

# IMPACT REPORT 2022-23



THE  
**Women's  
Centre**  
CORNWALL





## Foreword from our Chief Executive

This year has been monumental for The Women's Centre Cornwall. We have grown, evolved and adapted in increasingly challenging circumstances.

Statistics and reports can never truly reflect the impact of the work that takes place within this organisation. It is measured often in the moments of connection between women, the trust built and relationships that are developed. It is reflected in the first time women speak their truth and the sparks of joy in their lives as they slowly but surely return to their power.

Words cannot do justice to how proud we feel of the women who form the Women's Centre Cornwall community. These women show up to stand alongside and take care of one another amidst the devastation caused by sexual violence and domestic abuse. Together we look together in the same direction and work for change, even in the most difficult moments.

We are fully committed to keeping women and girls at the heart of everything we do. We know their voices, lived experience and aspirations are central to how we will continue to grow and evolve.

One of our core values is hope. We hold on to hope, not only for women's individual lives and futures but collectively, for our communities and wider society. We hope for a better world for future generations.

Thank you to every single person who supports our work. Thank you to our staff, volunteers, trustees, funders, partners, allies, friends.

It all makes a difference.

Jackie May  
**Chief Executive**

## Our Vision

Our vision is a world in which women and girls are **safe, respected and empowered** to fulfil their potential **free from violence, inequality and oppression.**

# THE NEED FOR OUR SUPPORT

**Knowledge is power.** Statistics can never show the true scale or impact of the epidemic of violence against women and girls, but they help us become more informed so we can better respond.


**Our hope is that one day services like ours will no longer be needed, but as long as they are, we will be here to support, listen and believe.**

Here are some statistics which show some of the scale of the epidemic of violence against women and girls.

**1 in 4** women have experienced domestic abuse by an ex/partner in their adult lives \*1



**1 in 4** women have been raped or sexually assaulted in their lifetime. This amounts to 6.54 million women. \*5



**People with learning disabilities are almost three times more likely to experience domestic abuse \*6**



## About us

**The Women's Centre Cornwall is a women's charity with services across South West England, offering empowering support to women and girls living with the impact of sexual and domestic abuse.**

Our Centre is based in Bodmin and we provide support to women and girls across Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and HMP Eastwood Park Prison through our wide range of projects and services.

The Women's Centre Cornwall was originally set up as The Women's Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre (WRSAC) in 1996. It was created and continues to be run by women, many of whom have lived experience of sexual and domestic abuse. We remain a member of Rape Crisis England & Wales.

## Our Services

We believe that with the right support, any woman can have the life they want for themselves. With our extensive range of services, we seek to meet women where they are and walk alongside them on their healing journey.

### Sexual & Domestic Abuse Specialist Support

**One-to-one support, Helpline & Campfire Forum, Young Empowered Women's Project, Peer & Group Support**

### Criminal Justice, Multiple Disadvantage & Outreach Services

**The Open Service - Dorset, Devon, Cornwall & HMP Eastwood Park, Mentoring, Women's Assertive Outreach Project, Krefta Kernow**

### Community Engagement

**DIVAS - Women with Learning Disabilities, Neurodiversity & Autism, Older People's Project, International Women's Group**



## Our Values



*Everything we do reflects the values we share.*

**FEMINIST** Feminism is about women and girls having equal rights and opportunities and being able to access them. We are a proudly feminist organisation and we believe in the power of offering services that are run by women, for women.

**EMPOWERING** We believe that women and girls are the experts in their own lives. We give women and girls the space to recognise their power and create the futures they want for themselves. We are led by women's voices, and we put their choices at the heart of our work. By empowering women, we support them to take control of their lives, to know their rights and speak up for what they need.

**TRAUMA RESPONSIVE** We believe that the ways women and girls respond to the harm caused by violence and abuse is normal and that every woman responds differently to this trauma. As a trauma-responsive organisation, we do not believe that women are broken and disordered because of the ways they have coped with their experiences. We understand and respect what women have done to survive.

