

# AYLESBURY WOMEN'S AID

## Annual Report for the year ending March 31<sup>st</sup> 2016

The purpose of Aylesbury Women's Aid is

*'to provide high quality services supporting women and children experiencing the effects of domestic violence by providing them with safe temporary and emergency accommodation and by giving information, other practical assistance and emotional support to those accommodated in our refuges and those living elsewhere in our local communities'*

### INTRODUCTION

Aylesbury Women's Aid continue to offer good quality temporary refuge accommodation, outreach, IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) and aftercare services, information, support and advocacy to women and children who have been subject to abuse in their relationship, usually by a male partner or ex partner but occasionally a female partner or a close family member.

During the last year, we together with Wycombe Women's Aid managed to secure the Buckinghamshire County Council contract to provide most of the Domestic Violence services across Buckinghamshire which is key to our future development. We continue to be funded by Aylesbury Vale District Council and the Police Crime Commission provided funding for counselling and a small amount of funding for one to one therapy work with children.

It was also agreed that we would set up the WAFE National Database system 'On Track' which will be ready to go on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.

However regardless of the developments within the organisation, or the political situation at any given time the principle aim remains the same and that is to give women the information and support to enable them to make their own choices in life so they and their children can escape the violence and live their lives free from fear.

### REFUGE SERVICES

The refuge offers a safe place to stay for women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence and who need to leave their homes. The service includes self-catering communal accommodation, provision of emotional and practical support for women and children before, during and after their residence at the refuge, accompanying to court and other appointments, emergency provisions, risk management and support plans for residents.

In the last year 57 women and 55 children have been accommodated in the refuge. This is a lower figure than the previous year and the reason for this is that families on average stayed at the refuge longer. 75% of the women were aged between 21 and 40 years of age which was a very similar figure to the previous year. 47% of the children that stayed in the refuge were under 5 years old.

Only 16% of the families staying in the refuge were from Buckinghamshire as for the majority of families fleeing domestic violence, it is not safe to stay in their local areas. Aylesbury Women's Aid found space for 85 families from the Aylesbury area in refuges across the country.

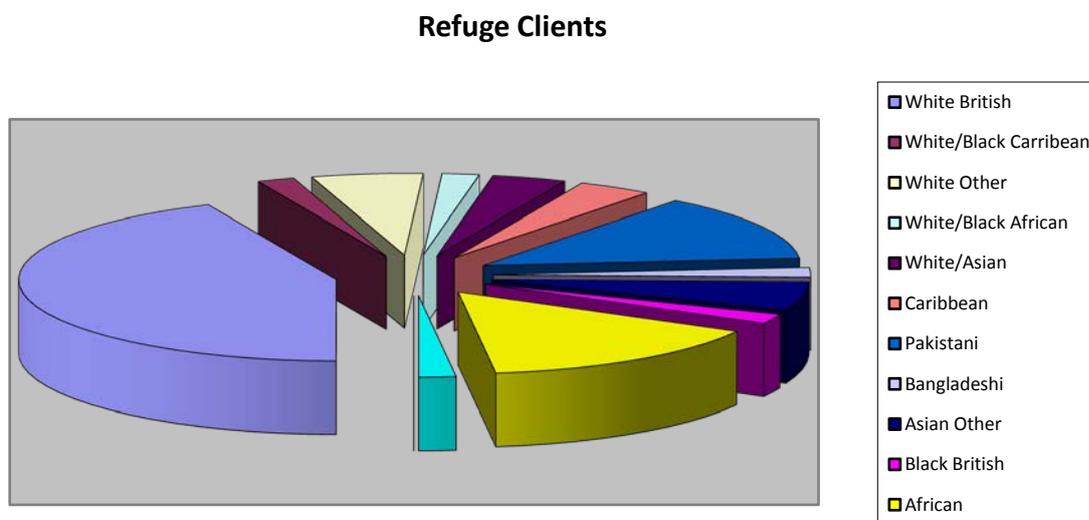
The occupancy rate was 98%, it is rare that we have a space for more than a couple of days as refuge space nationally has decreased considerably in the last few years. 165 families had to be refused space as the refuge was full. The average length of stay was 12.50 weeks although the majority of families stayed between 1 and 6 months. 31% of the residents were either moved onto temporary accommodation by Aylesbury Vale District Council or permanent accommodation by the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust or other Housing Associations in the Aylesbury Vale area. 24% of these were moved straight into permanent accommodation which is our highest figure to date. This figure is unusually high due to the considerable growth of housing in the area. Other residents moved on to other refuges, private rental and relatives or friends. 3% did return home with no extra protection.

