can restrict opportunities and choices, and access to services. Structural inequality impacts how a woman experiences domestic abuse, how she talks about it or who she talks to, and how she accesses support of all kinds (Women's Aid, 2021a).

The No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project

The No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project is delivered by Women's Aid. We wish to say thank you to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), who have funded the project since January 2016. It continues to provide dedicated support to survivors of domestic abuse who face structural inequalities and barriers to accessing a refuge space.

The NWTa project employs four paid specialist practitioners, providing telephone and email support to women in England looking for a refuge space, and one dedicated research and evaluation officer. In its initial years the project solely received referrals from the National Domestic Violence Helpline¹, which used to be run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge. Since November 2019, the project accepts referrals from a wider range of organisations, including Women's Aid's own direct services (Live Chat, e-mail, and the Survivors' Forum), Women's Aid member services (who are offered referral workshops upon request), violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisations listed on Routes to Support², Victim Support, and the British Red Cross.

¹ The 'National Domestic Violence Helpline' is now called the 'National Domestic Abuse Helpline'.

² Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland.

Methodology

The quantitative data in this report was recorded by the NWTa specialist practitioners using On Track, the Women's Aid case management and outcomes system. The specialist practitioners collected data on women's support needs, demographics, abuse profiles, outcomes, the barriers they have faced, and what happened to them while they were waiting for a refuge space or other safe outcome. They also completed questions on women's experiences with statutory services when they closed a case in On Track, as well as the time spent on each case and the types of support they gave to the women. This data was then cleansed and analysed by the NWTa Research and Evaluation Officer to produce the findings in this report. We have also included some case studies from information input by the practitioners in On Track.³

Along with the On Track data we have included three in-depth qualitative interviews to explore in more detail some of the early findings from the quantitative data analysis. Each of these interviews lasted between one to two and a half hours. Two of the interviews are with professionals; one a specialist domestic abuse practitioner on the NWTa project, and the other with an Advice Session Supervisor and Immigration Advisor at a Citizen's Advice Bureau. The third interview is with a survivor who had been supported by the NWTa project and was keen to share her experience. The survivor involved was safely accommodated and receiving ongoing support from a specialist domestic abuse service at the time of interview.

All the participants were interviewed by the female NWTa Research and Evaluation Officer, previously trained in providing support to survivors. The interviewer was White British, which must be understood as a potential limitation in the interview with the survivor, who was Black and 'minority ethnic.' This is because unequal power dynamics between an interviewer and interviewee may be heightened by such factors, making participants less willing to share certain experiences, such as racism (Archer, 2002). To mitigate these unequal power dynamics, the interview was semi-structured, which gave the survivor the space to share what she deemed most important. She was also given the opportunity to review and feedback on what was written about her before this report was published.

Copies of all editions of *Nowhere To Turn* can be downloaded for free online at:
www.womensaid.org.uk/evidence-hub

3 We have only included case studies where the survivor explicitly gave their consent for us to use their anonymised data for research purposes. All personally identifying information has been removed or changed from these stories.

PART 1

Referrals into the project

Referrals

A total of 337 referrals were made (307 individual women⁴) to the NWTAs specialist practitioners between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021. This period includes just under three months (January – March) in which the UK was under lockdown. Of these referrals 71.7% (220 referrals) resulted in support being given by the project. Eleven women were supported more than once during the period, meaning that a total of 209 women were accepted into the NWTAs project in this time frame.⁵

Where women did not go on to receive support from the NWTAs project, the most frequently cited reason was that caseworkers were unable to contact them (43.6%). This is usually one of the most common reasons practitioners are unable to accept a referral.⁶ However, this year we have seen a notably higher percentage of referrals unable to be accepted on this basis compared to previous years.⁷

There are many reasons support workers may not be able to contact survivors, and it may not necessarily be that they do not require support. We know that preparing to leave an abusive partner is often a dangerous and stressful time for a survivor, during which they may be unable to answer the phone because the perpetrator was

nearby, or perhaps do not have the phone credit to call a support service back.

The UK lockdown may have played a role in the increased number of survivors the NWTAs project were unable to contact. In our report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on survivors, *A Perfect Storm*, we detailed how perpetrators used lockdown restrictions, as well as Covid-19 itself, as a deliberate tool to control and manipulate survivors (Women's Aid, 2020a). This included perpetrator using lockdown restrictions to prevent women leaving, imposing very strict isolation rules such as not allowing survivors to leave the house for exercise, along with increased monitoring and surveillance of behavior and online activity. On the 4th January 2021 the UK Government announced the third national lockdown that lasted through to March 2021. During these months, two of the referrals accepted into the NWTAs project explicitly mentioned the perpetrator using the lockdown to monitor the survivor as part of the reason for referral, as this meant the survivor was more restricted in her ability to seek refuge by herself.

From March 2021, a roadmap out of lockdown was unveiled, with most restrictions projected to end in the summer. Although the route towards living with Covid-19 has not been quite

⁴ There were 30 repeat referrals to the NWTAs project during this period.

⁵ 184 Survivors started and finished being supported in this period.

⁶ See our Nowhere to Turn report series: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/no-woman-turned-away/>

⁷ Percentage of referrals into the project rejected due to being unable to contact the survivor:

- Nowhere to Turn 2021: 32.9%
- Nowhere to Turn 2020: 33.5%
- Nowhere to Turn 2019: 34.8%

so straightforward, as of February 2022 all restrictions have been lifted in England. However, some features that came about because of the pandemic, such as home-working, still remain for many people. For instance, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2022), between 19th and 30th January 2022, 36% of adults in the UK reported having worked from home at least once in the last seven days because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst the ability to work from home can bring benefits to those who are able to do so, such as saving money on commuting, it could also provide opportunities for perpetrators to exercise more control over survivors. Therefore, we shall continue to closely monitor this increase in the number of survivors who are not able to be contacted by the project.

Another reason that referrals into the project were unable to be accepted was that women no longer wanted support at that time (18.8%), reflecting how some survivors may seek help a number of times before successfully fleeing domestic abuse. Some survivors did not go on to be supported by the project because they were already being adequately supported by another domestic abuse organisation (12.8%), for example, a refuge or a local outreach service. This could be because the survivor had secured a refuge space between being referred and contacted by an NWTa practitioner, or that the practitioner felt that the survivor was already being sufficiently supported by a domestic abuse service. A small number of referrals (11.8%) were ineligible for support, for example because the woman was not experiencing domestic abuse, or the support she needed was not related to accessing refuge or accommodation. Alternatively, because the referral came via an agency such as the police, or social services, or another service that are not a charity and receive funding to accommodate

survivors themselves. Although we do not accept direct referrals from these agencies, whilst case working we do liaise with a range of statutory professionals whilst supporting the survivor. Alternatively, survivors can get in touch with our direct services and can request a referral to the NWTa project if appropriate.

Referral sources

The NWTa project continues to play a vital role in providing specialist knowledge and care alongside local Women's Aid member organisations, who made 56.7% (191) of referrals to NWTa during the period. 129 referrals (38.3%) came from direct services run by Women's Aid's national office, with 127 of these from the Women's Aid Live Chat service and one from Women's Aid email service. One referral came directly through one of the NWTa practitioners; where a survivor who had previously received support got back in touch with the practitioner after she no longer felt safe to remain in the refuge she had been accommodated in. In this instance the refuge was not run by a Women's Aid member so we were not able to address concerns directly and the NWTa team provided support to the survivor only. The remaining 17 referrals came from other sources, including our partner organisation, Victim Support (2; 0.6%), as well as referrals from services who are not our agreed partner agencies; Police (2; 0.6%), and Social Services (3; 0.9%).

PART 2

Who did we support and what were survivors' experiences during their search for a refuge?

How many women did we support?

In all, 184 women began and finished their support between the 1st January 2021 and the 31st December 2021, with eight of these women being supported twice, and one woman on three occasions (i.e. 194 exits from the project overall). The analysis of quantitative data for the rest of this report relates to these 184 women.

This is a slight increase in the number of women being supported compared to last year.⁸ To make sure we reach as many survivors who need support from the project as possible, we have recently implemented a number of changes. We have produced a simpler and more accessible referral form, updated the main project webpage to provide more information on who NWTAs support and what the referral pathway looks like, consulted Women's Aid Media and Communications team on how they can support us, and many more changes.

What were women's experiences of abuse?

The majority of women supported by the NWTAs project experienced multiple forms of abuse from their perpetrator/ perpetrators. At least 91.4% of perpetrators were male.⁹

Based on the women who had been subjected to domestic abuse within the past year¹⁰:

- ▶ 77.7% had experienced emotional abuse.
- ▶ 72.6% had experienced controlling behaviours.
- ▶ 59.2% had experienced physical abuse
- ▶ 46.4% had experienced economic/ financial abuse
- ▶ 31.8% had experienced surveillance, harassment or stalking
- ▶ 21.2% were recorded to have experienced sexual abuse.

As part of this domestic abuse many women also reported experiencing the following:

- ▶ 36.3% had experienced threats to be killed
- ▶ 12.8% had experienced an attempted strangulation or suffocation

The impact of these experiences on women can be stark. Based on these women we also found:

- ▶ Just under 10% (9.2%) reported having acquired an injury from the perpetrator which required either a visit to the GP or A&E, or hospitalisation.
- ▶ 11.2% of survivors reported having experienced suicidal thoughts or depression as a result of the abuse.

⁸ In Nowhere to Turn 2021 we report that 166 women received support between 12th January 2019 and 11th January 2020.

⁹ We did not know the sex/ gender of all perpetrators.

¹⁰ 179 out of 184 survivors had experienced abuse within the last year.

We know that it is not uncommon for survivors to experience feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts as a result of domestic abuse. This was indeed the case for 35.1% of survivors in this year's Annual Audit (Women's Aid, 2022a). Last year we carried out a literature review on mental health and domestic abuse, uncovering a clear body of evidence demonstrating the link between domestic abuse and mental health (Women's Aid, 2021b; Thiara and Harrison, 2021). Domestic abuse can have a long-lasting negative impact on the

mental well-being of survivors (including children), therefore it is vital that service provision is able to meet these needs. Unfortunately, as we know through research of the NWTa project, services that are not being resourced to meet support needs around mental health more often act as a barrier for survivors seeking safe accommodation, rather than it being properly understood as one of the devastating impacts of domestic abuse that it so often is.

