

*"This fund really has been a break in the clouds [for the clients we referred]. They are beyond grateful, when they received the funds they got in touch with their support workers, overjoyed. For some, they could clear debts, others could cover the food shopping and bills and one client was going to buy her daughter a laptop, as with so much homework being managed online via learning portals, she was the only child in her class that didn't have IT access at home to prepare for her GCSEs." [Women's Aid Federation of England 'by and for' member]*

*"And she's also got quite a lot of debt and hadn't been able to pay her rent so that ... every time I would see her, she'd be so upset to the point of crying. And when she received this, it was like it was a shock to her. And the pressure it took off her for the next time when I actually saw her face to face, she wasn't crying. So the mental health side of it and the stress side of it and the anxiety that she had over these things, it basically has eradicated a lot of that." [Welsh Women's Aid member service]*

## Emergency fund evaluation report

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Women's Aid, July 2023: Hannah Williams and Sarah Davidge

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## Introduction

On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023, Women's Aid launched an Emergency Fund to support survivors of domestic abuse with offered one-off payments.

The Home Office awarded a fund of £300,000 to deliver flexible grants for survivors of domestic abuse as part of the previously announced Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan<sup>1</sup> with the following objectives:

- To ensure survivors can effectively access the funding, particularly those facing structural inequalities and barriers to support – such as migrant women
- To ensure members and delivery partners – including 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's organisations – understand how to make referrals to the fund
- To ensure members and wider stakeholders understand the scope and purpose of the fund and to mitigate risks associated with Women's Aid holding it.

It was distributed via Women's Aid & Welsh Womens Aid's network of member services, with a proportion of the funding ring-fenced for Welsh Women's Aid members and for organisations delivering 'by and for' Black and minoritised survivors services.<sup>2</sup> This ring-fencing allowed us to ensure that the fund was accessible to survivors in both England and Wales proportionately. It also allowed us to ensure that services supporting Black and minoritised survivors, which typically are smaller in size, had access to funds. This was crucial as evidence shows deprivation is higher in Black and minoritised communities.<sup>3</sup>

The fund allowed support workers to apply for either £250, for a single survivor, or £500, for those who had children or were pregnant on behalf of the survivors they support. It could then be administered by a specialist service via bank transfers, vouchers, or cash. To be eligible for the fund, survivors had to have experienced domestic abuse within the last 12 months and met the following criteria:

- Financial dependency on partner or family member.
- Requires funds to flee abuse.
- Unable to meet debt repayments.
- Unable to replace/purchase essential goods for self/children.
- Unable to access their own money due to abuse.
- Unable to meet housing costs/rent payments whilst in refuge (e.g. whilst waiting for dual housing benefit).
- Unable to access appropriate housing.
- Unable to access benefits or waiting for benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan>

<sup>2</sup> Specialist 'by and for' services are run by and for the communities they serve, such as for Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organisations.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/oct/06/black-and-minority-ethnic-people-in-uk-twice-as-likely-to-be-in-deep-poverty>

- No access to benefits because of immigration status.
- Unable to care for their children or other caring responsibilities with family members.

Upon opening, the fund met an exceptionally high demand and was open for a total of five working days, closing on the 15<sup>th</sup> May for the non-ring fenced funding. All funding was allocated by 25<sup>th</sup> May.

This evaluation seeks to evidence and understand the impact of the fund on survivors. This report looks at the short-term impact the fund had on the survivors it supported and what worked well about this funding.

## Executive summary

On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023, Women's Aid Federation of England launched an emergency fund to support survivors of domestic abuse in England and Wales with offered one-off payments. The opening of the fund was met with an exceptionally high demand, causing the fund to close five working days later for the non-ring-fenced funding. During this period 626 applications were approved. This report seeks to evidence the short-term impact the funding had on the recipients of the funding using three key research questions.

### Key results

#### 1. What is the demographic profile of survivors applying to and receiving funds?

- a. Most successful applications were from female survivors of domestic abuse (97.3%) and 70.0% of successful applications were for £500, for those with dependents. This is to be expected with 61.9% of women accessing community based or refuge services between April 2021- March 2022 having children (Women's Aid, 2023).

#### 2. What did recipients use the funds for?

- a. 77.6% of applicants used their grant to replace or purchase essential goods for themselves or children<sup>4</sup>. Interviews showed that is because most survivors often leave an abuser with little to no belongings and this funding helped to replace or purchase needed items.
- b. 84.5% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the fund had supported the child(ren) of the survivor(s) they referred.
- c. 83.4% of applications said that the funding would be used to flee an abuser.

#### 3. To what extent did the fund meet the needs and improve outcomes for survivors?

- a. The most notable impact seen by referrers was on the mental health and wellbeing of women they support. The funding was able to alleviate pressures/worries, reliving economic stress and made survivors feel valued.
- b. The fund often did not contribute to a survivor's decision to flee abuse, however, it was an important part in the process of "staying fled"<sup>5</sup>. In the report we use an example of a survivor who was contemplating returning to the perpetrator, however, this funding allowed her to purchase goods ready for her baby and made the decision not to return to the perpetrator. It is important to acknowledge that this was a temporary fund, this outcome may differ if sustainable funding is available and awareness of this type of funding was more readily available.

