

Deserve To Be Heard

**CAMPAIGN
IMPACT**



women's aid
until women & children are safe

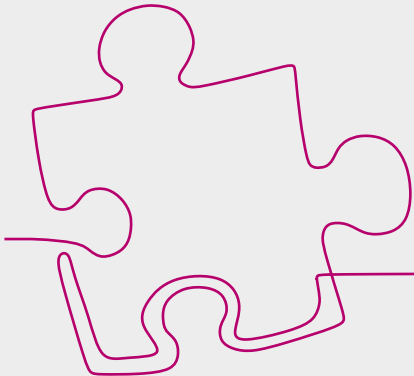


#DeserveToBeHeard



Since launching our flagship campaign ‘Deserve To Be Heard’ (DTBH) in September 2021, Women’s Aid has worked to change perceptions and attitudes towards survivors’ mental health which compound women’s trauma and inequality. Alongside survivors, our federation of member services, and a network of parliamentary champions and community campaigners, we have raised awareness of the devastating impact of domestic abuse on the mental health of women and children and worked to secure a more supportive policy environment and funding for essential mental health support.

This report shares some of the campaign’s proudest achievements to date. We want to show you all that we have achieved and how we will move forward to address new challenges together, ensuring that survivors’ voices are heard.



We worked to understand what effective mental health support looks like for survivors

In 2021-22 almost half of women in refuge services reported feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts as a direct result of the domestic abuse they had experienced, highlighting the need for effective mental health support for survivors (Women's Aid 2023).

Yet two literature reviews published by Women's Aid identified the many barriers faced by survivors when seeking such support.

These barriers include victim-blaming attitudes from professionals, stigma associated with a mental health diagnosis that can affect other aspects of women's lives or the weaponisation of a diagnosis by perpetrators (Women's Aid 2022). They can also include long wait times for services or inappropriate interventions that retraumatise survivors (Women's Aid 2022).

The literature review on experiences of Black and minoritised women found that these survivors confront heightened barriers including discriminatory responses and a lack of understanding of cultural issues when seeking help from mainstream services resulting in their exclusion from support services and potential further traumatisation (Thiara and Harrison 2021).

These literature reviews make clear the need for specialist mental health support services for survivors. They have reached a wide audience, having been **downloaded over 1300 times** from our website and disseminated to decisionmakers at key events. These include our parliamentary drop-in during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based violence in 2021 and our International Women's Day 2022 Parliamentary event which brought together key voices and decision-makers, such as Women's Aid patron Melanie Brown, MBE, our ambassador Alice Liveing and four government ministers across the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, and Department for Health and Social Care.

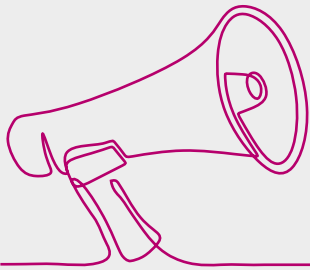
The literature reviews also informed our briefings and submissions to key government consultations, helping to drive policy change.

The literature reviews also found that existing research was inadequate, missing crucial survivor voices and focussing on barriers to care and not solutions. We addressed this by **working with survivors to identify solutions and to understand what effective mental health support looks like**. Together we produced the report, 'Are you listening? 7 pillars for a survivor-led approach to mental health support' (Women's Aid 2022). The report draws on focus group interviews with our Survivor Advisory Board to understand what effective mental health support looks like for them. It provides recommendations for healthcare professionals, mental health specialists, commissioners and local authorities on what needs to change to provide better support.

This report, and an accompanying guide for survivors, have together been downloaded over 500 times from our website.



'Are you listening?' shaped the campaign strategy. Central to this is our call to commissioners to fund specialist mental health support for survivors and to provide training to health professionals, so that they can better understand and respond to domestic abuse.



We worked together to amplify survivor voices

Together with survivors, Women's Aid developed an online space for survivors to share their stories. Using images, poetry, blogs and other creative approaches, the **microsite** enables survivors to tell their stories in their own way. It has received over **3,000 visits** since its launch, with visitors commenting on how the messages on the site resonated with them and thanking the survivors for sharing their stories:



“

“Amazing words, I resonate so deeply. Thank you Kady.”

– Women's Aid supporter

“

“I have visited the site there is some very powerful stuff there. [P]ass my admiration to all involved.”

– Survivor



“

“This is just so true. People in my immediate community have always seen me as a 'strong' Black woman and some couldn't and still can't conceive how I was subject to abuse and still I'm surviving. I hear you Joanne.”

