



Every woman deserves
respect and support



Leeds Women's Aid 50th Anniversary Timeline

A History of Our Services, Domestic Violence and the Feminist
Movement in Leeds and Beyond

1970s

The 1970s saw the growth of the refuge movement across the UK. It also saw the rise and evolution of a range of feminist groups, fighting for change for women. In terms of legislation, there was also a range of Acts introduced that affected victims-survivors of domestic violence and abuse.

1972 – A group of local women activists got together to set up Leeds Women's Aid (LWA).

1973 – Our first refuge was opened in Burley, after convincing Leeds City Council to give us 2 broken down terrace houses. This was the first women's refuge outside of London. We could house 10 women and 15 children at any one time.

Feminist Books Collective begins in Leeds and, due to increasing numbers, the Leeds Women's Liberation Group is divided into regional/ neighbourhood groups.

1974 - The 1st Women's Aid National Conference happened in London; this conference organises the refuge movement nationally. The conference acknowledged within their aims that violence against women was "due to the position of women in society".

The Select Committee on Violence in Marriage collects evidence and publishes its reports in 1974 and 1975, drawing from consultations of "central government, some local authorities, legal and law enforcement

agencies, as well as organisations providing services directly to battered women.” (Hanmer 1976). The committee suggested that the “initial target” of refuge provision should be “one family place per 10,000 of the population”, despite the fact that the need was much higher (Routledge Library Editions: Domestic Abuse, 1994).

1975 - The second national conference of Women’s Aid was held in Leeds in February 1975 with almost all of the 42 groups attending. A decision was made to form the National Women’s Aid Federation (which has now split into four separate organisations: Women’s Aid Federation England, Scottish Women’s Aid, Welsh Women’s Aid and Northern Irish Women’s Aid).

Peter Sutcliffe (The “Yorkshire Ripper”) begins to kill women in the area. The murders continue until 1980, with many of the victims being sex workers. The police fail to fully investigate Sutcliffe’s murders, only taking the cases seriously in the late 1970s when “innocent young girls” and “respectable young lad[ies]” (i.e. not sex workers) were murdered. Instead, for much of the duration of these murders, the police told women to stay home at night and fined sex workers for working on the street. Sutcliffe is finally arrested in January 1981 and is tried and convicted in the summer of 1981.

1976 - Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act passed. This act makes injunctions possible without a divorce or separation proceedings. It becomes possible for a court to order a man out of the matrimonial home, whether or not he owns it or the tenancy is in his name. These protections do not apply to unmarried women.

1977 – The Housing Act of 1977 gave priority need for accommodation to victims of domestic abuse with children. This enabled refuge workers in Leeds to re-house women safely.

The first Reclaim the Night marches across the UK were called by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, bringing women together in Leeds and across the country to protest against sexual harassment. The protest took place at midnight on the theme of “every woman has the right to walk alone at night without fear”.

1979 – Southall Black Sisters formed to support all Black and Asian women living in the UK through campaigns, providing legal advice and information and offering counselling.

In December 1979, the UN adopts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, providing the framework for the definition, protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls at the local, national and international level. It remains the only human rights treaty to focus exclusively on women. The Convention specifically deals with state obligation to address different forms of violence against women. Recently, there have been calls for a new and improved convention on VAWG due to deficits in the original.

In Bradford, 400 women march in protest against the Ripper murders and other murders of women, as well as in opposition to officials' calls for women to remain inside at night.

1980s

During the 1980s, feminists campaigned to transform domestic violence from a private trouble to an issue of public concern. Groups like LWA were at the forefront of encouraging women to speak out about it. Although there was a broad professional understanding of the general issues of domestic abuse, there was little reference to forced marriages, honour killings, trafficking or sexual violence in the general context of developing or funding service responses.

1980 – Leeds Rape Crisis Centre helped to organise a conference on Sexual Violence Against Women, as feminist groups continued to angrily oppose the police's ongoing responses to the 'Ripper' murders. The three-day long conference hosted 100s of women to discuss topics like sexual harassment, sex work, domestic abuse and sexual violence. (For more see the [History of Sex Work in Leeds timeline](#))

1985 – LWA were closely involved in two highly successful "Crimes Against Women" conferences organised by Leeds City Council. The first conference was held in response to a 1984 police seminar on "Crime and the Community" held in Leeds, which dealt mostly with crimes

against property. The conference was developed in order to “look at why women often do not report crimes against them; and at what happens when they do; what police attitudes are and how seriously they take these matters compared to, say, crimes against property” (Nanette Sloan, then Chair of the Women’s Committee).