### Recommendation

1. **Government commitment to a longer-term 'financial hardship fund' as part of the next spending review, to ensure survivors facing financial difficulty can access basic essentials.**

It is clear there is still a large unmet demand for such funding, from our findings we recommend the creation of a financial hardship fund, modelled on the recent 'emergency

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<sup>4</sup> Essential goods can include items such as food, toiletries and clothing

<sup>5</sup> "Staying fled" refers to the survivor being able to remain living in a separate home to the abuser, in the face of economic challenges which could potentially result in them being forced to return.

fund' to be disbursed through Women's Aid Federation of England, to a network of specialist domestic abuse services in England and Wales. To increase sustainability and maximise impact.

## Methodology

### Research questions

What was the short-term impact the funding had on the recipients? This was answered through the following sub-questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of survivors applying to and receiving funds? (including those rejected)
2. What did recipients use the funds for? (including what proportion of women used the fund to flee an abuser)
3. To what extent did the fund meet the needs and improve outcomes for survivors?

### Data collection

#### Data from application forms

##### **Analysis:**

We analysed the 626 approved applications to gain insight into demographic profile of survivors, their experiences of abuse, relationship with abuser, and what the funds were used for. We analysed 184 rejected applications to look at reasons for rejected referrals.

**Research questions addressed:** 1,2,3,

##### **Notes on sample:**

A total of 810 applications were made to the emergency fund from 63 domestic abuse organisations from across England and Wales. Of these applications, 184 applications were rejected and 626 were approved.

There were changes to the status of some applications after the fund closed. Seven applications were withdrawn due to the survivors no longer being with the service. Any remaining available funds will be reallocated to eligible applications that were previously rejected due to the fund closing. We were unable to account for the above status changes to applications in this evaluation due to the timing of the evaluation activities. Therefore, some of the analysis is not fully representative of the final sample. However, these changes affected a relatively small number of applications (n=7) and therefore the impact on what we present in this report is minimal.

### Interviews with support staff at specialist domestic abuse services

##### **Analysis:**

We conducted six interviews with support workers at seven of the specialist domestic abuse services able to refer to the fund. In addition, whilst the fund was live, we interviewed representatives from five Women's Aid member services who had submitted large numbers of applications, more than ten, on the first day. We used themes from these conversations to inform the discussion guides for the interviews.

The interviews allowed for a more in depth understanding of the applications process, barriers to accessing the fund and the immediate impact the fund had on survivors on domestic abuse.

**Research questions addressed:** 1, 3

### Sample

We ensured that our sample was representative of a range of experiences. Three organisations we interviewed after the fund had closed had submitted a large number of applications (more than ten) and two had submitted a small number of applications (less than five). We interviewed four member organisations from Women's Aid Federation of England, two of which were by and for organisations and two from Welsh Women's Aid.

### Survey to referrers

#### Analysis:

We analysed 98 responses to a quantitative survey of frontline workers who referred to the fund to gain insight on how well the fund met the needs of the survivors they support and the short-term impact on survivors referred to the fund.

**Research questions addressed:** 1,3

#### Notes on sample:

We surveyed 208 referrers who submitted an application on behalf of a survivor and received 98 responses (47.1% response rate).

There was a larger proportion of respondents from Welsh Women's Aid services in comparison to those who submitted applications, with 27.6% of responses coming from Welsh Women's Aid services in comparison to the 18.8% of all applications being submitted being from Welsh Women's Aid.

Comparatively, there was a smaller proportion of respondents from by and for organisations in comparison to applicants. 23.5% of respondents responding from a by and for organisation whereas 33.9% of applications came from by and for organisations.

Most regions were appropriately represented in the evaluation survey compared to the application data (Table 1). There was underrepresentation from East Midlands (4.1% vs 7.3%) and London (5.1% vs 10.4%) and overrepresentation from East of England (9.2% vs 3.5%) and South Wales (15.3% vs 8.0%).

**Table 1: location of services responding to survey (analysis of application form data)**

Row Labels	% in survey	% in application data
East Midlands	4.1%	7.3%
East of England	9.2%	3.5%
London	5.1%	10.4%



Mid and West Wales	1.0%	1.3%
North East England	2.0%	2.4%
North Wales	12.2%	8.8%
North West England	21.4%	23.6%
South East England	8.2%	11.7%
South Wales	15.3%	8.0%
South West England	3.1%	5.1%
West Midlands	14.3%	13.3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	4.1%	4.5%
Grand Total	100.0%	99.8%

Over a quarter (26.5%) of respondents only made one application to the fund and just under a quarter submitted six to ten applications. Of all applications, 29.6% had some of their applications rejected and 7.1% had all their applications rejected. The majority, however, reported none of their applications to be rejected (61.2%).

Table 2: number of applications per respondent (analysis of survey responses)

Number of applications	Percentage
1	26.5%
2	16.3%
3	8.2%
4	9.2%
5	11.2%
6-10	24.5%
11-20	3.1%
Unsure	1.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Considerations

The fund was open for a very short period of time. It is likely that many who would have qualified for the fund were unable to access it due to the short timeframe and limited overall funding available. This means that whilst this evaluation can evidence certain themes from this round of funding, it cannot make assumptions about national need.

Furthermore, within this report we only speak to the short-term impact of the fund. As the evaluation activities started immediately after the funding was closed, it meant we were

gathering feedback from referrers less than a month after the funding was closed which did not include data on the long-term impact of the fund. We are not able to speak to the long-term sustainable impact of a fund like this on the impact this might have on a decision to leave an abuser.

