

Wirral Women & Children's Aid

Trustees' Report

for the year ended 31 March 2013

The Trustees present their report for the year ended 31 March 2013.

Mission Statement

Everyone has the right to live free from abuse and fear.

The vast majority of the victims of domestic violence are women, children and young people. Wirral Women and Children's Aid is committed to intervening positively and effectively on their behalf. We aim to help women to move forward from a destructive relationship and to take control of their lives in a constructive, proactive way. We provide a safe, caring environment within which we can address their needs through:

- individual support, encouragement and protection
- group work activities
- OFSTED accredited crèche
- play facilities for older children
- Youth Club
- access to key services including health, social care, education and housing.

Our service is unique in Wirral for a number of reasons which include:

- Quality and depth of support given
- Knowledge, experience and commitment of staff
- Minimal staff turnover and high level of staff retention
- 24 hour cover and Helpline
- High level of involvement with other agencies
- Ability to accommodate a wide range of needs including some levels of disability
- Ability to accommodate mothers with older dependent children.

The success of the Refuge depends on our commitment to professionally assess the needs of the women, young people and children who arrive at the Refuge. Many are frightened, emotionally traumatised, financially insecure and have few personal belongings with them. We aim to provide a cohesive and holistic plan which will nurture, support and empower them through the individual support plan which is set up, developed and monitored for each new resident. The purpose built living accommodation provides them with a secure, safe environment, allowing both privacy and communal support. The Refuge gives them the time and space needed in order to move forward, make decisions and plan for a future which will give them a better quality of life and increased resilience.

We have identified the following as our key performance indicators:-

- Strive to prevent women from returning to known abusive partners by giving appropriate support in resettlement and thereby preventing repeat homelessness
- Ensure full contractual compliance with the requirements of Supporting People and other funding bodies
- Speedy enrolment at appropriate school for children and particularly those of secondary school age where we have encountered delays
- Multi-agency approach to resolving issues and solving problems/challenges
- Exercise effective risk assessment procedures in order to safeguard residents of all ages from harm and thereby secure the reputation of WWACA.

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Achievements and Performance

The core operation of the Refuge, which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, is funded by Supporting People. The Supporting People grant, which is based on the maximum number of women who can be accommodated in the Refuge at any one time, together with the rental income, covers the core staffing and day to day running costs of the Refuge. The charity operates the Domestic Violence Helpline which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Refuge has its own website, www.wirralwomensrefuge.co.uk, which provides contact details and explains the facilities available, including photographs.

During the year to 31 March 2013, the Refuge accommodated 44 women and 65 children. The accessible flat was utilised for most of the year by one family with three young children, including one severely disabled child. The family were in the Refuge for 21 months due to the difficulties experienced in finding suitable housing with appropriate facilities. The other self-contained flat was utilised by a number of families including one with 4 girls and a teenage boy and one family with specific cultural needs. We received referrals for a further 141 families who could not be accommodated either because the Refuge was full at the time of referral (16 families) or for other reasons including:

- safety reasons (families who needed to be away from the Wirral area)
- wanting to be nearer to their families
- being deemed to potentially pose a risk to other residents and staff for reasons including mental health issues, alcohol and substance misuse and other challenging behaviours
- being unable to meet their accommodation needs
- no recourse to public funds
- not domestic abuse.

In addition, referrals were received and accommodation was offered to 33 families who decided not to accept. We accommodate a diverse range of people including teenage parents, elderly and frail elderly, black and minority ethnic, those with physical or sensory disabilities and others with a history of substance misuse.

The dedicated hardworking team of staff work tirelessly to create a safe haven where children can flourish and thrive. Women can begin to take control of their lives and realise that positive choices can be made which will improve their emotional and physical well-being.

The weekly in-house Women's Group sessions have continued with an increased number of participants. The integration of Outreach clients with the residents proved very successful and our staff facilitators have been impressed by the women's understanding of the need for confidentiality. The main theme of the sessions is to inform and support women who have suffered domestic abuse so that they will feel valued, more confident, safe and able to engage more effectively in their children's lives and in the wider community.