“ LUCY'S¹¹ STORY

Lucy contacted the Women's Aid Live Chat service after being refused a refuge space by a service who could not support her multiple disabilities. This included mental health support needs and a long-term health condition. Lucy had also been offered accommodation by a local authority, however, accepting this would have meant being too far away from family members who provided informal care and support for both herself and her young children, and therefore was not suitable.

All of this meant that when the NWTa practitioner began supporting her, Lucy was extremely anxious about going to a refuge that was not very close to her support networks. The practitioner explained how a refuge would be unlikely to allow her family to visit due to safety concerns around the refuge location becoming known. Therefore, Lucy agreed to let the practitioner search for a refuge with 24-hour support slightly further afield than she had initially hoped for. Due to Lucy's long-term health condition this also meant she required a room on the ground floor in a refuge.

The practitioner provided support to Lucy over a period of almost four months, usually on a daily basis. Over this period, the practitioner searched for a refuge space on Routes to Support (the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies) and found no suitable spaces on 40 occasions. During this time, the non-molestation order that Lucy managed to obtain to prevent her perpetrator from contacting her expired, leaving Lucy extremely frightened for the safety of herself and her two children. Unfortunately, the local housing team continued to only offer inappropriate accommodation that would have left Lucy isolated and struggling to support her two children on her own.

After much support and advocacy by the NWTa practitioner, Lucy was eventually able to access some local grants that enabled her to move into private rented accommodation not too far away from her family members but also in an area where the perpetrator was unlikely to look for her. This meant that Lucy and her two children felt safe and were able to continue being supported by her family members.

Challenges in securing support

Lucy is not alone in her experience of a lack of suitable refuge vacancies. This year there were three women, including Lucy, where the NWTa practitioners searched Routes to Support over 30 times without finding a space available.¹² This is the first time that we have recorded the NWTa practitioners not finding a space on Routes to Support over 30 times for a survivor. Unfortunately, this increase may reflect fewer available refuge spaces generally; in this year's Annual Audit (Women's Aid, 2022a) we found a decrease of over two thousand refuge vacancies on Routes to Support since 2019-20.

As we also know from this year's Annual Audit, refuges decline around 61.9% of referrals they receive, primarily because they do not have the space or capacity to support that survivor (Women's Aid, 2022b). This means that when the NWTa practitioners were able to find a suitable refuge space on Routes to Support they still experienced a high number of rejections when they then contacted the service about the vacancy. Out of 171 survivors where the number of times they had been refused refuge space had been recorded, there were a total of 238 rejections between these women. The number of rejections per survivor ranged from 0 to 15, with an average of 1.4 rejections per survivor.¹³ The most common reasons that refuges were unable to accept survivors were: unable to support needs around

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) (26 women); unable to support needs around mental health (17 women); and unable to support needs around substance misuse (14 women).

One woman was rejected 15 times, another woman 13 times, and another 10 times. None of these survivors were accommodated in a suitable refuge after receiving support from the project, however, the NWTa practitioners were still able to work with them to find a positive outcome. One was supported to find private accommodation, another was helped to find temporary accommodation through her local authority, and one was able to access accommodation that had come about through Covid-19 response funding. Unfortunately, accessing this safe accommodation was not at all straightforward for these women, and one survivor was seriously let down by the police after being physically assaulted. You can read this survivor's story on page 26 (Makena's¹⁴ story).

There were a range of reasons refuge services were not able to meet the needs of women supported by the project, many of which highlight the structural inequalities that act as barriers for many survivors seeking safe refuge accommodation. Table 1 (on page 12) outlines the characteristics of women supported by the NWTa specialist practitioners this year, based on the reasons they were referred to the NWTa project for support.

¹² As we do not generally record the exact number in cases where this happened over 30 times, this means that we have not been able to calculate the average number of times that the NWTa practitioners found no places available per survivor.

¹³ This is based on 171 of the 184 survivors.

¹⁴ Pseudonym

Table 1: Characteristics of women supported by the NwTA specialist practitioners* (based on reason for referral)

	Number of women	Percentage out of total number of women (out of 184)
Women with mental health support needs	77	41.8%
Women who had No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	63	34.2%
Women who had one or more disability ¹⁵	38	20.6%
Women with substance use support needs – drugs and/ or alcohol	33	17.9%
Women with some language support needs ¹⁶	25	13.6%
Women who were tied to their local area	22	11.9%
Women with 4+ children	19	10.3%
Women with an offending history	19	10.3%
Women with older male children	17	9.2%
Women previously evicted from refuge	4	2.2%
Other circumstances or support needs that acted as a barrier to getting a refuge space ¹⁷	50	27.2%

***Many women had more than one of the listed support needs or circumstances.**

15 22 of these women had a mental health disability, 15 had a physical disability (excluding vision and hearing disability), ten had a long-term health condition, three had a learning disability, three had a hearing disability, and one had a vision disability (some women had more than one disability).

16 Women who required an interpreter.

17 Other reasons included the survivor being from the Gypsy/ Traveller community, the survivor not being able to contact refuges herself because the perpetrator was always around or she did not have a phone/ credit, the abuse involved multiple perpetrators, the survivor had a child with a learning disability or behavioural support needs, or the survivor had a dog with her.

There is a slight deviation from previous years, with fewer women being tied to their local area. However, finding services that were resourced to meet support needs related to mental health and disability, or could accept referrals from women with No Recourse to Public Funds continue to be some of the most common challenges for women seeking a refuge space. In previous years we have distinguished between drug and alcohol support needs, although there is often a crossover with these; with many survivors requiring support with both. For this reason, we have presented them together this year, however, it is worth noting that there are occasional differences in refuges acceptance criteria when it comes to alcohol and drugs.¹⁸

As demonstrated in this year's Annual Audit, specialist provision for survivors facing these barriers tends to be very limited. For example, we found only three refuge services in total that are run exclusively for women with support needs around substance misuse or mental health. In addition to this, only 15.3% of vacancies posted on Routes to Support were available to a woman plus three children, and only 1.2% of spaces to women with limited mobility (Women's Aid, 2022b).

No Recourse to Public Funds

With regards to No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), there appears to be confusion amongst professionals regarding who is and isn't entitled to benefits. In fact, two of the women supported by the project, who were referred on the basis of challenges related to them having NRPF, were subsequently found by the NWTAs caseworkers to actually be entitled to claim benefits. Along with this there were also a number of cases where it was still unclear as to whether the survivor was entitled to benefits when the case with NWTAs was closed e.g. when the case was closed because the caseworker was no longer able to contact the survivor. Therefore, it might be that more than two of the 63 women who were referred on the basis of NRPF were actually entitled to claim benefits.

For the two women who were incorrectly referred to the project on the basis of NRPF, one had been told by many refuges that they could not support her due to her not being entitled to benefits before being referred to NWTAs, and as a result had given up on the search and felt forced to stay with the perpetrator. The other was safely accommodated in a suitable refuge in a matter of days after positive multi-agency working between NWTAs, the police, and social services. As part of our research we interviewed an immigration advisor, Cassie, to better understand the confusion around NRPF and the impact this has on survivors. Our interview is detailed on page 15.

18 For example, some services may have requirements for certain drugs users to be on a methadone script.

Women from Black and minoritised backgrounds

Women from Black and minoritised backgrounds made up 34.9%¹⁹ of survivors supported this year.²⁰ Although this is a hugely diverse group of women, this high percentage possibly in part reflects the systemic racism that Black and minoritised women may face when it comes to accessing safety and support from domestic abuse. This can be structural inequalities that disproportionately impact Black and minoritised women, such as NRPF (or being presumed to be), as well as the lack of specialist provision for women with specific religious/ cultural requirements,²¹ or language support needs.

Specialist provision for Black and minoritised women, or services 'by and for' Black and minoritised survivors, are extremely limited outside of London,²² and commissioners often fail to recognise the added value and expertise that these services offer. This includes lived experience and in-depth understanding of survivors' experiences and the barriers to support and justice, in-house interpreters/ translators and knowledge of a broad range of VAWG strands

(Imkaan, 2018). Generally, women from these Black and minoritised backgrounds tend to prefer to be supported by these services (Imkaan, 2018).

Imkaan views minoritisation as an ongoing, active process which marginalises particular groups on the basis of 'race', ethnicity and other grounds (Imkaan, 2018). We know the role that intersecting forms of discrimination, for example, race and sex, can play for female survivors in their experiences of seeking safety from domestic abuse, as well as in the domestic abuse itself. This was very much the case for survivor, Kadijah,²³ a survivor we spoke to who had recently been supported by the NWTa project. Kadijah's British husband deliberately used her nationality, and her cultural and racial heritage as a way to control and abuse her. Unfortunately, Kadijah was let down by multiple statutory services and other places she thought she could turn to for support before being referred to the NWTa project. You can read Kadijah's story on page 27.

19 This is based on 169 of the 184 survivors where ethnicity had been recorded. 59 out of 169 survivors were recorded as being from a Black and minoritised background.

20 See Appendix 1 for a full list of survivors' ethnic backgrounds.

21 For example, refuges set up to accommodate for women to practice their faith or cook and access specific food i.e. halal meat.

22 In this year's Annual Audit we reported that only 17 out of 37 dedicated services for Black and minoritised survivors are outside of London (Women's Aid, 2022b).

23 Pseudonym



AN IMMIGRATION ADVISOR'S STORY

Cassie²⁴ works at Women's Aid part-time delivering training to specialist domestic abuse services, both internally and externally. She also works as an Advice Session Supervisor and Immigration Advisor at a Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), managing a small team of advisors focusing on immigration work in her local area. In this interview Cassie speaks about her experience of this role at CAB.