– Women's Aid supporter



To see the stories visit:
[www.womensaid.org.uk/
deservetobeheard](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/deservetobeheard)



Stories from the microsite were shared on social media to amplify the voices of survivors throughout the DTBH campaign. These stories highlighted the mental health needs of different groups of survivors, including those with disabilities, Black and minoritised women, children, migrants, women from different age groups, women from faith backgrounds, and women facing multiple disadvantages.

These spotlight stories reached thousands of people and attracted the attention of both national and specialist media outlets. As the campaign grew, the reach of the spotlight stories also grew, demonstrating the impact of the campaigners and the power of our message.

December

Saliha's story shining a light on the impact of gender-based violence on the mental health of disabled women had **3.8K** Twitter impressions and reached over **6K** people on Facebook and **15.9K** on Instagram.

January

Patron Melanie Brown's post on Black and minoritised survivors reaches over **4K** people on Twitter, **11K** on Facebook, and **18.9K** on Instagram.

February

A video created by a child survivor highlighting the devastating impact of domestic abuse on the mental health of children & young people was **one of our most successful spotlights on Twitter**, reaching over **21K** accounts.

March

Sapphires' story on being a migrant survivor trying to access support receives over **2K** impression on Twitter, **3K** on Facebook and **4.5K** on Instagram.

May

Our post in May on women from faith backgrounds with the poem *Why did you not just leave?* reached **17.5K** Instagram users.

July

Our post raising awareness on the needs of older survivors was our most successful Facebook post, reaching over **22K** accounts.



The campaign also collaborated with survivors to produce a film, 'The Road We've Had to Walk'.

The short film focuses on the barriers to accessing mental health support for the most marginalised survivors and is the culmination of the campaign's yearlong focus on survivor storytelling. It weaves together the narratives we have shared through the microsite, and in accompanying social and traditional media coverage.

The film was launched in Parliament in January 2023 with high profile speakers including Vicki Nash, associate director of policy, campaigns, and public affairs at Mind; Rt Hon Sir Robert Buckland KC MP; Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP, Shadow Minister for Mental Health; and Maria Caulfield MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy. We also heard from three survivors who contributed to the development of the film and Surwat Sohail, CEO at Roshni Birmingham. The launch event for the film provided an opportunity for survivors, parliamentarians, 'by and for' services, and leading voices from the mental health sector to come together, explore solutions and share best practices. Attendees at the film launch commented on the power of the film and the importance of hearing from directly from survivors:



'The Road We've Had to Walk' survivor film launch in Parliament. Image shows panel (left to right) BSL interpreter, Maya Oppenheim, Rosena Allin-Khan MP and Maria Caulfield MP.

“

“Still thinking about this film which I had the pleasure of seeing last night, so powerful”

– Charity sector member

“

“[T]he speakers were all excellent too and in particular those who spoke about their experiences first-hand of domestic abuse. It was heart wrenching to hear really but I am in total awe of their courage.”

– Chief of staff to MP

“

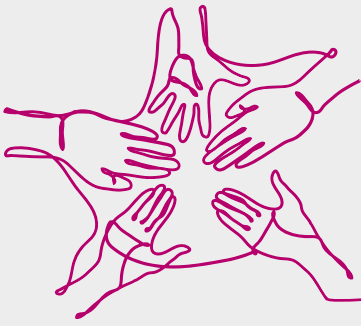
“A much needed spotlight on survivor[s] voices and the impact #domesticabuse has on mental health for women and children.”

– Charity sector member

“

“Good to be in parliament for the launch of this excellent & challenging new film”

– Parliamentarian



We worked together to drive change

People from across our communities have been working together on the DTBH campaign supporting survivors. By May 2023, **2075 community campaigners and seven Parliamentary Champions signed up** to help us raise awareness about the need for specialist mental health support for survivors of domestic abuse. This is in addition to the hundreds of people who have attended DTBH events and webinars.

Campaigner actions

Our network of community campaigners has been very active throughout the campaign – pledging their support to #HearHer, writing to their MPs or local councillors, and signing open letters urging action on mental health support for survivors. These actions have been essential for raising awareness about mental health and domestic abuse.

Campaigners told us about the impact DTBH made in their lives, with many noting that they are themselves survivors of domestic abuse or that they work with survivors:



The **#HearHer pledge** to listen to the voices of survivors in bringing about effective mental health support was shared widely on social media, including by notable supporters such as our patron **Melanie Brown, MBE** and ambassador **Michelle Griffith Robinson, Malin Andersson, Charlie Webster**, and **Maddy Anholt**. **36 MPs** also pledged to #HearHer.