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The childcare workers continue to run the OFSTED accredited playroom, the Sunshine room (for children aged 11 and over) and the weekly Youth Club, which is run off-site with the help of support workers. As the core funding from Supporting People and Housing Benefits does not include any provision for work with the children who have experienced domestic abuse, we are reliant on donations and fund-raising to continue this essential part of our work. A highlight this year was a trip for the Youth Club group that included an overnight stay in a hotel. This was a very different experience to the usual boundaries imposed from living in a residential refuge and from the previous holidays which had been in a self-contained environment.

One of the aims of Outreach work is to keep to a minimum the numbers of women who return to abusive relationships, to reduce the levels of repeat homelessness for women who have been in the Refuge and returned again due to issues of isolation, lack of support or difficulty in accessing services and also to reduce further disruption to the lives of their children. Outreach work is central both in intervention with women experiencing abuse in the community and the positive resettlement of residents. Whilst our Outreach Worker concentrates on identifying and providing support and information to women experiencing domestic abuse who are living in the community, the project workers' outreach work is focused on resettlement of residents during the first three months after they leave the Refuge. Where ongoing support is required after three months, the case is transferred to the Outreach Worker. The initial external funding for this post expired in May 2012 but we have been able to source further funding towards the cost of the Outreach worker for the next three years.

Throughout the year, staff have taken many opportunities to participate in relevant training. This year the training has included Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding, mental health, MARAC awareness, mentoring and honour based violence. In addition, Val Sanders, Head of Service, has been a facilitator on the multi-agency Domestic Abuse training programme. The diverse nature of the training undertaken provides staff with up to date knowledge and skills and increases their professional ability to deal with the various complex needs presented.

Details of the charity, its Trustees and advisers

The registered name of the charity is Wirral Women and Children's Aid, charity number 1106399, company number 5250366.

All Trustees who served during the year are listed on page 1, along with details of the registered office and the charity's professional advisers.

Constitution and organisation

The charity was established in 1981 as The Womens' Refuge and later changed its name to Wirral Women and Children's Aid to reflect the work done with children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse.

The company was registered with the Charity Commission on 21 October 2004 and is a company limited by guarantee, governed by its memorandum and articles of association, incorporated on 5 October 2004. With effect from 1 April 2005, all the assets and the activities of the previous charity, which was constituted as an unincorporated association by trust deed, were transferred to the new company, using the same name of Wirral Women and Children's Aid.

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The Management Committee appoints all new trustees, based on selection criteria which ensure that collectively it maintains a broad range of relevant skills and experience. Nominations are sought from current trustees and from interested organisations and individuals.

The Management Committee meet at least 6 times per year with other subcommittees set-up to consider and report back to the Management Committee as required. Day to day operational decisions are delegated to the Head of Service, Mrs Valerie Sanders.

Risk management

The Management Committee has overall responsibility for the system of internal control for the charity. However, such a system can provide only reasonable, but not absolute, assurance against errors and fraud. The charity operates a comprehensive budgeting process which is approved by the Management Committee. Reports of actual financial results against budget are made to the Management Committee at the end of each quarter, including linking financial performance with resource and activity levels.

The charity has risk management policies and procedures throughout, in which risks arising from the existing operations and strategic developments are identified and evaluated. All major risks to which the charity is exposed have been reviewed and the systems implemented to mitigate these risks are continually being developed or enhanced.

Financial Review

Results

In summary, total incoming resources were £417,932 whilst total resources expended were £380,731 resulting in a net surplus for the year of £37,201. Total funds at 31 March 2013 were £455,816 of which £50,567 are restricted to specific funds, £79,242 represents fixed assets (being primarily building costs) and the balance on the Charity's general fund of £326,007.

Principal policies

The Management Committee expect to maintain a position whereby the combination of fund-raising, fees charged for accommodation and grants received are at least equal to operational expenses. General donations are used for the benefit of the women and children in the Refuge including providing basic food and clothing in cases of hardship, funding activities and days out and assisting families as they move on from the Refuge.

Reserves policy

Transfers between funds are made in accordance with the charity's reserves policy. Details of the policy, including explanations of the various funds, are given in notes 9 and 11 to the accounts. The Management Committee's policy is for free reserves (being unrestricted funds not invested in tangible fixed assets) to be maintained at a level equivalent to between four and eight month's expenditure less depreciation, in order to be able to meet shortfalls in income or unforeseen expenditure. This equates to between £110,000 and £220,000 in general funds. At this level, the Management Committee believe that in the event of a significant drop in funding, they would be able to continue the current activities of the charity. It would also provide time to consider and access alternative funding and/or consider how the services provided by the charity could be changed.