Campaigning from women prompts female genital mutilation (FGM) to become an offence for the first time (under the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985). However, no one is prosecuted under the act until 2009. The act has now been replaced by the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, which amongst other things, extends the offence of FGM to cover acts committed outside the UK.

1986 – The UK ratifies the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women but with some reservations and declarations.

1987 – LWA works with other women’s organisations to hold a ‘Money for Women’ Conference in Leeds, which consisted of a series of workshops looking at why women and women’s groups receive less income than men.

The first National Domestic Violence Helpline was opened by the national Women’s Aid organisation.

1988 – Private accommodation for domestic abuse victims becomes scarcer under the 1988 Housing Act, which deregulates rent, making it more difficult for victims-survivors to find private accommodation after leaving abusive homes.

LWA raised concerns about how the introduction of the Poll Tax would affect women in refuges. Their voice was added to the voices of many organisations protesting the introduction of the tax, which was a flat rate of tax on *all* properties, regardless of worth, that unfairly affected working-class people.

1990s

Throughout the 1990s, LWA continued to grow and a range of policy, research and public changes related to domestic abuse took place.

1990 - LWA was now the biggest women's refuge in the country with places for women and children across three sites.

1991 - The Leeds Inter Agency Project (LIAP) was established. This project brought together systems and policies across the city, encouraging co-operative work between agencies, and raised the profile of domestic violence and abuse, analysing it as gender-based. It also identified "the non-judgemental models of work developed by women's voluntary sector organisations" as the "most helpful" in meeting the needs of victims and survivors.

The then Chief Constable Peter Nobes published the first Force Policy on Domestic Violence, importantly defining practice such as the need to "separate the complainant from the alleged perpetrator" before taking a statement.

Marital rape only became a crime in the UK this year.

1992 – LWA celebrated being established for 20 years!

The Zero Tolerance campaign to end violence against women had a huge profile in Leeds with many public buildings, buses, bus stops and lifts covered in black and white Zero Tolerance posters. The posters focused on depicting positive, strong images of women, rooted in their experiences, and pushed back against the reality that violence against women is often silenced and hidden. Andrea Dworkin, the well-known feminist, came to speak in Leeds.

1993 – The Brookside storyline featuring Mandy Jordache increased public awareness of domestic violence. Sandra Maitland, who played Mandy, came to speak at that year's Leeds Women's Annual General Meeting.

Jasvinder Sanghera set up the Karma Nirvana charity in Derby after she was a victim of forced marriage and tragically lost her sister to honour-based abuse. This charity is now based in Leeds.

1994 – Help, Advice and the Law Team (HALT) was set up as a pilot project in Leeds to provide practical and legal help, support and

advocacy to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. HALT was the first organisation in the country to fulfil this unique and vital role which was not covered by any other service. For several years HALT and LWA delivered joint presentations on domestic abuse to every police group across all the divisions at least once a year. HALT was the first Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service in the UK, before CRARG (then named CAADA, now SafeLives) coined the term.

1996 - LWA told a perplexed Look North interviewer that “the disposable incomes of LWA staff would not be spent at Harvey Nicholls” following their misogynist launch posters showing a woman on a lead.

The Family Law Act 1996 was passed. This Act included key new options for taking civil action around domestic violence and abuse. For example, occupation orders were introduced that could help exclude perpetrators from victims-survivors’ homes and non-molestation orders could forbid a perpetrator from threatening or using violence against a victim and any relevant children. These orders were limited in that they could only protect those who experienced domestic violence in a familial or home setting.

The Housing Act of 1996 broadened the definition of homelessness for those who are eligible for accommodation, including explicitly referring to victims of domestic violence.

1997 – LWA employed a new volunteer coordinator, who delivered the first volunteer course in June.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was passed as law, introducing in 1998 new protection orders which could be used when dealing with post-separation harassment and stalking. This Act can be used by people who cannot apply for an order under the above Family Law Act 1996 because they are not cohabiting, or do not have a familial relationship, with the perpetrator. LWA and HALT work closely with the police to establish how these orders could be used positively when attending reports of domestic violence.

1998 – Throughout 1998-9 Professor Jalna Hanmer, an experienced academic on gender-based violence, led a research-based project based at Killingbeck Police Station in Leeds, focusing on the issues of

repeat victimisation in domestic abuse. LWA and HALT were asked to contribute their views and this report made recommendations and changed police practice.

Although only 200 were expected, there were nearly six thousand prosecutions nationally under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

1999 - HALT became an independent charity.

Leeds opened the 1st Domestic Violence Court in the UK at Leeds Magistrates Court with HALT as a key partner.

2000s

Services and systems supporting victims-survivors of domestic violence and abuse continued to evolve and grow throughout the 2000s.