Understanding No Recourse to Public Funds

Cassie explained that NRPF is a term that is often incorrectly applied to a wide group of people. For instance, it is often applied to a person with pre-settled status who may be able to access benefits if they also have an additional underlying right to reside in the UK, such as their EU citizen spouse being in paid employment. Therefore, Cassie preferred to use the term 'non-British citizens' because this encapsulates both survivors with NRPF, along with survivors whose access to benefits is dependent upon other factors. However, Cassie was also keen to get across that accessing benefits can be a problem even for British citizens.

"Frankly even if you're a British citizen if you don't have a passport, you can't get access to benefits because you can't prove your immigration status [...] it happens for a lot for women because their partner takes their papers [...] the hostile environment effects anyone who can't produce a British passport. The DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] will usually accept expired British passports, but expired passports from other countries, even if the person has an indefinite leave to remain stamp in them, causes problems."

This was indeed the case for one survivor in our *Experiences of financial hardship whilst seeking a refuge report* (Women's Aid, 2022). Although she was a British citizen, she struggled to access refuge for a long time because she had left her paperwork behind when she had fled her abuser.



Inappropriate advice

It is illegal to give immigration advice when you are not qualified (i.e. a solicitor, barrister, or immigration advisor). However, in Cassie's experience, sometimes professionals can give inappropriate advice to survivors and may be unaware of this regulation.

She talked about dealing with cases where it appeared as though professionals in the Department for Work and Pensions [DWP] had refused benefits to people with pre-settled status without considering if they have an underlying right to reside and also told some survivors of domestic abuse with pre-settled status to apply for the DDVC [Destitution Domestic Violence Concession].

"I've had six or seven people who've done this. It's completely inappropriate and they're not eligible but they're telling people to go and do this stuff."

The Destitution Domestic Violence Concession enables survivors on certain visas to access benefits so that they can flee their abuser, have money to support themselves, and usually access refuge accommodation. Unfortunately, this is not available for everyone and when survivors are incorrectly advised about this, it can have serious repercussions.²⁵

"If they [advisors] tell someone who is here as the dependent of someone who is here on a work visa to apply for the concession, she won't be eligible but she's also telling the home office her relationship has broken down and they're likely to then revoke her visa. So, for some people it has very serious consequences."

Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and their upbringing with their families. This can include providing accommodation and/ or essential living expenses (Coram, 2017). Whilst not everyone is eligible for this support, Cassie argues that if Social Services were to carry out a full human rights assessment on these particular cases, they would likely find that they do have a duty to support these families under this legislation. Unfortunately, in practice local authorities sometimes evade responsibility for helping even those families who are eligible, sometimes involving inappropriate immigration advice.

25 It is illegal to give immigration advice when you are not appropriately qualified, for example, a solicitor, barrister, or immigration advisor.



“You get social services taking women to Croydon and getting them to claim Asylum because once they’ve claimed asylum and they’ve got asylum support they’re no longer entitled to section 17 support anymore and so they get rid of their duty. They do this even when a woman has no asylum claim [...] and has made no indication that she wants to claim asylum or that she’s afraid of return. They actually drive them, some social services, to Croydon, and get them to claim Asylum so that they no longer have a duty. It’s incredibly dodgy but it’s happened a few times.”

Accessing immigration advice

“It feels like the public law sector was decimated in 2013 when legal aid was cut and nothing has been put in to replace it. In our sector nothing has been done, domestic abuse workers are just lumped with somehow trying to deal with something that they aren’t trained to do [...] they’ve got no one to go to anymore and they’re really stuck and there needs to be some sort of provision to help them because they can’t negotiate it.”

Cassie spoke about the impact of The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO), which removed most immigration matters from the scope of legal aid. Although there exists an ‘Exceptional Case Funding’ pathway, this has been found to be incredibly complex to navigate, disproportionately disadvantaging survivors with vulnerabilities such as mental health support needs and language support needs (Rights of Women, 2019). In Cassie’s experience this scheme is sometimes even too complex for survivors without these vulnerabilities, due to the application forms; which are designed for lawyers to complete, making them extremely confusing for most members of the public, even if their first language is English. Cassie regularly supports people with these applications in her role as an immigration advisor and is yet to have one refused, however, without the initial support most people don’t know they exist; Cassie finds that solicitors often don’t tell people they can go down the exceptional funding route.

Cassie frequently receives emails from domestic abuse organisations, sometimes from the other side of the country, asking for advice about a survivor’s immigration status and what she might be entitled to. The lack of



accessible immigration advice for survivors and the services supporting them could not be any more evident from Cassie's experience.

"They'll just email me and ask. They just don't know where else to go."

What is the impact on survivors?

What is most concerning for Cassie is how the lack of accessible immigration advice can result in survivors not being able to access the support that they are entitled to. As Cassie explains, there are instances where refuges refuse women despite them having the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession; the very scheme that was created to enable survivors to access safe accommodation.

"I've had services tell me 'She had recourse to public funds but the funding is only for three months, and we wouldn't be able to fund her after that.' This woman is on the [Destitution Domestic Violence] Concession, which is there specifically so she can get safe housing [...] and there's a total lack of understanding that as long as she made her domestic abuse application in time, she'd have her right to public funds continue. They don't understand that, they think that at the end of three months she'll have no access to anything and they'll have to evict her.

"When it gets to the point that refuges are actually refusing women when they've got the specific type of leave that was created so they could access refuge, it's bad. It's really bad."

The impact of this means that many survivors may return to live with their perpetrators because they believe that they have no other option. Cassie has met many survivors who have done just this, only to learn years later that they were eligible for support.

"I find it incredibly distressing the number of women who have been refused and return to abusive partners because we as a sector didn't know their rights or how to fight for their rights. They actually had a right to access things and we didn't recognise it and they went back; they're being returned to abuse when it shouldn't happen and they wanted to leave and they had rights and they couldn't access them. I've seen them, they come in to see me years later after they've been sent back to live with him and it's clear that this never should have happened; they had rights this whole time.



“It always scares me because I think of how easy it would be for that woman never to have got the advice she needed, for her to remain trapped in the abusive relationship. Getting the right advice seems arbitrary, haphazard – a matter of luck. There are so few places where you can get free immigration advice and even fewer places where you can find free immigration, welfare benefits, housing /homelessness and community care expertise all at once. And that’s the thing – immigration status affects so much.

“I have trained countless, absolutely amazing domestic abuse specialists who are completely committed and willing to do whatever they can to support survivors. I am always afraid that people will respond along the lines of ‘That’s all very well but we just don’t have capacity to do that, we can’t help survivors to challenge benefits decisions, social services decisions.’ But it has never happened. Not once. The will is there to support survivors and to fight for their rights, but domestic abuse specialists are not legal advisers and access to services can be hideously complicated by immigration status – even women with the right to work or to claim benefits often find it incredibly difficult and are wrongly told that they do not have the rights that they do, in fact, have.”

“If you really want to see the ‘hostile environment’ in action, go to any domestic abuse service. You will quickly see just how hard it is to support women who don’t have ‘the right papers’ and just how hostile we as a nation have become.”

Where did women stay while they waited for a refuge space?

Table 2 summarises where women stayed while searching for a refuge space. Just over a quarter stayed in emergency accommodation, and just over a fifth of the women sofa surfed. Others paid for a hotel/ B&B or slept rough. Of the women that spent time sofa surfing, 15 had dependent children. Whilst just over half (eight) of these survivors were able to rely on family and friends to accommodate their children during this difficult time, many others were not. In a few circumstances the children were taken into care or the perpetrator was granted custody.

In our other research we have found that whilst women are extremely appreciative of the fact that family members or friends are able to

accommodate them, it can bring about its own set of problems during this incredibly difficult time. For example, in our *Nowhere to Turn, 2019* report, survivors shared stories of overcrowding, broken friendships and, in some instances, further abuse (Women's Aid, 2019a; see also Women's Aid, 2020b). In our *Experiences of Financial hardship whilst seeking a refuge space* report, one survivor talked about the difficulty of having to sleep in a communal area and not having a private place to emotionally process the domestic abuse and sexual exploitation that she had just fled. However, the survivors accommodated in emergency accommodation or hotels often struggled particularly when it came to affording essentials, due to lack of cooking facilities making meals more expensive (Women's Aid, 2022b).

We have seen a continuation of last year's trend in a smaller proportion of women sofa-surfing

Table 2: Where did women stay while waiting for a refuge space*

	Number of women	Percentage out of total number of women (out of 184)
Spent time sofa-surfing	40	21.7%
Spent time in emergency accommodation (same local authority)	32	17.4%
Spent time in emergency accommodation (different local authority)	20	10.9%
Paid to stay in a hostel/B&B/hotel	8	4.3%
Spent time sleeping rough (including using 24h spaces to sleep, or living in her car)	6	3.3%

***We were not necessarily aware of where women were staying and not all women are represented here. Some women stayed in more than one type of temporary accommodation.**

compared to previous years,²⁶ along with a larger proportion staying in emergency accommodation compared to previous years.²⁷ This reversal is likely to be, in part, a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown rules. In fact, last year four survivors supported by the project told us that they had been prevented from staying with friends or relatives due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Women's Aid, 2021a). Another explanation could be linked to the passing of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, placing a statutory duty on all local authorities to accommodate survivors and their children, regardless of whether they have a local connection to that authority (Home Office, 2022). However, this reversal is similar to the previous year, and therefore it is too early to determine if this is yet the case, particularly as it only came into force at the start of July 2021 (GOV UK, 2021).

Mixed-sex accommodation

Through the NWTa project we have heard from many survivors who have been placed by local authorities in mixed-sex accommodation, such as temporary hostels and B&B's, whilst waiting for a refuge space. Concerned about the impact this was having on survivors, as of August 2020 we began recording when this had occurred. During this reporting period, 17 out of the 184 survivors supported by NWTa project were placed in mixed-sex accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge space. This equates to just under 10 percent (9.2%) of these women. In our *Experiences of Financial Hardship whilst seeking a refuge space* report (Women's Aid, 2022b), one survivor described how being placed in mixed-sex accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge space meant that she was afraid to leave her room to use the bathroom or make food for herself in the kitchen. As a result, this survivor did not eat a proper meal here at all during her stay.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance states that housing authorities should provide single-sex accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse who may find sharing with a particular sex traumatic (DLUHC, 2022). However, we are continuing to find that local authorities do not always adhere to this guidance, often failing to adequately assess cases where this could be particularly detrimental to that survivor's wellbeing and the barriers, she faces in seeking suitable refuge accommodation. For example, over 50 percent (52.9%; 9 out of 17) of these survivors were referred to the NWTa project on the basis of mental health support needs.