It is worth noting that we did not interview the ultimate beneficiaries of the fund, the survivors of domestic abuse. This was so that we were able to protect the confidentiality of survivors referred to the fund and not place an additional burden on them. Instead, our qualitative work focussed on frontline workers. This approach increased the scope of our qualitative inquiry, allowing us to gather information from experts who can share information about the impact on multiple survivors in their service.

The demographic profile of the survivors who accessed the fund is largely representative of the national picture we see through the data collected in On Track (Women's Aid, 2023a)<sup>6</sup>, with one significant difference. Over a quarter of those who accessed the fund were from an Asian (25.9%) or Black (9.3%) ethnic background whereas in the previous financial year, just over fifteen percent of those who accessed domestic abuse support services were from Asian (10.4%) or Black (6.4%) ethnic background. This variation is likely a result of ring fencing a portion of the fund for by and for organisations, meaning the proportion of applicants from Black and minoritised backgrounds are likely to be overrepresented in this sample compared to national data.

## Findings

### 1. What do we know about survivors applying to and receiving funds? (including rejected referrals)

#### 1.1 Who referred to the fund

The fund was accessible to all members of Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid. A total of 115 (18.4%) approved applications came from Welsh Women's Aid member services. The remaining 511 (81.6%) applications were from Women's Aid Federation of England members at the time of analysing the application data. There were 213 (33.9%) applications from by and for member services.

#### 1.2 Referral amounts and methods

- 438 (70.0%) payments of £500 were given to survivors with dependent children and 188 (30.0%) payments of £250 were given to survivors with no dependents.

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<sup>6</sup> Every financial year we publish an Annual Audit with an overview of the provision and uptake of domestic abuse services in England, using data from On Track (Women's Aid case management and outcomes measurement system). We compared the sample of survivors who accessed the emergency fund with the sample of survivors who accessed refuge or community-based support services in England in the year 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

- 339 (54.2%) of survivors received their payments through a bank transfer, 259 (41.4%) received cash payments and 28 (4.5%) received a voucher.

### 1.3 Demographic data

Analysis of demographic data in this section is based on application forms for survivors who were successfully referred to the fund (n=626), unless otherwise stated.

#### *Sex and gender identity*

- Successful applications included 609 (97.3%) female survivors, 15 (2.4%) male survivors and two who did not wish to disclose their sex.
- 610 (97.4%) survivors said their gender identity was not different to their sex, 1 (0.2%) survivor identified as a transgender man and 3 (0.5%) survivors identified as a transgender woman<sup>7</sup>.

#### *Sexual orientation*

- The majority of survivors identified as heterosexual (596 / 95.2%); 5 (0.8%) survivors identified as a lesbian; 1 (0.3%) survivor identified as gay, and 4 (0.6%) survivors identified as bisexual<sup>8</sup>.

#### *Age*

The majority of survivors referred to the fund were aged between 25 and 39 (372 / 59.4%). See table 3 for a full breakdown by age group.

Table 3: age of survivors who were successfully referred to the emergency fund (analysis of application form data)

Age	#	%
16-19	10	1.6%
20-24	60	9.6%
25-29	113	18.1%
30-34	138	22.0%
35-39	121	19.3%
40-44	92	14.7%
45-49	36	5.8%
50-54	23	3.7%
55-59	8	1.3%
60-64	8	1.3%
65-69	6	1.0%
70-74	6	1.0%
85-89	1	0.2%
Unknown	4	0.6%
Grand Total	626	

<sup>7</sup> 9 (1.4%) survivors preferred to self-describe, 1 (0.2%) did not wish to disclose if their gender identity differed to their sex and there were 2 (0.3%) applications where this was unknown by the referrer

<sup>8</sup> 15 (2.4%) referrals marked the survivor's sexual orientation as unknown, 4 (0.6%) did not wish to disclose their sexual orientation and 1 (0.2%) survivor identified as 'Other'

### *Nationality and ethnicity*

- 422 (67.4%) of survivors successfully referred to the fund were British nationals.
- 201 (32.1%) of survivors were either EEA citizens or other nationalities<sup>9</sup> and these applications recorded the immigration status of the survivor. Of these, 64 (31.8%) had indefinite leave to remain and 36 (17.9%) were on a spouse visa<sup>10</sup>.
- 356 survivors (56.9%) were from a white ethnic background 162 (25.9%) were from an Asian ethnic background, and 58 (9.3%) were from a Black ethnic background. There were 17 (2.7%) survivors who were from mixed or multiple ethnic groups and 30 (4.8%) were from 'Other' ethnic groups<sup>11</sup>.

### *Disability and long-term health conditions*

- 183 (29.2%) survivors reported they had a disability or long-term health condition.
- Of these survivors, the most reported type of health condition was a mental health impairment (97 / 53.0%) followed by having physical health impairment (57 / 31.1%)<sup>12</sup>.

### *Religion*

- There were 135 (21.6%) Muslim survivors, 118 (18.8%) who were Christian, 47 (7.5%) who were Sikh, 15 (2.4%) who were Hindu, and 1 who was Buddhist. 2 (0.4%) survivors identified as Spiritual. 235 (37.5%) survivors did not have a religion<sup>13</sup>.