2000 - HALT grew from having just one part time worker, alongside a team of volunteers, to four paid workers plus volunteers.

Forced marriage continued to be on the agenda for LWA and other Violence Against Women services. Nationally this was strengthened with the publication of a national working group Choice by Right in 2000. As always, training and resources to implement change were slower in becoming widely available.

2001- Sylvia Walby at the University of Leeds conducted an in-depth study on the total cost of domestic violence to services, including the criminal justice system, healthcare, social services, housing, civil and legal. The cost was counted as amounting to £3.1 billion, while the loss to the economy is £2.7 billion. Including all costs, the total cost of domestic violence for the state, employers and victims-survivors (including human and emotional cost that is not counted in the costs of services) was estimated at around £23 billion.

2002 – LWA introduced 24-hour staff support in our refuges in April.

LWA received our 1st Children in Need (CIN) grant to work with children and young people in refuge, which marked the start of a long-running relationship with CIN. The children’s support service went on to be cited as a model of good practice in the 2003 report “We’re just like other kids”.

2003 – LWA opened 20 self-contained safe houses.

The Supporting People funding framework was introduced in April, changing the way accommodation-based services were funded. This brought together seven housing-related funding streams from across central government into a single programme.

MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) were piloted in Cardiff and soon became part of the discussions which led to this way of working in Leeds. MARACs are now held daily in Leeds to increase

the safety of the most high-risk victims in the city. Keep reading to find out more about MARACs.

2004 – HALT celebrated its 10 years anniversary and held a conference which had input from Baroness Scotland.

The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (DVCVA) brought in major changes around domestic violence and the law, including making common assault an arrestable offence.

2005 – LWA successfully renovated our largest refuge “Emmeline” from shared accommodation to individual 10 self-contained flats, with 24-hour staff cover and security. Accommodation included two units for disabled women or nondisabled women with disabled children. We became one of the only refuges in the UK that could offer self-contained accommodation for large families, including women and older sons.

HALT was one of the organisations that helped to create the national agency CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse), which is now called SafeLives. HALT was also one of the handful of small charities across England and Wales that were trying new ways to help domestic violence victims along with the Women’s Safety Unit in Cardiff (who went on to set up MARACs) and Advance in West London.

2006 – Volunteering England funds the development of community counselling services. Following this, LWA works in partnership with Women’s Counselling and Therapy service, Touchstone and Leeds Housing Concern.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) began in Leeds. A MARAC is a victim-focused information-sharing and risk management meeting attended by all key agencies, where high risk cases are discussed. This process provides a structured response to cases through a partnership approach and allows statutory and voluntary agencies consistently to respond consistently to manage risk.

2009 – LWA with a steering group of partners, opened the Anneli Project, a safe house service for women who had been trafficked into, and within, the sex industry.

The police began using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour-Based violence (DASH) Risk Identification, Assessment and

Management Model to identify and assess the potential danger caused by domestic violence.

Related implementation of sections of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims' Act 2004 enabled any person convicted or acquitted of any criminal offence after 30 September to be made subject to a restraining order.

2010s

During the 2010s, LWA became the biggest women's charity in Leeds and continued to deliver high quality services for victims-survivors of domestic violence and abuse.

2011 – Leeds Domestic Violence Service (LDVS) was formed by LWA, Behind Closed Doors (BCD) and HALT to deliver the local authority's community-based Domestic Violence and Abuse contracted services in partnership for the first time. However, LWA, were not successful in obtaining the main refuge contract for "Emmeline" refuge.

Sahara Black Women's Refuge was decommissioned by the local authority and closed down. LWA worked to try to ensure the provision was not completely lost for women in Leeds and opened its second independent, non-commissioned refuge in the building and named it Warwick House. This refuge continued to support a high percentage of residents, who were Black women and other women of colour.

2012 – The protection from Harassment Act 1997 was initially introduced as a Stalking Bill; however, many victims of stalking felt that they were not taken seriously by the criminal justice system and that stalking should be a specific offence. The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 created two new offences of stalking and stalking involving fear of violence or causing serious alarm or distress.

2014 – LWA recognised that LGBT+ people are proportionately not engaged in Domestic Violence and Abuse services so undertook "An Enquiry into LGBT+ Domestic Violence in Leeds", which comprised a literature review on Domestic Violence and Abuse amongst LGBT+ people. This review included conducting questionnaires and focus groups to better understand the domestic violence experiences of

LGBT+ people and what helps and hinders them in accessing effective support.

HALT celebrated being formed for 20 years and also became a Leading Lights service fully accredited by SafeLives demonstrating their commitment to excellence in service and support.