26 In *No Woman Turned Away 2021* we reported that 26.5% of women supported between 12th January 2020 and 31st December 2020 sofa surfed whilst waiting for a refuge; In *No Woman Turned Away 2020* we reported that 38.3% of women supported between 12th January 2019 and 11th January 2020 sofa surfed whilst waiting for a refuge; in *Nowhere to Turn 2019* we reported that 44% of women supported between 12th January 2018 and 11th January 2019 sofa surfed whilst waiting for a refuge.

27 In *No Woman Turned Away 2021* we reported that 32.5% of women supported between 12th January 2020 and 31st December 2020 stayed in emergency accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge; In *No Woman Turned Away 2020* we reported that 15.6% of women supported between 12th January 2019 and 11th January 2020 stayed in emergency accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge; in *Nowhere to Turn 2019* we reported that 13.6% of women supported between 12th January 2018 and 11th January 2019 stayed in emergency accommodation whilst waiting for a refuge.



JESSICA'S²⁸ STORY

Jessica was referred to the NWTa project by a local domestic abuse service who were unable to provide for her complex support needs. Jessica's support needs, which included a mental health diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, a history of non-violent offences, and a drug-dependency that she was attempting to manage through a methadone script, were likely linked to the trauma she had experienced growing up.

As a child, Jessica had been sexually exploited by multiple perpetrators, none of whom had been brought to justice. As an adult, after fleeing from domestic and sexual abuse from her partner, Jessica was sofa-surfing with the only friend she had; a male, who was sometimes obsessive and controlling towards Jessica. At one point this meant Jessica became extremely difficult to contact, because this man was preventing her from speaking to other people.

Due to Jessica's support needs around drugs and mental health, it was proving extremely difficult for the NWTa practitioner to find her suitable refuge accommodation. Therefore, the NWTa worker liaised with the local housing team, who despite the NWTa practitioner's best efforts,

placed Jessica in a mixed-sex homeless hotel. In this accommodation Jessica befriended a man who was able to buy drugs for her, leading Jessica to relapse and miss her upcoming drugs test. Not long after Jessica was assaulted by this man and had to flee the accommodation in order to be safe from him. Unfortunately, the fact that Jessica had relapsed meant that the refuges Jessica was able to access became even further restricted, as she would be understood as currently using drugs.

Unfortunately, after this Jessica gradually began to disengage from the professionals supporting her including the NWTa project. The NWTa practitioner was able to engage her long enough until Jessica reported that she had found privately rented accommodation. Unfortunately, Jessica disengaged completely after that and it was difficult for the NWTa practitioner to ascertain whether Jessica was safe. The NWTa practitioner let the other agencies that she had been working with know that she had no choice but to close the case after six weeks of not being able to contact her, encouraging them to let Jessica know that she can get back in touch with NWTa for further support if she wishes in the future.

Jessica's story is just one example of the 17 survivors who were placed into mixed-sex accommodation during their wait for a refuge. It demonstrates the lack of consideration that appears to have been given to this decision. Although Jessica may have been able to access private accommodation, her relapse experience meant that there were few other options available

to her. Whilst Jessica reported that she was pleased with the outcome and support that she had received from NWTa, it is difficult to imagine that the path to safety and recovery will be straightforward for survivors like Jessica who do not have the support of the project, especially if statutory services fail to adequately implement safeguarding guidance.

What happened to women whilst they waited for a refuge space?

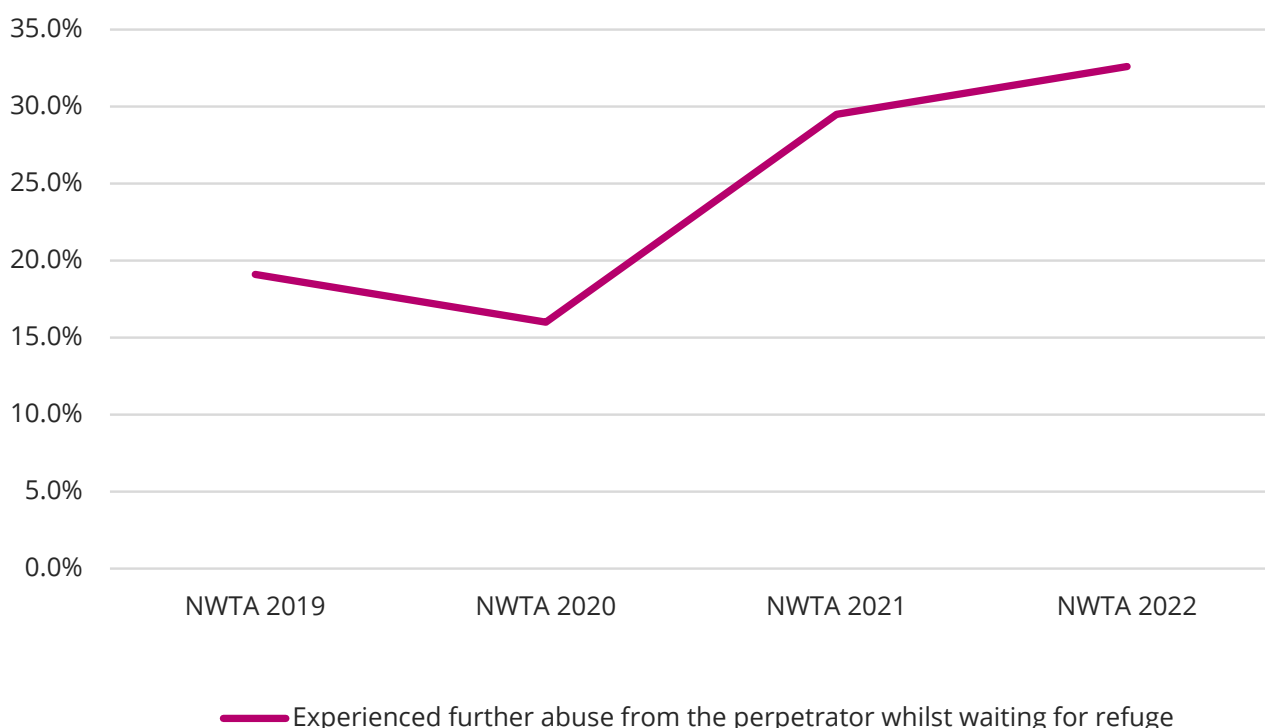
Unfortunately, Jessica was not the only survivor to be subjected to further abuse whilst waiting for safe accommodation. As shown in table 3 (page 24), almost a third (32.6%) of survivors supported by the NWTA project disclosed that they experienced further abuse whilst waiting for refuge. Alarming, we have seen an additional increase compared to last year, in the proportions of women experiencing further abuse from the perpetrator/ perpetrators whilst waiting for a refuge. This increase is demonstrated in the line graph below.

Last year we were concerned that this increased number of survivors experiencing further abuse from the perpetrator could be related to lockdown restrictions, with survivors being unable to flee to the homes of family and friends, leaving them at further risk during this period (Women's

Aid, 2021a). This could again be the case for this reporting period, with the UK lockdown restrictions leaving more survivors with no option but to stay with the perpetrator until they could find safe accommodation. Nonetheless, this notable increase will continue to be closely monitored by the project.

An additional explanation for this increase could be the increased range of referral pathways since November 2019. It could be that the NWTA project is reaching a higher number of survivors who are at higher risk of experiencing further abuse from the perpetrator via these new channels. This could be because these survivors have fewer support networks and are more likely to still be living with the perpetrator, or because they are experiencing abuse from multiple perpetrators.

Percentage of survivors who experienced further abuse from the perpetrator whilst waiting for refuge by reporting year



As detailed in table 3 (below), 14.1% of survivors called the police to respond to an incident, and 5.4% were physically injured by the perpetrator; 7.6% of survivors had to stay in hospital, and

13.0% of women experienced abuse from an additional perpetrator whilst waiting for a refuge, for example whilst sofa-surfing or in temporary accommodation, or in Jessica's case, both of these.

Table 3: Survivors' experiences while waiting for a refuge space*

	Number of women	Percentage out of total number of women (out of 184)
Experienced further abuse from the perpetrator	60	32.6%
Was scared to go outside	34	18.5%
Called the police out to respond to an incident	26	14.1%
Experienced abuse from an additional perpetrator	24	13.0%
Did not have enough money to pay for essentials	21	11.4%
Spent time as an inpatient/overnight in hospital	14	7.6%
Was physically injured as a result of an assault by the perpetrator	10	5.4%
Spent time in police custody	2	1.1%
Spent time under section ²⁹	0	0.0%

*Some survivors experienced more than one category

Survivors' experiences with statutory services

As we have detailed in previous Nowhere to Turn reports, survivors' interactions with statutory services frequently reveal a lack of knowledge of domestic abuse and a tendency to seek to evade their duty to support survivors. Out of the 184 survivors, the NWTa practitioners recorded 125 system failures on behalf of the police, local authority housing team, or social services. These failures include police failing to notify the survivor

of a change in the perpetrator's bail conditions following arrest (see Makena's story on page 26), the local authority inappropriately contacting the perpetrator for evidence (see Kadajah's story on page 27), and Social Services failing to accept their duty to accommodate women and children (see next section). Table four details these failings by each service.

²⁹ Women who were sectioned under the Mental Health Act (2007).