### *Marital status*

- 258 (41.2%) survivors were separated and 270 (43.1%) were single. 51 (8.1%) were married or in a civil partnership, 27 (4.3%) were divorced or had legally dissolved their partnership, and 11 (1.8%) were cohabiting<sup>14</sup>.

### *Pregnancy and children*

- 30 survivors (4.8%) were pregnant at the time the referral was made.
- 438 (70.0%) of referrals made were for women with children or who were pregnant.

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<sup>9</sup> 0.5% (3) of applications recorded nationality as do not wish to say or unknown.

<sup>10</sup> Other types of immigration status recorded included: limited leave to remain (10%), EEA background (7%) and refugee asylum (7.5%), settled status (6.5%), other (7%), work/study/ visitors visa= 2.5%, Unknown= 0.5%, do not wish to say= 0.5%

<sup>11</sup> The ethnic background of 1 (0.2%) survivor was unknown and 2 (0.3%) did not wish to disclose this information.

<sup>12</sup> Other health conditions included: Learning difficulty (2.7%), Learning disability (2.2%) Neurological condition (2.2%), organ-specific (1.1%). There were roughly 10 other health conditions only recorded once.

<sup>13</sup> 16 (2.6%) who did not wish to disclose their religion and 57 (9.1%) referrals where the survivor's was not known.

<sup>14</sup> The marital status of 5 survivors was unknown and 1 (0.2%) survivor did not wish to disclose this information.3 (0.5%) survivors were widowed

## 1.4 Experiences of abuse and relationship to abuser

- 203 (32.4%) applications were made on behalf of survivors who were experiencing domestic abuse at the time of the referral and 420 (67.1%) had previously been a victim of abuse within the past 12 months<sup>15</sup>.
- 334 (53.4%) of survivors had experienced abuse from their current partner (at time of the abuse), 275 (43.9%) had experienced abuse from their ex-partner (at the time of abuse), and 75 (12.0%) had experienced abuse from a family member. This question allowed referrers to select multiple options to allow for a situation where a survivor was experiencing abuse from more than one person. There were 61 applications with more than one option selected.
- At the time of referral, 596 (95.2%) survivors did not live in the same household as the abuser and 30 (4.8%) did. At the time of referral, 596 (95.2%) survivors were not in a relationship with the abuser (at the time of referral), 28 (4.5%) were in a relationship and the relationship status was unknown for two of the applications.

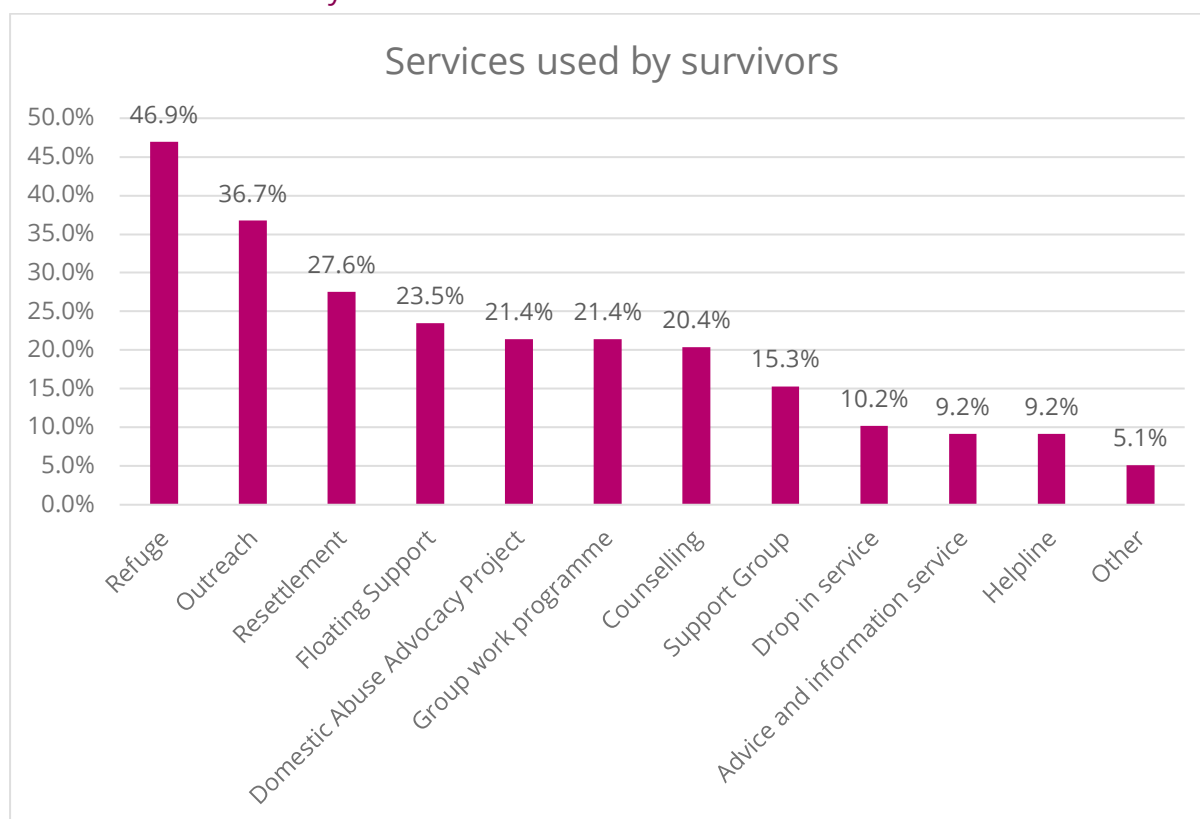
## 1.5 Service use

In terms of which type of services were supporting the survivors who accessed the fund, the most common services recorded were refuge services (46.9%), outreach services (36.7%) and resettlement services (27.6%) (See chart 1). Please note respondents could select more than one option as survivors may be accessing multiple services, though they would not be accessing the three mentioned concurrently.