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The free reserves at the end of the year were £326,007, which is greater than the upper limit set by the reserves policy. There are two main reasons why the free reserves are higher than expected. Last year the Trustees reported their decision to use reserves to continue to fund the post of the Outreach worker when the external funding expired in May 2012. This was budgetted to utilise approximately £25,000 of reserves in the current year but was reduced to around £11,000 thanks to the generous gift received from the Mayor's charity fund. External funding for the Outreach post for another three years has now been secured but this does not cover the full costs and the Trustees have therefore decided to use some of the reserves to fund the shortfall.

The second reason was the significant bequest of £54,135 received from the estate of the late Patrick Williams, a long time supporter of the Refuge. This was a totally unexpected source of income which had not been planned for. This bequest has enabled us to progress the first of our strategic objectives, namely the establishment of a volunteer service and register of volunteers. Due to the planning and recruitment process required, these funds were not spent in the current year but a volunteer co-ordinator has now been appointed to develop the volunteer service and reserves have been designated to cover the costs for an initial period of 18 months.

Future plans and events since the year end

A comprehensive rolling three year business plan and budget has been prepared in response to the requirements of the Supporting People core funding as reported last year. In planning our activities for this year and future years we keep in mind the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

The Refuge has made a start on gathering information in order to gain the PQASSO quality mark. It is a straightforward, user friendly quality assurance system intended to help an organisation run more effectively and efficiently. PQASSO addresses all the essential areas necessary for the effective management and governance of a charity. It will allow us to analyse strengths and weaknesses in order improve the quality of the service.

PQASSO is built on 12 quality areas needed to run an organisation well. It offers a staged approach to implementing quality through 3 levels of achievement. Level 1 is the minimum requirement. During the year we have looked at the sections on planning, governance, leadership and management and user centred service. In each section the indicators have been carefully considered and evidence has been gathered. This process has allowed us to evaluate our current systems and practice and make adjustments in order to secure Level 1.

Development Day

Held on 16 April 2013, this was the first time that staff and trustees had participated in a joint away day and was facilitated by Chris Greenwood, one of the key note speakers from our 30th Conference last year. The day was divided into 2 sessions, morning and afternoon, in order that all staff could attend one or the other depending on their shift. Seven trustees were also able to attend. It was a really successful day and gave staff and trustees an opportunity to get to know each other and work together in a positive and enabling way.

The theme of the session was '6 tools for Happiness' which were:-

- Appreciate what we have - including a team skills audit
- Build personal power - opportunity to think about individual strengths

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- Make good choices - give a gift to the team in the form of a promise relating to the work of the Refuge in order to create a Short Term Action Plan.
- Tell healthy stories about you work life - celebrate a good piece of work
- Lead with your strengths - identify the next steps for the Refuge, and to think about blocks and solutions. This will form the Long Term Action Plan
- Live a balanced life - a survival kit.

Volunteer Co-ordinator

As noted above, the generous bequest received during the year has enabled work to start on our strategic objective of developing a volunteer service and register. The volunteer co-ordinator was appointed in August 2013 and will be responsible for recruiting, training and supervising volunteers. Our vision is to further expand the services provided by Wirral Women & Children's Aid with the help of the volunteers and also to increase our fund-raising activities. Volunteers will not replace or undermine any of the roles and responsibilities of paid professional staff and we envisage that the volunteers will be an asset to the existing dedicated staff.

At the heart of our organisation, is the belief that it is the charitable status of the Refuge which encourages the generous and wide-spread support received from so many varied groups and individuals. Donations, large and small, in cash and in kind, received from our supporters allow us to provide a range of additional benefits and facilities for the families both within and outside the Refuge. We remain appreciative of this ongoing support.

The Trustees would like to thank the professional and committed team of staff and all the volunteers who work so hard to provide such a high quality service.

This report has been prepared in accordance with special provisions of part VII of the Companies Act 1985 relating to small companies.

On behalf of the Board

H Nile
Secretary

23 September 2013