Together, members of the community and our federation of local services sent **220 letters to MPs** or their local councillors asking them to support survivors and the specialist services that provide mental health support to survivors.



The **Women's Health Ambassador agreed to speak** at the parliamentary launch of our film **after 478 campaigners** signed our open letter to her urging her to do so.



"[The campaign] has made me mentally stronger and more resilient. I feel almost like an activist now."



"I feel I am better equipped to help others look for help, I'm not as afraid to speak my mind now."



"Being a domestic violence survivor myself hearing and reading about other [women's] stories and just how there is so much support out there really empowered me to tell everyone I know to sign up and get behind [Women's Aid] charity."

Webinars

We held a series of webinars for community campaigners, with 6 completed by May 2023 and more planned for the future. These webinars have focused on the mental health experiences of disabled survivors, Black and minoritised survivors, migrant survivors, d/Deaf survivors, LGBT+ survivors and campaigning with your local services. The webinars featured survivors speaking about their experiences and specialist services describing experiences of supporting survivors.

Over 150 people attended the webinars, with attendees overwhelmingly reporting in post-attendance surveys that the webinars improved their understanding and will help them to raise awareness about the issues from the webinars. Attendees described the webinars as “constructive and encouraging”, “informative”, and “powerful.”



“Excellent and informative webinar and series of webinars. Helps me to understand and keep informed, which helps me to help and signpost survivors I work with.”

– Attendee at webinar on experiences of deaf survivors

Future webinars are planned to upskill community campaigners as we approach the general election. These will cover how to engage your local MP and other campaigning techniques

Download the report at:
[www.womensaid.org.uk/
research-and-reports](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-reports)



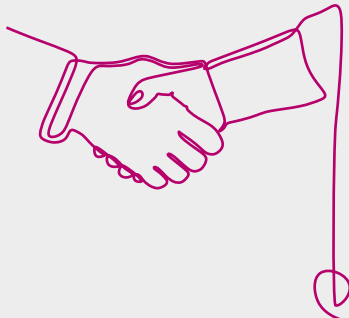
Engaging policymakers

Beginning with our **campaign launch in Parliament** in September 2021, the DTBH campaign has worked to engage policymakers. The launch saw Farah Nazeer, CEO of Women’s Aid alongside Nicole Jacobs, domestic abuse commissioner; Apsana Begum MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on domestic violence and abuse; and Baroness Bertin, vice-chair of the APPG.

As part of our **International Women’s Day** activities in 2022, we held a **Parliamentary Reception at Westminster** with speeches from Farah Nazeer; the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Care and Mental Health; Jasmine Mohammad, VAWG services manager at the Angelou Centre; Women’s Aid patron Melanie Brown, MBE and our ambassador Alice Liveing. The event raised awareness about the key issues in the DTBH campaign including the need for specialist services to support survivors with the mental health impacts of domestic abuse. Three members of our survivor advisory board attended the reception, alongside ten MPs and four Ministers from across three government departments.

We continued to engage with lawmakers at our **fringe event at the Conservative Party Conference 2022**. The event focused on developing a health system response to domestic abuse and of the impact of domestic abuse on mental health. James Cartlidge, MP spoke at the event alongside Women’s Aid supporter Malin Andersson; Nimco Ali OBE, CEO of The Five Foundation; Diana Nammi, Executive Director, Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation; and Farah Nazeer, CEO of Women’s Aid.

During the event we launched the new report, **‘Are you listening? 7 pillars for a survivor-led approach to mental health support’** (Women’s Aid 2022). This research was conducted to better understand what domestic abuse survivors want and value when it comes to mental health support, and what an effective response looks like. The report outlines the seven key findings, and our priority recommendations for change.



Together we secured commitments from the government to better support survivors with their mental health needs

Women's Aid worked with federation members, campaigners and survivors to secure some big policy wins over the course of the DTBH campaign.

In March of 2022, the Home Office published the **Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan**. The plan describes how the Government intends to prevent and respond to domestic abuse. These commitments have the potential to improve service provision for survivors of domestic abuse by addressing abusers' behaviour, helping healthcare professionals to better support survivors, and through funding 'by and for' and community-based services.

The funding and policy commitments in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan included notable wins for the DTBH campaign, including:



Recognising domestic abuse as **a gendered crime**, and that it complements and is fully aligned with the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy.