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<sup>15</sup> 3 (0.5%) applications did not wish to disclose whether their experience of domestic abuse was current

Chart 1 Services used by survivors who accessed the fund



## 1.6 Rejected applications

We received 184 applications which were rejected.

- 175 were from Women's Aid member services in England and 9 were from Welsh Women's Aid member services. In all, 40 of the rejected applications were from by and for services.
- The majority, 107 (60.5%), of applications were rejected due to the fund being completely allocated by the time they were received.
- A further 45 (25.4%) applications were rejected because the cap of 10 applications per organisation had been reached.

## 2. What did recipients use the funds for?

### 2.1 Reasons for referral

Referrers were able to select multiple options from a list of ten reasons for referring a survivor. The most commonly recorded reason was that the survivor was unable to replace or purchase essential goods for themselves or their child/ren (486 / 77.6% of application forms). Survivors being unable to meet debt repayments (234 / 37.4%) was the next most common reason followed by being unable to access appropriate housing (162 / 25.9%).

Only 5.1% (n=5) of survey respondents reported any changes to how the survivor spent the grant money, in comparison to what was recorded on the application form. Respondents clarified in each case that the changes were within the remit of the fund and referenced changes to specifics such as paying to replace a broken washing machine rather than purchasing beds as originally planned.

**Table 4: reasons for referral (analysis of application form data)**

<b>Reason (can pick more than one)</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Financial dependency on partner of family member	143	22.8%
Required funds to flee	94	15.0%
Unable to meet debt repayments	234	37.4%
Unable to replace/ purchase essential goods for self/children	486	77.6%
Unable to access their own money due to abuse	51	8.1%
Unable to meet housing cost/rent payments whilst in refuge	139	22.2%
Unable to access appropriate housing	162	25.9%
Unable to access benefits or waiting for benefits	104	16.6%
No access to benefits because of immigration status	57	9.1%
Unable to care for their children or caring responsibilities with family members	67	10.7%

## 2.2 How grants were spent

When we asked interviewees how survivors spent their funding, they gave a variety of responses. They told us that some survivors had paid off their arrears, others used it to purchase food or clothing, home security items, mobile phones or used to buy essential good for their children.

Referrers were asked whether the funds will be used to flee an abuser. In response, 522 applications (83.4%) said, yes, the survivor will use the fund to flee, 77 (12.3%) said this would not be the case and 26 (4.2%) applications answered unknown. See section 3.3 on the impact of the fund for further discussion on this.

As mentioned in 1.1, 70.0% of grants were awarded to those with dependents and 84.5% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the fund had supported the child(ren) of the survivor(s) they referred<sup>16</sup>. See section 3.5 on the impact of the fund on children for further discussion on this.

Funds were also used to provide housing and fresh food for women with children and, in one case we were told about, preventing homelessness. In survey responses, referrers noted how the funding provided safer housing for women and their children, away from the abusers, with a number of interviewees noting that the funding was used to purchase security measures such as Ring door bells or CCTV. It is therefore clear that this fund had great impact not only on those who received the funding but also their dependents, increasing their quality of life and safety.

<sup>16</sup> Not applicable removed. Base=84.

### 3. To what extent did the fund meet the needs and improve outcomes for survivors?

#### 3.1 Referrer perspectives on need

We asked interviewees to tell us how or if they made any preparations to be ready for the fund opening. Five out of the six interviewees who had made referrals had made decisions about who to refer to the fund prior to the fund opening. Most interviewees referenced having strong knowledge of their case load and knowing from this experience who would benefit most from the funding:

*"I've basically sat down, had a look at my ladies and thought I knew which ones and I see them every week anyway, so I generally know what they're going through and what have you and it was like fantastic, get this done now because I bet it won't last long."*

When we explored further with interviewees the basis on which they prioritised survivors to refer, three main themes emerged.

#### *Gaps in accessing benefits*

Regarding referral decisions that were influenced by universal credit (UC) or receipt of benefits, referrers referenced prioritising survivors who had not received universal credit funding, those who had to cancel their UC due to having a joint application with the perpetrator or those who had complications receiving their benefits. Proof of identity and a bank account are needed to apply for UC, but survivors who have fled without documents or who experienced economic abuse may not have these, or may not have access to them, which can slow down the application process. Even if survivors apply for an advance payment to reduce the wait, the deductions from future payments can threaten their ability to afford essentials (JRF and TTT, 2023).

*"So the women that didn't get the Universal Credit top up. It was basically they came first .... So it kind of was just trying to make it in the fairest way as possible."*

Survivors with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) cannot access benefits. Whilst those who came to the UK on a spousal visa may be able to gain access to benefits via a Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC), this is not available to those on other types of visas or those who are undocumented, who may face additional barriers and financial hardship when leaving an abuser.