Table 4: System failures by statutory service

Service	Number of failures recorded	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184) ³⁰
Local authority housing team	55	29.9%
Police	38	20.7%
Social services	32	17.4%

Social services and survivors with NRPF

Survivors with NRPF made up 34.2% (63 out of 184) of the women who began and finished receiving support from the NWTa project between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021. Although they made up just over a third of women supported by the project, they were almost four times as likely to experience a failure on behalf of social services to meet their duty, with 14.3% (9 out of 63) of women with NRPF recorded as experiencing this, compared to 4.1% (5 out of 121) who did have recourse to public funds. These

failures include only offering to accommodate the children but not the woman, refusing to fund a space for both the woman and the children, or only offering to fund a space for the children but not the woman. During this same period, the NWTa caseworkers recorded two incidents in which survivors with NRPF were prevented from making a valid homelessness application by local authorities as a result of discrimination on the basis of their nationality.

³⁰ Some survivors experienced failures by more than one of these services.



MAKENA'S³¹ STORY

Makena was referred to the NWTa project by a local domestic abuse service who were unable to accommodate her due to NRPF. Before being referred to NWTa Makena had already been rejected by over 15 different refuges, primarily because of her immigration status. Makena was legally married to the perpetrator and had made an application for a spousal visa four months earlier, however, this was still being processed by the Home Office. This meant that despite the police having been involved because of domestic abuse, Makena's application for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession had been rejected.

Makena's husband's behavior changed quickly after they were married, becoming extremely controlling and physically abusive. This involved turning up at Makena's place of work, accusing her of having an affair with a male colleague, and forcing her to leave the building. Later in the relationship he pushed Makena down the stairs. She was so frightened that she fled the flat despite having no clothes on, and sought help from some neighbors across the street. After this incident the perpetrator was arrested and given bail conditions to stay away from Makena and the family home.

A few weeks later, during which time Makena was staying in temporary accommodation whilst the NWTa practitioner was supporting her to access immigration advice, the police lifted the perpetrator's bail conditions and decided to take no further action. This came as a shock to Makena and the other professionals supporting her, who knew that there had been witnesses to

the incident, meaning the police failed to follow up on the evidence. The police did not alert Makena of their decision to lift the perpetrator's bail conditions, and she only learnt that this had happened after finding out that the perpetrator was back in the family home through word of mouth.

During the time that Makena was receiving support from the NWTa project she found paid employment again, meaning that she was able to financially support herself and no longer eligible for the DDVC. The NWTa practitioner supported her to speak with her local Member of Parliament (MP) who wrote to the Home Office for clarification regarding Makena's status in the UK. The NWTa practitioner then supported Makena in her search for private accommodation.

Makena was left feeling seriously let down by the police and did not feel up to challenging their decision, even with the support of the NWTa worker. Unfortunately, we hear of systematic failures like these all too often in the NWTa project, that seriously undermine the safety of survivors. Had Makena not had support of the NWTa project and the local safeguarding team her story may have been very different.



INTERVIEW WITH A SURVIVOR SUPPORTED BY NWTA

Background

Kadijah³² grew up in an Arab country with her parents and sisters. Kadijah worked hard at school and achieved high marks, enabling her to get into a good university. Kadijah's father was very supportive and extremely proud of her.

"My father used to say that most men won't reach this high in [name of vocation]. Because I was so clever, I used to get such high scores, he was so proud. He used to say 'I know many men, they enter a university, they do [name of vocation] and they find it difficult and they run away to another university, but you stay and you get high scores.'"

Sadly, Kadijah's father passed away. After this, Kadijah's uncle became controlling and took the father's money for himself, leaving Kadijah and her family without a home and having to stay with her mother's relatives.

"When my father passed away my uncles were controlling [...] my uncle suggested that he would help us because my mum was in a bad situation; she was grieving, he said that he would help us because he's my uncle, he's my father's brother. He took a paper from us and then with the paper he took all my father's money, and he kicked us out from living in the house we were in, and he said, 'your father didn't leave a son, so all his money will be mine [...] it was horrible.'"

Kadijah then worked whilst she was still in full-time education in order to support her mother in buying them a house. Unfortunately, as Kadijah explained, laws and customs in her home country make it very difficult to live as a woman without a man, therefore, Kadijah's family still had to retain some contact with her father's family. Kadijah's mother also hoped for her to find a good husband so that things would be easier for her.

"[Name of country] is not like the UK, you need to have men."



Meeting her partner

As mentioned, Kadijah was very successful in her chosen career path and landed herself a scholarship opportunity in the UK. This was how she came to meet Oliver³³.

“He was telling me loads of stories about human rights and telling me how people should be supported [...] I was seriously taken by the idea because he [was] different. Different than anyone I met before. [I thought] he’s more... he has more humanity and has more morals and things I have ever seen in my country. So, I really fell in love with him from the [start].”

It became clear from speaking with Kadijah that this man was able to exploit the experiences that Kadijah had previously had back home to convince her that she was safer with him.

“When [Oliver] proposed to me and he’s English, he said he will never hit me, he will never hurt me, and he won’t be an Arabic man to me. So, I thought [everything would be okay].”

How things changed

Kadijah endured emotional abuse and controlling behaviour from both Oliver and the rest of his family. Despite this, Oliver would continuously call Kadijah whenever she would visit her home country, begging her not to leave him again. Although the initial plan had been that after they married Oliver would move back to Kadijah’s home country with her, Oliver no longer agreed to do this, which put Kadijah in a difficult position as she had a job she needed to go back to. After lots of going and back and forth between the UK and her home country following their marriage, Kadijah decided to apply for her spousal visa after Oliver begged her not to leave him again. Much to Kadijah’s confusion, this became something that Oliver started to use against her.

“He would say ‘You are so lucky to be here. People in [survivor’s home country], they sell their [organs] to be here, [they] jump the sea to be here.’ [But] I didn’t choose to be here. I even put in the marriage contract that he was coming to [survivor’s home country] to be with me.”



In order to settle properly in the UK Kadijah needed to leave her job, unfortunately this involved Kadijah having to make a 'pay out' because she was contracted to continue working her job after her scholarship ended. Kadijah's mother, wanting to support her daughter as best she could, sold the property so that these fees could be paid off; the same house that Kadijah and her mother had worked extremely hard to save for whilst Kadijah had still been studying.

When Kadijah returned after leaving her job Oliver refused to let her in to their home, becoming physically and verbally threatening towards her, getting the rest of his family involved in trying to force Kadijah to leave.

"He started shouting 'I will kill you!' and 'I don't want you! I'll drive you to the airport and you can get the first flight. Go back to [survivors' home country]!"

Police Involvement

When the police became involved Kadijah was shocked to find how quickly the police sided with Oliver over herself.

"The police listened to him more than me, they didn't let me speak. I felt like I was a criminal."

When Kadijah explained her situation and asked for help, the police told her (incorrectly) that she didn't have any rights, and failed to point her in the direction of any support services and anyone she could turn to.

"I told them 'I don't know where to go, I'm his wife. I need to know, what are my rights here?' They said, 'you have no rights.'"

Continued harassment from perpetrator

Oliver carried on contacting her harassing her, begging her to come back, threatening to kill himself. When Kadijah would not agree Oliver would become threatening.

"He kept saying that he will use all his power to destroy me [...] he would say 'this country is not for your people or your skin.'"



Getting help

Kadijah experienced serious failings on behalf of the housing team in the local authority, who actually contacted Oliver, who told them that Kadijah was lying about being homeless.

“The housing worker said ‘you are not eligible to find a place because you are not homeless. I spoke with your husband and agrees for you to go back to [survivors’ home country].”

Under Chapter 21 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance (DLUHC, 2022), local authorities are instructed to not approach the perpetrator when deciding if they have a duty to accommodate someone presenting as homeless because of domestic abuse. This guidance exists to protect survivors, and the housing worker’s action did not show regard for Kadijah’s safety, which could not better highlight the need for the NWTa project, who can challenge such responses.

Kadijah also contacted her local religious centre, who also turned her away because of her marrying an English man.

“The woman from the [religious] centre said ‘we can’t take you because he’s white and he’s English.”

This woman did however tell Kadijah that what she had experienced was domestic abuse, and encouraged her to get in touch with a support line. The support line directed her to an organisation that provided her with some temporary accommodation and put her in touch with the local domestic abuse service.

Support from NWTa

The local domestic abuse service referred Kadijah to the NWTa project. The NWTa practitioner then worked with Kadijah and the organisation accommodating her to get her immigration advice, and an application for the DDVC was made.

The NWTa practitioner was able to find Kadijah a suitable space in a refuge service ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women in a safe area. This is exactly what Kadijah had hoped for.



“She was good, she always used to call me and helped me find this refuge. [...] It’s good here.”

Kadijah talked about how nice it was to be around women who had similar experiences and could speak her first language. Kadijah emphasised how more awareness of domestic abuse support services would have helped her in leaving the abusive relationship sooner.

“If I had known about Women’s Aid or No Woman Turned Away, I would have [left sooner] because many times I get my stuff in my suitcase and try to get out but he would stop me, telling me ‘There’s no place to turn to.’ After that he would be begging me saying sorry [...] I thought there was no other way to live if he wasn’t sponsoring me.”

Aftermath

Kadijah’s father’s family never approved of the marriage, and upon finding out that it had not worked out they became increasingly threatening of Kadijah and her mother. Despite the insistence of both Oliver and the housing worker in this story, it is clear that it is not safe for Kadijah to return home.

“My uncle said ‘if you come back to [survivors’ home country] I will kill you at the airport because you bring to the shame on the family.’”

Kadijah’s mother has not been able to stay at her rented house since, instead having to seek shelter with one of Kadijah’s sisters.

“She’s staying with my sister because my sister’s husband is there and my uncle cannot reach them because of my sister’s husband [...] if my mum stayed alone, he would definitely reach her.

PART 3

What support was offered?

How much support did women receive?

Overall, the No Woman Turned Away caseworkers provided just over 1,000 hours of support to women in the period between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021. For the 184 women who started and finished receiving support during this period, support was provided on a daily or almost daily basis over an average time span of just under four weeks (27.5 days). The length of support varied from one day to just under five months.