Only 59% of the women who stayed in the refuge were still married or living with the partner when they came to the refuge which is testament to how leaving your abuser does not necessarily mean being safe.

40% of the women identified themselves as White British with the other 60% identifying themselves from many different ethnic groups. See Figure 1

As you can see from the chart below families came from many diverse groups. It was heartening to see how well they all got on together – sharing their experiences that were all very similar considering their vastly different backgrounds and proof of how domestic violence can affect all women regardless of economic status, culture, religion, age or ethnicity.

Figure 1



## IDVA AND OUTREACH SERVICES

Staff members work on both these services simultaneously as they are very similar. The IDVA service is an independent domestic violence advice service that works in partnership with criminal justice and other agencies as part of the MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) process in order to give advice, information and support to medium/high risk victims of domestic violence about options to improve their safety and that of their children. High risk cases are discussed at MARAC which the IDVA/Outreach worker attends.

The Outreach service is available to any woman living in the Vale of Aylesbury who are either living in a violent situation or who are working through the effects of past domestic violence and who are not currently living in refuge accommodation. Services include support, information, one-to-one counselling and group work sessions, telephone advice and support/advocacy to attend family and criminal courts.

Many clients are originally referred to the IDVA services and then continue to use the Outreach services as safety is just one of the issues most women have to deal with when leaving violent relationships. The two main issues women have to deal with are child contact and the need for emotional support.

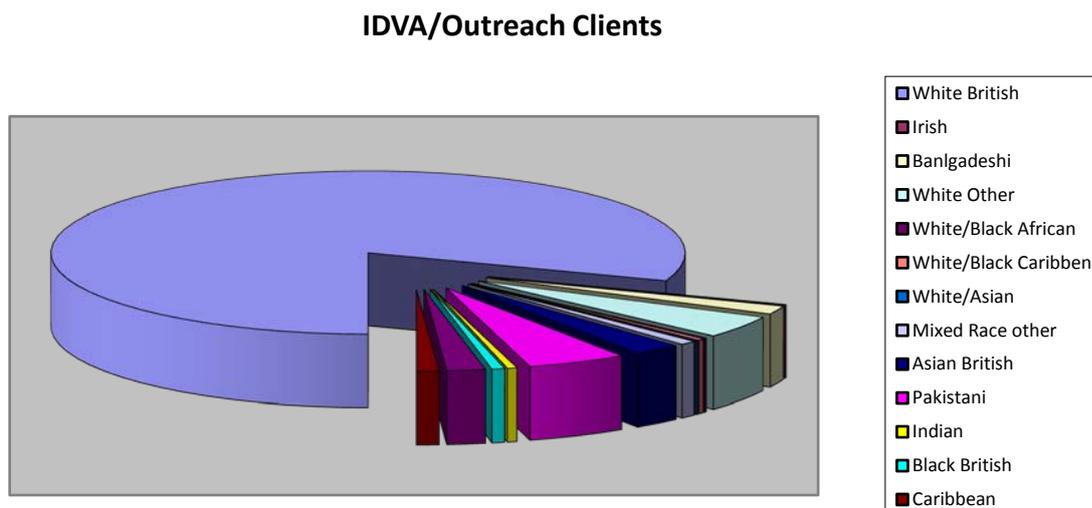
In 2015/16 both the IDVA and Outreach services assisted approximately the same amount of clients as the previous year. 340 women and 7 men used the IDVA service; 242 the Outreach services and 67 women attended counselling sessions. 55% of the women were aged between 21 and 40 years; 8% under 21 and the remaining 37% over 40 years of age. Women using the Outreach and IDVA services are more likely to be over 40 years of age than clients staying in the refuge. This is because when women are older they are often more established in their employment; own their own home and any children are at a crucial stage of their education. All these things can increase the difficulties in leaving the area and starting again.