#### *Possible risk to the survivor*

We also heard from referrers that they had made referral decisions based on the safety of their clients. One referrer noted referring to their clients' safety and support plans to identify where support might be needed:



*“When clients are referred into MARAC and we have that initial assessment, when we do an initial safety and support plan with the client, things are identified ... I had a client for example, who had to borrow money to get a Ring doorbell and it was an elderly gentleman and then I had a lady who has got no mobile phone due to it being broken in an incident”*

### *Whether the survivor had dependants*

Three out of the six referrers said that a driving factor in prioritising referrals was whether or not their client had dependents.

*“The ones that basically have got children... and were struggling and was struggling with mental health as a result of debt and being chased for debt that was more of a priority really, because I've found that that really does impact people, especially when they're away from family and they can't really speak to family about it or they're embarrassed by it”*

## 3.2 Impact of grants on survivors' mental health and wellbeing

The most notable impact seen by referrers was the impact of this funding on the mental health and wellbeing of women they support.

Research suggests that improvements in wellbeing are linked to a variety of factors with the potential to impact on other areas of survivors' lives, such as health<sup>17</sup>. Research from Women's Aid shows that a substantial portion of the public sector costs associated with domestic abuse are costs to the health and mental health system (Women's Aid, 2023b). We cannot determine from this evaluation if any short-term wellbeing gains will persist, or what their economic impacts are, but if wellbeing gains are shown to be real and are sustained, they have the potential to have positive, wide ranging impacts for survivors and their communities.

### *Alleviating pressure/worries*

When asked about how the fund impacted survivors, most interviewees said that it had an impact on the mental health of their clients, reporting it alleviated some of the pressure and worries felt by survivors. Interviewees noted that if more survivors knew this fund was an option it might encourage them to leave.

*“What we know is some women, if they continue to struggle, we don't want them to start thinking about returning to the perpetrator. So what we were trying to do is to offer them any opportunity we can to make sure that they are as safe and settled as possible.”*

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<sup>17</sup> <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/category/mental-and-physical-health/>;

### *Relieving economic stress*

Evidence from interviews and the survey supports the idea that relieving economic pressures improves survivors' wellbeing. In an interview one referrers noted the relief that her client felt after their financial stress was reduced by receiving funding:

*"And she's also got quite a lot of debt and hadn't been able to pay her rent so that ... every time I would see her, she'd be so upset to the point of crying. And when she received this, it was like it was a shock to her. And the pressure it took off her for the next time when I actually saw her face to face, she wasn't crying. So the mental health side of it and the stress side of it and the anxiety that she had over these things, it basically has eradicated a lot of that."*

### *Feeling valued*

The other theme seen from these interviews is around the feeling of survivors being valued. Many mentioned the positive impact this fund had on their clients, noting that it made their clients feel as though there are people out there who care and can support them. It is likely that the agency this fund delivered in terms of the freedom to spend the money on what they know they need aided this feeling. The very existence of the fund seemed to improve survivors' wellbeing because it signalled to them that there was support available and that they were not at fault for the bad things that happened to them:

*"I do think it impacted their mental health that actually, you know, they're not in the wrong and where the abuse has happened, it wasn't their fault. Good things do happen. And so that was really nice to sort of discuss after the money was given. And just to, you know, talk generally, you know, cause we talk about all the different things and just let you know look there is help and support out there. So I think it really impacted their mental health."*

## **3.3 Fleeing an abuser**

Our evaluation showed that even where the fund did not directly contribute to a survivor's decision to flee abuse, it was an important part in the process of "staying fled". By this we mean that the survivor is able to remain living in a separate home to the abuser, in the face of economic challenges. We know that economic circumstances can push women back into contact with their abusers during the critical early stages of fleeing, particularly when they have to consider the welfare of their children, and even force them to return to a joint living situation. Funding to enable survivors to purchase essential goods and support moves to safe housing, can help them to establish independence and safety. It is clear from the evaluation evidence gathered that, at least in the short-term, one direct impact of the fund for survivors was in helping them to 'stay fled'.

Most applicants were not in a relationship (95.2%) or living with an abuser(s) (95.2%) at the time the referral was made showing that most had started the process of fleeing. However, 83.4% of applications recorded that the funds would be used in relation to fleeing an abuser showing that a large proportion of the referrals were made to support this early 'staying fled'

period. This, however, could also be reflective of the model of funding. Where services have a strong working knowledge of their caseload and know they are supporting survivors who are experiencing financial hardship they might be more likely to refer those survivors rather than those that are considering fleeing to support the process of staying fled. This sentiment is reflected in the below comment from an interviewee:

*“What we know is some women, if they continue to struggle, we don’t want them to start thinking about returning to the perpetrator. So what we were trying to do is to offer them any opportunity we can to make sure that they are as safe and settled as possible.”*

Around three quarters (73.4%) of survey respondents reported that without this fund the survivor(s) they referred would have struggled to leave an abuser<sup>18</sup>. It is therefore evident that this fund played an important role in helping survivors of domestic abuse flee their abusers. We saw in our survey results that 79.4% either agreed or strongly agreed that the fund helped the survivor they support flee abuse<sup>12</sup>.

When asked on a scale of one to ten how confident they felt that the survivor(s) they referred left or will be leaving their perpetrator in the immediate future after being referred to the fund, referrers responded 8.8 on average<sup>19</sup>.