Each of the 184 women received on average just under 5 hours³⁴ of support in total over the course of being supported by the NWTa practitioner. Each individual contact of support ranged from two minutes to three and a half hours. Whilst this is a slight decrease in the average total hours of support provided to each survivor compared to last year, it is more in line with previous years.³⁵ It is interesting to consider how, although the support hours are slightly less than last year, the length of time over which women are on average receiving support over is slightly longer.³⁶ These two things could reflect the other; for example, if caseworkers are providing support to each woman on average for a longer period of time, it may mean that they can only provide a certain number of hours support to each woman in order to balance their caseloads. Unfortunately, the outcome for

survivors supported by the project depends greatly on refuge availability, and so the tendency to keep cases open longer may be down to trying to reach the most positive outcome. This appears to be the case from my interview with NWTa support worker, Priya, detailed on page 35.

What type of support did women receive?

Table 5 (page 33) details the type of support that women received from the NWTa practitioners. For the first time the largest part (29.0%) of practitioners' time was spent communicating with the survivors over email or text message. With the exception of last year,³⁷ the largest part of the practitioners' time has previously been spent communicating with survivors over the phone. However, we have observed a trend of more and more communication between the practitioners and the survivors taking place via email or text over the years. It is too early to determine whether this finding reflects a more permanent change in the NWTa practitioner's ways of working, or whether it is a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, that left a higher proportion of women only being able to communicate via email or text.

Although not as high as the previous year, liaison with other professionals continues to dominate a

34 4 hours and 57 minutes.

35 As reported in *Nowhere to Turn, 2019* (Women's Aid 2019) and *Nowhere to Turn, 2020* (Women's Aid 2020), in the previous two years survivors received an average of four hours and ten minutes, and 6 hours twelve minutes support, of support respectively.

36 In *Nowhere to Turn 2021* we reported that the survivors supported between 12th January 2020 and 31st December 2021 were on average supported for just over three weeks (23.4 days).

37 In *Nowhere to Turn 2021* we reported that the largest part (29.1%) of specialist practitioners' time was spent liaising with professionals.

substantial proportion of the NWTAs practitioners' time (24.2%). As detailed in my interview with Priya,³⁸ this may in part be down to the time that the practitioners are having to spend seeking

immigration and/ or benefits advice for survivors they are supporting, in order to best help them in finding suitable refuge accommodation.

Table 5: What type of support do women receive?

Type of support	% of specialist practitioners' time ³⁹
Email/ text contact with survivor	29.0%
Liaison with other professionals	24.2%
Phone contact with survivor	18.9%
Attempting contact/chasing up	10.8%
Paperwork	8.5%
Advocacy on survivor's behalf	4.9%
Other	3.7%

What did women receive support with?

Table 6 (page 34) details the areas of support that the caseworkers provided to the 184 survivors supported by the NWTAs project between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021. For the first time, support around immigration e.g. helping a survivor to seek immigration advice, is the biggest form of support that the practitioners are providing to survivors beyond housing and referral/ signposting, with the NWTAs practitioners spending time supporting just under a tenth (9.2%) of survivors with their immigration. In the interview with Priya⁴⁰ (detailed on page 35) it seems that the NWTAs

practitioners are increasingly having to make up for limited resources and capacity in the wider domestic abuse sector by supporting women with their immigration-related needs. This results in the NWTAs practitioners spending much longer supporting these women than previously. This indeed appears to be what the data is telling us, with cases for women referred on the basis of NRPF lasting for five days longer on average than for women who were understood to be entitled to benefits from the point of referral.⁴¹

³⁸ Pseudonym

³⁹ These number do not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding methods.

⁴⁰ Pseudonym

⁴¹ Women referred on the basis of NRPF cases lasted 31.1 days on average, ranging from 1 to 144 days (based on 67 cases – with four of the women being supported twice). Women who were known to have recourse from the point of referral cases last 25.6 days on average, ranging from 1 to 135 days (based on 127 cases – with four women being supported twice and one woman being supported three times).

Table 6: What did women receive support with?

	Number of women supported	Percentage of total number of women (184)
Housing	43	23.4%
Referral and Signposting	34	18.5%
Immigration	17	9.2%
Emotional Support	16	8.7%
Children	14	7.6%
Finances	10	5.4%
Safety Planning	10	5.4%
Mental Health	10	5.4%
Criminal Justice	10	5.4%
Safeguarding	9	4.9%
Drugs and Alcohol	8	4.3%
Physical Health	6	3.3%
Practical Support	6	3.3%
Family Law	6	3.3%
Offending	4	2.2%
Civil Justice	3	1.6%
Covid-19	3	1.6%
Education, Employment and Training	3	1.6%
Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)	3	1.6%
Parenting	3	1.6%
Risk Assessment	3	1.6%
Sexual Health	3	1.6%
Other	38	20.6%



INTERVIEW WITH AN NWT A PRACTITIONER

Priya⁴² joined the NWT A project last year as a specialist domestic abuse practitioner, after having previously worked as an advocate in a local domestic abuse service, as well as a support worker on Women's Aid Live Chat service and the National Domestic Violence Helpline.

Impact of lockdown

Although Priya was not working in the NWT A project before the Covid-19 pandemic, she does have experience of working closely alongside them and making referrals into NWT A prior to this. When asked about survivors being referred on the basis of not being able to contact refuges because of lockdown restrictions, Priya said that perpetrators controlling survivors in this way is something that we have long seen and continue to see in the project.

“To be honest it is something that’s continued anyway, like regardless of lockdown we have had referrals where women have said he’s around all the time, I can’t make the phone calls [...] I think like the tactics we saw in lockdown, they’re very similar to what we’ve always seen.”

Nonetheless, Priya has noticed some cases in which the perpetrators have been able to exploit the consequences of the lockdown to continue controlling and monitoring survivors, even after lockdown has ended.

“We’ve seen perpetrators out of work because of lockdown and then they’ve not managed to find work or they’ve just kind of given up on it [...] then the women have come forward and said ‘he’s just always around now, he’s not going back to work.’”

Challenges in securing a refuge space

Priya talked about the difficulty of navigating the different refuge criteria each service has on top of the availability and provision of support. As an example, she talked about supporting one survivor who had some alcohol support needs that didn’t really equate to a dependency.



“She didn’t have an addiction, so when she was being assessed by recovery refuges, they said ‘but you don’t have an additional dependency and you’ve told us you don’t actually want support with that because you don’t think you need it.’ You know, she even had a drug and alcohol worker who turned around and said ‘you’re not addicted, you don’t have a dependency, but you could do with a little bit of the other side of support around working on your triggers and things like that.’ But then the generic refuges⁴³ were saying, ‘but you’ve still had a drink in the last three to six months and we can’t take you for that reason.’ So this was a woman stuck in the middle of refuge rules and criteria.”

Priya came to the conclusion that the only option for this survivor was to present as homeless to the local authority, and with Priya’s support she did so and was accommodated in temporary accommodation by them. This example highlights just how many barriers survivors have to navigate when it comes to securing safe accommodation.

Working with survivors with NRPF

Priya talked about how difficult it can be when faced with a referral for a survivor who isn’t eligible for refuge because of NRPF. Although the practitioners will help any woman in her search for a refuge, like any support worker they are still having to work around what refuges are able to accept, and unfortunately if a survivor cannot get funding somehow, she is very unlikely be eligible for a refuge.

“There’s been almost like an assumption made that no woman turned away means that regardless of status they will go to refuge, where actually it’s regardless of status they’d get our support to look for refuge.”

As most refuges rely on housing benefit to fund their services, they may refuse referrals from survivors who they incorrectly perceive as being ineligible for state benefits (Women’s Aid, 2021c). The NwTA project are often able to meet the needs of survivors whose eligibility has been missed or overlooked previously.

43 Refuges not set up to specifically support survivors around substance misuse.



“We’ve just had that recently, so the refuge referred because she couldn’t, you know, they couldn’t get her anywhere [because] she wasn’t eligible for [state benefits to pay for the housing costs of] refuge, but if she’s not eligible for [state benefits] we wouldn’t be able to change those circumstances. The problem was that they didn’t actually really check the eligibility [for state benefits] to begin with and that’s what’s happened [...] where a straightforward referral a woman could get into refuge within a week or two, it actually took, you know, weeks to months because we had to kind of start right from the very beginning.”

Given that refuge services often have to turn away referrals on the basis of limited space or capacity (Women’s Aid, 2022b), it is understandable that they would not have the resources to provide the weeks to months of support that the NWTa project was able to in order to ascertain this survivor’s eligibility for public funds.

Cases like these help to explain the increase in the amount of time that the NWTa practitioners are spending supporting women with issues like immigration as well as the average case length being five days higher on average for survivors referred on the basis of NRPF. Also, obtaining the correct immigration/ benefits advice can involve waiting on another busy professional to respond to these queries.

The impact on survivors

When asked about the impact on survivors who are referred to the NWTa project who have been incorrectly turned away on the basis of NRPF, Priya talked about how hard it could be to re-engage these women.

“There’s a massive emotional impact on these women, you know, they’re initially told you know there’s loads of support available for you, and then one by one the doors keep closing, and that’s something a woman said to me recently, you know, ‘how do I know that you would actually be able to support me? Because everybody else has said no.’ So, you know we’re having to like build that trust again and reassure them that actually our support is, you know, honest [...] so that’s something really tricky to manage on our part, because how can we offer this reassurance to somebody when clearly there’s a massive distrust in services and that’s valid?”



Statutory services and NRPF

Much like the immigration advisor we spoke to, Cassie (her interview is detailed on page 15), Priya also has experience of local authorities evading their duty to support women and children. Priya gave the example of local authorities agreeing to fund accommodation costs for a refuge space for a survivor with NRPF for only three months. This is a problem because most refuge placements are six months, and therefore refuges are reluctant to accept survivors when they may have no choice but to refer them elsewhere after three months.

“They are reluctant to fund anyway, and then even when they do agree, it’s only for three months. Some refuges have said, ‘but this is a six-month placement, so what we do in three months?’ Then the children services have said, ‘well, it’s three months or nothing,’ and then we’re just back to where we started [...] that conversation happened with a number of refuges, children services [saying the same thing] to each refuge, every time three months.”