Providing **£7.5 million over 3 years** to enable **healthcare professionals** to better identify, refer and support victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

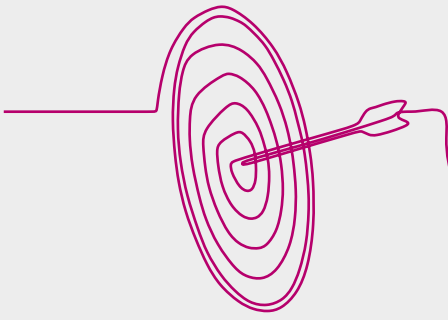


Setting aside **£15.7 million** of the proposed funding each year to be spent on **community-based services** supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Following evidence that Women's Aid submitted to a Department for Health and Social Care consultation, 2022 also saw the publication of the **Women's Health Strategy**. The strategy lists mental health and violence against women and girls as two out of its six priorities. The first Women's Health Ambassador for England was also appointed.

With the support of our federation members, and drawing on evidence from our research, Women's Aid also consulted on the **Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing plan**. The consultation included powerful case studies from federation members about how they support survivors. We are disappointed that the Mental Health and Wellbeing plan will not go ahead, but the case studies may be used in future influencing work.

The Health and Care Bill was also a key avenue for influencing government policy on mental health. Women's Aid briefed MPs at key stages during the Bill's progression, including through hosting a roundtable for Shadow Labour Ministers on key priorities from across the sector. Our consultation response on the draft Bill called for a focus in the new Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) on tackling the mental health impacts of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and working with the sector. As this is crucial to enable survivors to get the support they need, we were pleased that the **published guidance requires ICBs to set out specific steps they will take to address the needs of survivors of domestic abuse**. The Bill also requires ICBs to include a mental health expert, which is a notable win for the DTBH campaign.



Continuing to make an impact

As the campaign continues into its third year, it is looking to make an impact with health professionals and on the upcoming general election. We are also ensuring that the remarkable work created survivors will live on after the campaign comes to an end, continuing to raise awareness about the link between mental health and domestic abuse.

66

“All women deserve access to tailored mental health support for as long as they need to heal. We are proud to have worked alongside survivors through the Deserve To Be Heard campaign to take positive steps towards achieving this, including through our awareness-raising work and tangible policy and funding commitments. We know that there is still so much more work to be done and will continue to champion survivors’ needs across future campaigns – because all women Deserve To Be Heard.”

– Isabelle Younane, Head of External Affairs, Women’s Aid

Working with health professionals

On 28th June we hosted a health summit to bring together health and NHS leaders with the domestic abuse sector, to discuss better outcomes for survivors. Drawing on research from the DTBH campaign, the summit brought together members of Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) with our federation members and survivors to learn about what survivors need, and what specialist domestic abuse services can do to support those needs. The day demonstrated to ICBs how they can deliver on their duties for victims of domestic abuse in the joint forward plan guidance.

Gearing up for the general election

We will be supporting our #DeserveToBeHeard campaigners to influence and campaign in the run up to the 2024 General Election. This will include capacity building resources, a social media campaign, and different actions that campaigners can take to influence their local politicians.

We will also be continuing to work with our Parliamentary Champions on our various campaigns, ensuring that the voices of survivors are heard in Parliament.

Creating a legacy of support

Working through the campaign, survivors created powerful resources in the microsite and film. These resources are vital for sharing survivors’ stories with other women experiencing abuse, for raising awareness of the issues with health professionals and policymakers, and for reaching out to the public. These resources will continue to be shared by Women’s Aid through our website and other awareness raising efforts.



References

Home Office. (2022) *Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan – Command paper 639*. UK: Home Office. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan-command-paper-639-accessible-version>. [Accessed: 19th April 2023]

NHS (2022). *Guidance on developing the joint forward plan. Version 1.0. Publication reference number PR1940*. UK: National Health Service. Available at: www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/B1940-guidance-on-developing-the-joint-forward-plan-december-2022.pdf. [Accessed: 19th April 2023]

Thiara, R.K. and Harrison, C. (2021) *Reframing the Links: Black and minoritised women, domestic violence and abuse, and mental health - A Review of the Literature*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

Women's Aid. (2021) *Mental health and domestic abuse: A review of the literature*. Bristol: Women's Aid

Women's Aid. (2022) "Are you listening? 7 Pillars for a survivor-led approach to mental health support." Bristol: Women's Aid.

Women's Aid. (2023) *The Domestic Abuse Report 2023: The Annual Audit*. Bristol: Women's Aid.

© Women's Aid 2023

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. For almost 50 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 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 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, 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 Women's Aid Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

Women's Aid Federation of England is a registered charity in England & Wales (1054154) and is a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (3171880)



'Deserve To Be Heard: Campaign Impact'

© Women's Aid 2023, Registered Charity No.1054154
Women's Aid Federation of England, PO Box 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH

www.womensaid.org.uk | www.loverespect.co.uk