LWA was chosen as one of only three Leeds charities to benefit from StreetSmart. At participating restaurants during the festive months of November and December, a voluntary £1 is added to the diners' bill. At the end of each month, the restaurant passed on all of these £1s to StreetSmart and funds raised were donated to chosen charities.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (or Clare's Law) was introduced to give any member of the public the right to ask the police if their partner may pose a risk to them. A member of the public can also make enquiries into the partner of a close friend or family member.

2015 – The LWA Charity Shop in Horsforth was officially opened by our patron Rachel Reeves MP.

The Leeds Front Door Safeguarding hub (FDSH) was launching, having daily partnerships meetings and MARACS, giving high and medium risk victims and their families additional interventions in order to reduce risk. HALT (representing LDVS) were key in this development.

2016 – Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) was launched as a unique partnership between 12 women and girls' organisations across Leeds, including LWA as the lead partner. The partnership is funded by the Big Lottery Women and Girls' Initiative for 4 years.

LWA carried out a further survey with LGBT+ people to find out what kinds of services and support LGBT+ people in Leeds were accessing; what their experience of this has been; what they would like to see available and what prevents them from accessing support around Domestic Violence and Abuse experiences.

2017 – LWA, HALT and BCD were successfully re-commissioned by Leeds City Council to deliver the community-based Domestic Violence and Abuse contract as LDVS, and welcomed Women's Health Matters into the partnership. The consortium won the refuge accommodation contract as well and LWA were delighted to run this for LDVS and

welcome staff to LWA who came from the previous supplier.
“Emmeline” refuge returns home after 6 years away.

LWA merged with HALT, using the working name Leeds Women’s Aid incorporating HALT for the 1st year, creating the largest women’s organisation in Leeds, which has enabled us to offer a wide range of improved services to high risk victims of domestic violence.

2017 marked 45 years since LWA was formed in 1972. However, due to the merger and expansions, 2018 would be celebrated as 45 years since the opening of the 1st refuge in 1973.

LWA supported the 3 GP surgeries with the pilot of asking all female patients if they had experienced domestic violence and abuse by delivering drop-ins in those surgeries.

12th November 2017 was the 40th anniversary of the start of the Reclaim the Night marches. Every year these marches bring 1000s of women onto the streets to reclaim their right to enjoy the freedom of our towns and cities, at night, without fearing male violence.

2018 – LWA celebrates 45 years of service delivery and of proudly opening the 1st refuge in the UK outside of London in 1973.

This year marks 100 years since a subset of women over the age of 30 got the right to vote.

Leeds piloted the first Domestic Abuse car in partnership with the police, sending trained DV support workers on shift with responding officers.

LWA coordinated the involvement of LDVS staff in delivering this.

2019 – WLL published the State of Women’s Health report, which created a picture of the health challenges women and girls in Leeds faced.

2020s

The 2020s have been a tumultuous time that have provided many challenges to third sector organisations due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This period has also seen a regrowth in feminist activism around gendered violence.

2020 – The COVID 19 pandemic generated conversations around domestic violence and abuse under lockdown, with many domestic abuse support services, including LWA, experiencing a surge in how many people contacted them for support during this time.

In response to the pandemic, LWA set up an online chat service for women to message if they needed support.

In June 2020, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman were found murdered in a park. Police officers took photographs with their bodies. This terrible incidence of gendered violence and racist police responses were later included in feminist conversations and protests in 2021 following the death of Sarah Everard.

2021 – In March, Sarah Everard was murdered by police officer Wayne Couzens. Sarah's death reignited conversations and activism around women's safety, gendered violence and the institution of the police. Vigils for Sarah were staged by feminist organisations, including Sisters Uncut, across the UK. Feminist protests and marches, including Reclaim the Night marches, were also organised across the country. Police crackdowns against these movements continued to spark feminist criticism of the police and prison systems.

In April, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was introduced. The Act made it a statutory duty to house victims of domestic abuse and gave the DA commissioner power to bring about change and hold agencies to account. It also meant perpetrators will no longer be allowed to cross examine their victims in the family courts. Following years of campaigning from third sector organisations, the act also finally recognised children and young people as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. However, the Act failed to address the barriers to support that exist for groups of victims-survivors, including migrants with no recourse to public funds.

LWA published a set of web pages aimed at children and young people with experiences of domestic violence and abuse. These webpages preceded the expansion of LWA's Children and Young People's team of support workers.

2022 – LWA celebrate 50 years of services. To mark this milestone, we are fundraising for a brand-new children's playground and dedicated tranquil garden space for women and families in one of our refuges.