Priya spoke of a particular example when it seemed that social services were deliberately avoiding their responsibility to fund refuge accommodation costs for a woman and her child, hoping that NWTA would find her to be eligible for benefits before they had to do so.

“They didn’t refuse, but they were reluctant to fund her because I said she might be eligible [for state benefits], and so they clung on to that might be eligible kept it going, going, going, which is obviously taking weeks, and the minute we get the approval for Universal Credit, it’s like, ‘yes, great. OK. Off you go to refuge.”

This left this particular child-survivor without access to education whilst waiting for refuge accommodation. As soon as they were accommodated, they were supported to find a school.

“She kept trying to get her [child] into school, but she couldn’t because, well, they moved anyway and suddenly it was like, ‘oh now we’re in a new area should we bother getting [child] into school?’ Should we wait for her to go to refuge? So you, know we’ve got a young child who’s been out of school for months simply because we’re clinging onto this hope she might be eligible [for state benefits]. But [child] could have actually just been, supported with getting into school at the very beginning, and if [child] went into a refuge that would have happened. You know, she’s only on day one in refuge, and they’re already getting a family support worker in to help her look for a school.”



Recently the impact of school closures during the Covid-19 restrictions on children and young people has been brought to the Government's attention. This includes the drop in attainment that has disproportionately affected younger children, children from working class families, and Black and minoritised children (Department for Education, 2021; House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). These issues are deeply concerning, and therefore it is important to remember that many children are left missing school because of having to flee domestic abuse. Finding this mother and child safe and suitable accommodation where the child could attend school should have been a primary concern for social services.

What is needed to help the domestic abuse sector support survivors?

Having supported many survivors who believe themselves not to be entitled to benefits after having been told so by statutory services or other organisations, Priya stressed that the domestic abuse sector needed better access to advice services. Generally, Priya will contact Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and the Aire Centre for benefits advice on survivors who aren't British citizens. Another requirement that Priya was keen to emphasise is the need for specialist domestic abuse refuges run by dedicated providers including service run 'by and for' Black and minoritised women.

Highlight of working on the NWTa project

"My favorite part about my job [...] is obviously getting women into refuge or getting women accommodated somewhere suitable because there's no point getting them accommodated where it won't work out and that we don't go for that anyway. You know, we wouldn't entertain that at all. It's about getting something sustainable for them.

"But another part is actually giving the women who are really hard to reach out to [...] or the women who found it hard to reach out to us, giving them that bit of hope that actually we can work with them and there is still a way out."



LEISEL'S⁴⁴ STORY

Liesel was referred to the NWTA project by Women's Aid Live Chat service. She was finding it hard to find a suitable refuge space because she has a teenage son, who was over 14 years old⁴⁵ and has learning disabilities. Liesel also has two other children, and was hoping to secure a refuge space for herself and her three children in order to get away from her abusive partner. Due to her son's support needs, Liesel felt that sharing communal areas with other survivors and their children would be very difficult, and so therefore asked the NWTA caseworker to search for self-contained spaces.

After a couple of weeks of the NWTA caseworker trying to find a suitable refuge space, Liesel was physically abused for the first time by her partner. Upon this, Liesel moved herself and her children to a family member's house. Although this was much safer for her and the children, it was not possible for Liesel to stay long-term due to space and the perpetrator knowing their whereabouts.

As part of the abuse, Liesel's partner had made them move far away from all of her support networks, leaving Liesel and the children extremely isolated. Therefore, Liesel was keen to come back to the area that she had had to leave many years previously. Over a period of three months the caseworker conducted over 30 searches for a suitable refuge space on Routes to Support without there being a single one available. Due to this, the caseworker liaised simultaneously with a local authority, advocating for them to provide temporary accommodation for herself and the three children. Eventually, they accepted their full duty to accommodate her, reuniting Liesel with her family and friends, granting her the opportunity to re-build her relationship with them, as well as for her children to get to know them.

⁴⁴ Pseudonym

⁴⁵ In the interest of protecting women spaces in refuges, some services are unable to accommodate male children above a certain age, generally this is about 14 years old. You can read about the importance of women only spaces here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-86-the-impact-of-changes-in-commissioning-and-funding-on-women-only-services.pdf>

PART 4

The Impact of the No Woman Turned Away Project

How many women were accommodated in a refuge?

Table 7 explains the end outcome for the 184 survivors supported by the project between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021. Although fewer women were accommodated in a refuge than last year, there were also more women

who were placed in temporary accommodation by the local authority. In some cases, this was still a positive outcome for women that would have struggled to be in a communal refuge. For example, in Liesel's case.

Table 7: Outcome at the end of support from the NWTAs specialist practitioner

	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (184)
Accommodated in suitable refuge space	47	25.5%
Accommodated in emergency accommodation	35	19.0%
Outcome unknown/Lost contact	30	16.3%
Stayed put – living with perpetrator	16	8.7%
Stayed put – not living with perpetrator at time of referral	15	8.1%
Staying with friends and family	8	4.3%
Accommodated in private rental (out of area of residence)	5	2.7%
Able to return home after perpetrator moved out / was removed	2	1.1%
Accommodated in private rental (in area of residence)	2	1.1%
Accommodated by community or religious group	2	1.1%
Paying to stay in B&B or hotel or hostel	1	0.5%
Returned to perpetrator	0	0.0%
Sleeping rough	0	0.0%
Other	21	11.4%

One explanation for this change could be the statutory duty that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has placed on local authorities, meaning they are required to accommodate survivors (including children) regardless of whether they have a local connection (Home Office, 2022). This came into force on 1st October 2021 (GOV UK, 2021), and therefore only applies to three months of this reporting period. We do not yet know for certain how much of a difference the passing of the statutory duty has made to survivors and the services supporting them, however, the impact of the statutory duty is something we hope to explore in the upcoming report: *The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit*. Of course, under the Homelessness Code of Guidance, local authorities were obligated to recognise survivors and their children as having a priority need long before the Domestic Abuse Act cemented this (Home Office, 2022).

In addition to the number of women being put up in emergency accommodation, seven out of the 21 women in the 'other' category were due to be moved by the council or into a form of social housing after the advocacy of the NWTa project at the time of case closure. Two women were able to stay in their previous home after the perpetrator was removed from the family home, or in one case decided to move out. One of these women had two children, and the other had four. This meant that the women and their children were able to stay in the same area with their support networks and school, a scenario we rarely hear of when it comes to fleeing abuse. Unfortunately, this can bring with it ongoing harassment and abuse from the perpetrator (and sometimes also from his friends and family). We hope that these survivors and their children are still safe and receiving the ongoing support of the local domestic abuse services. If this is not the case, we have let survivors know that they can get back in touch with the NWTa project through the Women's Aid Live Chat service and be supported again, as other survivors have done in the past.

Inequalities in refuge provision

Table 8 (page 43) details the end outcomes for survivors supported by the NWTa project by the reason they were referred. As reported in previous Nowhere to Turn reports, there continue to be inequalities in refuge access depending upon a survivor's specific characteristics and circumstances. Women who had one or more disabilities, women with older male children, and women with four or more children found it the hardest to find a suitable refuge space.

None of the 14 women with multiple disabilities were accommodated in a suitable refuge after being supported by the NWTa project. However, seven of these women, including Lucy (page 10) were supported to find alternative accommodation, including local authority temporary accommodation, housing association, or community supported accommodation. Unfortunately, for three of these 14 women, the NWTa practitioner had to close the case not knowing what had happened after no longer being able to contact the survivor.

Only one of the women referred on the basis of four or more children was accommodated in a suitable refuge space, along with only one of the women referred due to having an older male child. This demonstrates the limited refuge provision for large families and those with teenage children.

Despite the high proportion of women referred on the basis of NRPF, many of whom enter the NWTa project believing they are not entitled to state benefits (see interview with Priya, page 35), 31.7% were supported to find suitable refuge accommodation by the NWTa project.

Table 8: Proportion of women with different support needs who were accommodated in a suitable refuge

	Number of women with this support need who were accommodated in a refuge
Women with some language support needs ⁴⁶	12 out of 25 (48.0%)
Women who had no recourse to public funds (NRPF)	20 out of 63 (31.7%)
Women with an offending history	6 out of 19 (31.6%)
Women who were tied to their local area	6 out of 22 (27.3%)
Women previously evicted from refuge	1 out of 4 (25.0%)
Women with substance use support needs – alcohol or drugs	8 out of 33 (24.2%)
Women with mental health support needs	16 out of 77 (20.8%)
Women who had one or more disability ⁴⁷	4 out of 38 (10.5%)
Women with older male children	1 out of 17 (5.9%)
Women with 4+ children	1 out of 19 (5.3%)
Overall	47 out of 184 (25.5%)

Whilst survivors referred on the basis of one support need were accommodated in refuge in 28.0% of cases (21 out of 75 women) and survivors referred for two reasons were accommodated in 26.8% of cases (19 out of 71 women), survivors who were referred for three or more reasons were only accommodated in a suitable refuge space in 18.4% of cases (7 out of 38 women). This demonstrates how those survivors who faced a multitude of barriers and systemic inequalities found it particularly difficult to find a suitable refuge space, and how inequalities in refuge provision disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable survivors.

⁴⁶ Women who required an interpreter.

⁴⁷ Proportion of women with specific disabilities who were accommodated in a suitable refuge: Physical disability: 0% of the 15 women; mental health disability: 13.6% (3 out of 22 women); Long-term health condition: 10% (1 out of 10 women); learning disability: 0% of the three women; vision disability: 0% of the one women; hearing disability: 0% of the three women.

⁴⁸ 103 out of 124 survivors where the client's perception of safety had been recorded.

⁴⁹ This is based on the final outcome for survivors supported more than once by the NWTa project between 1st January 2021 and December 2021.