Interviewees were able to shed light on how important this funding was in helping with the process of moving on from abuse/staying fled rather than fleeing.

*“You know you’ve just separated, you’ve just fled. You’re in a new place. Some women feel like “Oh my God, I can’t”. This place is like I just can’t survive here and then some do consider going back to the perpetrator. Some struggle, but make it through. And I think with a bit of help a lot more women would stay safe and away from the abuse if they had that help and support. And we know that finances plays a major, major role in that”*

Through interviews and the survey, support workers also reported that survivors used the funds to secure new housing or to maintain safe housing away from their abusers, further supporting their ability to stay safely fled:

*“Has enabled some clients to move house and escape perpetrator, increasing safety. Another was able to make a month’s rent payment to secure housing for her and children for another month.”*

We know from our research that when leaving refuge some survivors do reconcile with their perpetrators, our analysis of those who were in refuge services from April 2020-March 2021 shows that 7.0% of those in refuge did reconcile with the perpetrator<sup>20</sup>. In another interview, we captured an example that showed a pregnant survivor who concerned about having to

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<sup>18</sup> Not applicable removed (n=32). Base for metric = 64.

<sup>19</sup> Base=88. 75.0% of referrers responded either nine out of ten or ten out of ten to this question.

<sup>20</sup> Unpublished data from Women’s Aid On Track database

return to their perpetrator because she did not have the financial resources to look after her baby however, this funding ultimately stopped her making that decision:

*“ So she was a student at the time and she was being supported by who was her partner at the time financially. And, you know, he had the tenancy, he had the money, he had the bank account, everything. And so really, when I applied for that, it was to support her in getting things for herself and baby set up. And because I remember one day when we'd had a conversation, and it was before my knowledge of the grant, she was like, I don't want to go back [to the perpetrator] because I can't afford to raise the baby on my own.*

*... and she got given 500 pounds and from that she actually managed to set up her entire nursery, get all her bottles and get clothes for the first couple of months. You know, she was like, I don't need him cause I can do this by myself, like, you know. And yeah, it's honestly it has just changed things massively for her. Every everything's set up. She didn't feel like she needed any money. She didn't feel like she needed to contact him for any money”*

It is important to note however that we are only looking at the short-term impact of the funding in this evaluation. The presence of this type of grant on a more sustainable and long-term basis would enable us to also measure the impact of pre-existing awareness of the fund on a survivor's decision to leave an abuser.

### 3.4 Essential needs

The majority agreed that without this fund the survivor(s) referred would have struggled to pay for essentials (87.8%)<sup>21</sup>.

Many mentioned that when survivors flee abuse, they flee with relatively little or no belongings. This referrer talked about her client who used the funding to purchase clothing as she did not have any clothing when she entered the service due to the abuse she experienced:

*“So they've either had to leave their belongings and stuff in the marriage or home when fleeing or because of economic abuse or financial abuse. They haven't been able to apply for anything like benefits or whatever to be able to get some stuff for their children or like I gave that example of that other client, the single one who ... her mum and stepdad, tore up her clothing as a form of punishment because they weren't happy with the way she was.”*

The act of buying clothing for a survivor of domestic abuse can have larger impacts than simply replacing lost items, especially if they have previously been subjected to controlling

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<sup>21</sup> Not applicable removed. Base=90.

behaviour. One referrer described how being able to purchase her own clothes impacted her client's self-esteem:

*“Self esteem. Her own self worth her own individuality. The person that she is, she's able to get that person back a little bit because she's had to leave with nothing she's left with the clothes on her back and she was able to go out and buy things that she wants to wear, things that she can make a decision on. And so that's quite impactful.”*

### 3.5 Impact on children

The effects of domestic abuse on children are profound. Children are recognised as victims of domestic abuse as included in the legal definition of domestic abuse implemented as a result of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. As such the fund had a strong impact on the welfare of survivors' children. In our survey, 84.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the fund had supported the child(ren) of the survivor(s) they referred. Our interviewees told us this included funding being used to visit children, opportunities to use the funding to improve emergency accommodation for children and purchasing essential goods for children. This was supported through the interviews we conducted with support workers providing examples of how those who accessed the fund used it to support their children:

*“And I have a young lady who's only 18 and pregnant by her perpetrator. But she's been moved out of area and she is under children's social care herself. And she was using this this money because she has to go into, well, she had the option of mum and baby or mother and baby foster. And she took mother and baby foster. So she now has the money to go and buy the things for the baby that she needs to go into that”*

Another gave an example of a survivor who had recently gained custody of her children after fleeing abuse and using the money to purchase items for her home for when the children come back into her care.

The flexibility of the fund allowed survivors to better meet the needs of their children whilst in temporary accommodation, again contributing to survivors' ability to remain safely in that stop gap accommodation and stay fled. One interviewee gave this example:

*“She was basically placed in temporary accommodation, emergency temporary accommodation without a washing machine, and she has a child with special needs and another older child, and she had been placed in that accommodation due to a serious incident. Buying, like a washing machine or something like that to try and just ease that pressure on her.”*

### 3.6 Most impactful time to receive the grant

Understanding when and where this funding is most needed by those fleeing abuse was a core aim of this evaluation process. We know from our survey analysis almost half of survivors receiving the fund were in refuge services (46.9%), with a third in outreach services (36.7%) and 27.6% in resettlement services, showing a clear need for this funding in accommodation-based services and community-based support services.