86% of IDVA referrals were made by the Police and 79% of outreach referrals were made by the woman herself. Only 41% of the Outreach clients and 25% of the IDVA clients are still living with the perpetrator at the time of referral. Continual harassment and violent threats are one of the main problems for women who have chosen to leave or managed to get the perpetrator to leave and this can continue for years.

76% of the IDVA/Outreach clients identified themselves as White British and of the other 24%, 9% of these identified themselves as Asian and 4% as white other. This percentage has been slowly increasing over the years and I think it can be assumed some of this increase is due to continuous employment of an Asian speaking IDVA/Outreach Worker.

Please see chart below for breakdown

Figure 2



90% of clients using the Outreach and IDVA Services resided in the Aylesbury Vale District with the other 10% coming from Chiltern District. The IDVA service covers the Chiltern District.

## BREAKDOWN OF SERVICES (OUTREACH/IDVA)

Calls to and from clients for information and/or support	5019
<b>Clients visit to office:</b>	
Support Meetings	468
Solicitor's Appointment	179
Counselling	546
Support Meetings in another venue	75
Advocacy phone calls/letters	1924
Accompanying to court, solicitors etc.	101
Number of Case Conferences attended	8
Number of Core Group meetings attended	26
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS</b>	<b>8356</b>

The Freedom Programme co-ordination of programmes all over Buckinghamshire is run from the Outreach Centre. 109 women attended the Freedom Programmes in Aylesbury and Buckingham.

## CHILDREN'S/YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICES

55 children were accommodated with their mothers in the refuge. 47% of these children were under 5 years of age; 44% were aged between 5 and 10 years of age and the remaining 9% were over 10 years of age.

In an average week the Child Development Worker facilitated between eight and thirteen structured group sessions for different age groups. The Child Development Worker also assisted mothers with finding school and nursery places and she also supported the mothers when there were issues with their children.

The Child Development Worker facilitated the 'Helping Hand's Programme' for children who live out in the community and are now living free from Domestic Violence and 21 children attended this programme. The primary purpose of the programme is *"to increase children's understanding of feeling safe and to explore and promote behaviours which will contribute to a safe environment"*. A support group for mothers runs alongside this group.

Awareness Raising workshops for young people were held at a Secondary School in Buckingham along with the AWAre (Aylesbury Women's Aid relationship empowerment) programme for teenage girls. Both were very successful.

## MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

In addition to our direct service provision Aylesbury Women's Aid worked with a number of partner agencies to ensure co-ordinated service delivery and a strategic response to the needs of women experiencing domestic violence, for example:

- Attendance as members of the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC)
- Involvement with Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) as advocates for our clients when their abuser is discussed.
- Participation alongside statutory sector partners and service commissioners as a member of the Domestic and Community Violence Strategy Group.

- Members of the Homelessness group
- Attending Task and Finish Group to raise awareness in the LGBT community
- Alcohol Strategy Group
- Support and Drop in Sessions with the police

## **FINANCE**

The Service Level Agreement with Aylesbury Vale District Council was extended for a further year, although with a cut of 10% on the previous year as new way of funding voluntary groups was due to go out to tender sometime in 2016/17. This funding is used for Outreach Work.

Buckinghamshire County Council contracts which include funding for supporting women in the refuge, IDVA services and some outreach services; Children's services which included work with children in the refuge and in the community and Freedom Programme Coordination across the county were all extended for a further year, also due to the tender that was due to go out during the year which was to include all the domestic violence services in Buckinghamshire.

The accounts are healthy and although there is a small under spend this is due to monies given to AWA for projects that will run into the next financial year.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has been an exceptionally busy year mainly due to the tendering process.

The staff and Trustee teams remained committed and there has been a lot of support throughout the year from individuals and organisations and this has been invaluable.

I feel confident that the charity is in a very good position, strategically, politically and financially and hopefully this will continue.

And, lastly but not least Aylesbury Women's Aid extends their thanks to all our partners, churches, other organisations and individuals for all their support and gifts throughout the year.

Denise Edmonds  
Head of Services  
Aylesbury Women's Aid

April 2016