Additional outcomes

The majority of survivors (83.1%⁴⁸) reported an improvement in regards to their safety after having been supported by the project, with 72.6% (90 out of 124) of women reporting a significant improvement in their safety, and 10.5% (13 out of 124) reporting a somewhat improvement in their safety.⁴⁹

Unfortunately four women (3.2%) supported by the project reported feeling less safe when they finished receiving support by the NWTa project. In all these cases, the NWTa practitioner was in

agreement with these survivor's perception of their safety. Three of these women were still living with the perpetrator when the case was closed, and in one case the perpetrator's controlling behavior had intensified so much that the NWTa project could only contact this woman through email. After many attempts to find this survivor safe accommodation the NWTa project felt that refuge would not be appropriate and referred her to a her local IDVA service for help applying for an injunction order to remove the perpetrator from the property.

The other two women still living with the perpetrator felt that their safety had worsened due to statutory services becoming involved but then not following through on providing support. For example, in one case social services became involved because of the abuse, and only offered to accommodate the children; therefore leaving the family in the home with the perpetrator knowing that the survivor had sought help. This survivor was left feeling let down by services and decided to remain living with the perpetrator. However, in all three cases the NWTa practitioner ensured that the survivor was engaging with her local domestic abuse services before closing the case. In the fourth case, the woman had moved away from the UK and was experiencing ongoing harassment and conflict around child contact from the perpetrator. Unfortunately the courts had become involved, who were siding with the perpetrator and not believing this survivor's story of domestic abuse, despite the fact that the perpetrator had recently been arrested and charged.

For 13.7% survivors (17 out of 124 supported by the NWTa project, their sense of safety had neither worsened nor improved after being supported by the NWTa project. Unfortunately, the NWTa practitioners not able to record the survivor's perspective on whether their safety had improved for 60 women.⁵⁰ This may be down to the NWTa practitioner not being certain that it was

still safe to contact the survivor, or simply being unable to do so successfully. This reflects just how precarious a survivor's situation can be when it comes to seeking safety from domestic abuse.

Signposting to other services

A significant aspect of the NWTa specialist practitioners' work involves the skilled signposting of survivors to other relevant support organisations. This includes ensuring that the survivor will be receiving appropriate support after the NWTa practitioner closes the survivor's case. For 84 of the survivors the NWTa practitioner was able to establish that further support would be provided from another specialist Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisation after the case was closed

(e.g. refuges, local domestic abuse organisations). For 74 survivors the NWTa practitioner was able to secure support from another non-VAWG organisation after the case was closed (e.g. immigration specialists; statutory agencies).

Immigration outcomes

The NWTa practitioners recorded 39 positive immigration outcomes as a result of being supported by the project. This included offering the survivor clarity around her immigration status (14 women), helping the survivor to make positive progress in regularising their status (10 women), ensuring a survivor was able to make an application for the DDVC application (8), and a survivor having been successful in their DDVC application (7). These outcomes were generally achieved through referring the survivors to organisations who could support with immigration advice and DDVC applications.

⁵⁰ These 60 cases have been removed from the overall calculations.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

The findings in this report demonstrate the vital ongoing need for the NWTa project, which offers survivors the hope of securing safe accommodation away from abuse in a context of insufficient refuge vacancies to meet needs and inequalities in domestic abuse service provision. Although not all the survivors were accommodated in a suitable refuge, the majority reported an improvement in their safety as result of being supported by the project.

Some specific findings from this year will continue to be monitored by us to better understand women's experiences of seeking a refuge space, and take measures (albeit these are limited in the current funding context). This includes the higher proportion of referrals that the NWTa practitioners are having to decline on the basis of not being able to contact women. Also included is the increase in the number of times the NWTa practitioners are finding no suitable refuge spaces on Routes to Support. For the first time, this has happened over 30 times for three survivors. If this trend continues we may need to alter the way this is recorded in order to accurately capture the number of times that this is happening per survivor on average. The continued increase in the proportion of survivors subjected to further abuse from the perpetrator whilst waiting for refuge is extremely concerning. Whilst it might be the case that we are reaching more vulnerable survivors as a result of increased referral pathways, the other findings in the report suggest continued challenges for women who face multiple barriers to accessing refuge vacancies.

The NWTa project supports women and their children during this difficult and turbulent time not only by searching for a safe place for them to live, but also by offering them detailed advice, and putting them in touch with appropriate organisations. The high numbers of survivors who are referred on the basis of NRPF, many of whom

begin receiving support from the NWTa project believing that nobody can support them, but are then supported to find safe accommodation is evidence of this. Nonetheless, the lack of access to immigration support in the domestic abuse sector is not sustainable and is resulting in many survivors being led to believe that cannot access support. Many services do not have the resources the adequately assist survivors in accessing immigration advice, resulting in survivors being put at risk and the NWTa project spending more time on these cases to reach a positive outcome.

The lack of specialist refuge provision means that the NWTa practitioners often have to seek alternative accommodation for survivors. The four biggest barriers to finding a suitable refuge space this year were mental health support needs, a disability, a male child over 14 years old, and having four or more children. With none of the 14 women who had multiple disabilities being accommodated in a suitable refuge after receiving support from the NWTa project.

We welcome the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), placing a statutory duty on local authorities to fund support in refuge services and other forms of safe accommodation. However, we remain concerned that the £125 million allocated to local authorities to fund all accommodation-based services falls £56 million short of Women's Aid's estimate of what's required for women's refuge services alone (Women's Aid, 2019b). There is also mixed picture in terms of how the duty is being implemented at a local level, with many smaller, specialist services struggling to complete with larger more generic services. Whilst it is too early to determine how much this new legislation has made a difference to survivors seeking safety from domestic abuse, the continued research and evaluation of the NWTa project will offer us the opportunity to monitor this on an ongoing basis.

Recommendations

Urgent recommendations

- ▶ National and local Government to ensure existing refuge spaces are sufficiently funded so that support can be provided to survivors facing additional barriers, such as mental health needs, substance misuse, and structural inequalities. Also provide funding to create additional spaces when needed to deliver vital additional refuge spaces that can accommodate these survivors.
- ▶ National and local Government to ensure funding is available to provide emergency immigration advice to survivors of domestic abuse to ensure survivors have access to the support that they are entitled to.
- ▶ Local authorities to commission single sex emergency accommodation, in adherence to the law under the Equality Act 2010, in recognition of the number of survivors accessing this form of accommodation and to ensure their safety and support needs are being met.
- ▶ Central Government to Empower the National Expert Steering Group (NESG) to develop robust accountability mechanisms for local authorities failing to meet their duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This should be done through improved assessment and gathering of quantitative and qualitative data on the delivery of the duty which should be presented to the National Expert Steering Group. This could also include funding specialist services to contribute to this data gathering exercise, to ensure a frontline perspective on the funding landscape.
- ▶ Domestic abuse training must be rolled out across local and housing authorities – and it is imperative this is informed and delivered by specialist organisations, including those led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women - to ensure that women and children are not further traumatised when seeking safe accommodation.

Longer-term recommendations

Recommendations for national government

- ▶ Training on immigration rights across statutory agencies and continuous monitoring to ensure compliance.
- ▶ Implement a national needs assessment to underpin the duty on local authorities to commission support in safe accommodation in order for commissioning to reflect best practice, including support available across boundaries, and to make refuge services accessible to all women and children who need them.

Recommendations for local government

- ▶ Adhere to the Homelessness Code of Guidance (MOJ, 2018) and refrain from putting women fleeing domestic abuse in mixed-sex emergency accommodation, or in other instances in which it may be inappropriate.
- ▶ Ensure changes delivered to 'priority need' in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 are accompanied by robust training from specialist domestic abuse services to housing officers, with quality assurance and key points of accountability built in.

Recommendations for commissioners

- ▶ Prioritise the needs of marginalised groups, including Deaf and disabled women, and Black and minoritised survivors, in commissioning decisions in order to meet the needs of all survivors.
- ▶ Building on national funding for 'by and for' services in 2021-22, provide ring-fenced funding for these specialist services and as set out in the statutory guidance to support implementation of the duty on local authorities to commission support in safe accommodation, where possible, conducted on a multi-year basis.
- ▶ Develop proportionate approaches to contract monitoring and quality assurance, with reference to and use of national outcomes data collection and quality standards developed by Women's Aid, and other specialist VAWG sector organisations, as recommended by the Home Office's VAWG Commissioning Toolkit.

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APPENDIX 1

Profile of women supported by the NWTA specialist practitioners

Sex		
	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184)
Female	184	100.0%
Total	184	

Transgender		
	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184)
Yes	0	0.0%
No	141	76.6%
Don't know	17	9.2%
Declined	1	0.5%
Not asked	25	13.6%
Total	184	

Ethnicity		
	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184)
Asian / Asian British		
Bangladeshi	1	0.5%
Chinese	1	0.5%
Indian	5	2.7%
Pakistani	7	3.8%
Any other Asian background, please describe	10	5.4%
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British		
African	15	8.1%
Caribbean	2	1.1%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	4	2.2%
Mixed / Multiple Ethnic background		
White and Asian	3	1.6%
White and Black African	0	0.0%
White and Black Caribbean	4	2.2%
Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	3	1.6%
Other ethnic group		
Arab	2	1.1%
Any other ethnic group, please describe	2	1.1%
Don't know	4	2.2%
Declined	1	0.5%
Not asked	10	5.4%
White		
British	83	45.1%
Eastern European	7	3.8%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1	0.5%
Irish	0	0.0%
Any other White background	19	10.3%
Total	184	

Age		
	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184)
16-20	2	1.1%
21-30	20	10.9%
31-40	54	29.3%
41-50	19	10.3%
51-60	5	2.7%
61-70	2	1.1%
70-79	0	0.0%
80+	0	0.0%
Don't know	82	44.6%
Total	184	

Disability		
	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184)
Yes	38	20.6%
Don't Know	4	2.2%
No	129	70.1%
Not Asked	13	7.1%
Total number of women supported	184	

Type of disability		
	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 184)
Hearing	3	1.6%
Learning	3	1.6%
Mental health	22	11.9%
Physical	15	8.1%
Visual	1	0.5%
Long-term health condition	10	5.4%
Speech impairment	0	0.0%
Total number of women with a disability	38	20.6%
Number of women with more than one disability	14	7.6%

Nowhere To Turn, 2022: Findings from the sixth year of the No Woman Turned Away project

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