When speaking to interviewees we asked what point in their journey they felt survivors would benefit most from type of grant funding. Some mentioned that this is difficult to pinpoint and that there will always be someone in need and every survivor has a unique experience of abuse. However, two key moments were mentioned in responses as the most impactful time to receive fundings. These were when the survivor had just fled abuse and when they came to access move-on accommodation after refuge.

#### *Immediately after leaving an abuser*

Interviewees noted that when survivors have just left an abuser it is an important time to receive financial support. Many of the survivors they support leave their homes with little to no belongings and need financial support to purchase essentials, such as food or clothing. They also mentioned that many survivors see gaps between entering services and having access to benefits; this is even more challenging for those who have NRPF. This can also create challenges for survivors around paying for their stay in refuge.

*“Really significant for our survivors who are living in refuge and unable to make the payment of service charge and they were able to get that up to date because that service charge then goes in on to be a housing debt which we don't want anybody to leave refuge into independence with a housing debt hanging over them”*

*“... it's a good support for women who have come into refuge because often they have joint UC claim which is shutdown straight away and to prevent obviously the perpetrator from accessing the money or women who have no recourse to public funds and we have to get the process up and ready for the UC and that application can take time.”*

#### *Moving on from refuge*

When entering new accommodation following a stay in refuge, interviewees often mentioned the need to make new accommodation safe and suitable for a survivor. This included installing security arrangements, such as CCTV or Ring doorbells in new accommodation or purchasing suitable appliances and furniture for new housing. Examples of how financial support during this time would be used were given in our interviews and included buying home essentials or improving the security of their new homes. One interviewee noted that funding during this period helps survivors have an increased sense of independence:

*“So I think those early stages where they come to refuge and it's probably quite essential. And then the other end of it is when they moving on and so when we do support women and through their journey, we encourage them to save as much as possible. And some women know they do fantastically.....Um, but as you know, moving out, especially if they're going to council properties, is all unfurnished uncarpeted. They need a lot of money to move on independently, and we've always said that it takes time ..... So I think in terms of a fund like this it's literally at the beginning of when they joined the project and then when they're ready to move on.”*

### 3.7 Demand for funding

Evidently, there is clear high demand for this funding. This is firstly evidenced by the rate at which the funding was administered, with the non-ring-fenced funding being allocated within five days and all the funding being allocated within 16 calendar days. As well as demonstrating demand our evaluation shows us that there is still unmet need. A quarter of survey respondents (25.5%) said they had eligible survivors in their service they would have liked to refer but could not due to the limited available funding and almost all respondents said they would use the emergency fund again if they had the opportunity to do so (98.0%). Furthermore, the main reason for rejected applications was that the funding had already being allocated (60.5%). Evidence of unmet demand was also reflected in the interviews where caps on the number of applications influenced the decision-making process of who workers referred to the fund, notably demonstrated in the below comment:

*“I do think it was a difficult decision for us. And you know, like an elimination process and it was hard and in the end, even though when we said just to action, just trying to think we ended up pulling names out of a hat.”*

This clearly demonstrates that there is still an unmet demand for funding of this nature amongst domestic abuse services and the survivors they support.



## Recommendation and conclusion

### Recommendation

We recommend a continuation of a financial hardship fund for survivors of domestic abuse using the model piloted.

A quarter of respondents to the survey said that they had more survivors whom they would refer if funds were available and 98% said they would use the fund again if there were an opportunity to do so. This evaluation clearly demonstrates that there is unmet demand for a fund that provides immediately accessible small grants to individual survivors to support them in fleeing abuse or remaining fled from their abusers.

The success of this fund shows that the model piloted served well to meet need, with delivery through Women's Aid Federation of England removing significant parts of the administrative burden for frontline services. It also evidences the quality of using existing communication networks on positive experiences of communications of this funding. It is clear there is still a large unmet demand for such funding, from our findings we recommend the creation of a longer-term financial hardship fund, modelled on the recent 'emergency fund' to be disbursed through Women's Aid Federation of England, working with agreed partners through memoranda of understanding, to a network of specialist domestic abuse services in England and Wales. A larger, longer-term fund replicating the model piloted would enable more services to refer survivors and be more effective. Ring-fencing a portion of the funding for specialist service providers would still be important, as this aspect of the fund was generally viewed as successful.

A future iteration of the fund should consider better targeting so that funds are allocated more slowly and in a predictable fashion. Some adjustments to the criteria are recommended to create a more sustainable fund.

### Conclusion

As this evaluation shows, the emergency fund had widespread participation from domestic abuse services in England and Wales with large appetite for further grants to be made available for survivors. The model used was a success, with a positive response from domestic abuse service providers,

This evaluation has demonstrated that the fund had an important impact on supporting survivors to flee abuse and stay fled and the qualitative evidence gathered shows the positive impact on survivors' wellbeing and on the quality of life for their children.

Our evaluation highlights (see section 3.1) that delays and complexities in accessing benefits such as UC, and NRPF meaning that women couldn't access benefits, were a key reason for women requiring this emergency funding

In conclusion, this evaluation demonstrates unmet demand suggesting a need for additional fund, with suggested recommendations to enhance sustainability and impact of any future interaction.



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