**BRAVE** We are brave and speak out against injustice, violence and oppression towards women. We will keep working for the change that is needed in society to make sure women and girls are free, safe and empowered in all spaces.

**BELONGING** We make the effort to invite and welcome all women into our community. We recognise, respect and celebrate our differences! We do what we can to make sure everyone has equal opportunities to progress and succeed. Our community is one where women can feel as though they belong - that they have a purpose and their voices matter.

**HOPE** We believe that with the right support, any woman or girl can have the life they want for themselves. We are hopeful that we can live in a world free from violence and oppression. We will always listen to women and work with other organisations in the community to make sure women have the services they deserve.

## Specialist Sexual and Domestic Abuse Support

Our Specialist Support Service provides one-to-one trauma-informed, psycho-educational and emotional support to women living with the impact of sexual and domestic abuse. Support is given over a 20 week period and this continues to be our most in demand specialist service.

“

This service has been priceless to me and changed my life in ways I always hoped. The work is not finished but the improvements to myself are huge and I really hope they will continue with the things I've learnt. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the help you have given me. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

”

382

women were supported

### Staying safe



### Coping & thriving



### Health & wellbeing



### Growing & changing



## Young Empowered Women's

Our YEW Project provides one to one support and group work to young women aged 11 - 18 who have experienced any form of sexual violence, harassment, abuse or exploitation.

This year we developed our first YEW Grads group as a progression pathway for young women who have accessed support.

“

This support has made me feel heard and supported in making sense of what was in my head, I was really listened to for the first time in my life. I have learnt coping skills which have helped me feel hopeful for my future.

”

58 young women supported



## Helpline

**Our telephone Helpline provides valuable support to women survivors and also offers information for professionals, family members and friends who are supporting women and girls affected by sexual and domestic abuse.**

Our local Helpline provides valuable support to any woman, including those wanting to access support or needing a top-up between their planned sessions.

The level of crisis that women are experiencing, and the complexity of their lives has been noticeably higher than before the pandemic and as such, the value of the Helpline is greater than ever, particularly in relation to our increasing levels of suicide prevention work.

Main reasons for calls involve women seeking support for childhood sexual abuse, Sexual Assault Referral Centres, domestic violence with sexual violence, rape and domestic abuse

**800** calls received

## Campfire



Following requests from women, we transitioned our web-based 'Survivors Forum' in a fully mobile-friendly App; Campfire.

**We believe this to be the first App of its kind in the country that provides a women-only peer support space for survivors of sexual and domestic abuse.**

To ensure safety, the platform is anonymous and moderated.

Our online Peer Support App 'Campfire' has also been well used this year and we understand that this is being used as an alternative to Helpline support for some women.

**480** members at the end of the year

**Campfire membership grew more than 400% during this period.**



## Peer and Group Support

In the summer we piloted running peer support groups based on women's feedback including a walking group, trauma informed boxing, cycling, pottery, swimming, art exhibition and an overnight camp.

The aim of these sessions was to bring women together to break isolation and support women to face new challenges and build confidence and self-esteem.

“

I was feeling tired and alone before I went to the walking group, afterwards I felt amazing - connected to other women and nature.

I felt nervous to meet new people but left feeling thrilled, peaceful, infused with the power of doing something creative with other women.

”

**44** women attended group opportunities including walking, trauma informed boxing, cycling, pottery, swimming and camping

## Sorella Project

In the Autumn, we were successful in bidding for a women's Sexual Violence Peer Support programme funded by the Office for the Police & Crime Commissioner. Working with our partners, Trevi and Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services, we launched a Devon and Cornwall wide peer support service.

“

Thank you - knowing that I am not alone, that I have like-minded women with similar experiences that I can meet up with is so nice.

Feedback from a woman attending her first 'Coffee and Chat' peer support group.

”

**12** peer supporters trained to provide 1:1 befriending and to facilitate access to group peer support



of women said they felt better after attending groups



## Support for women in the criminal justice system

Our work supporting women involved in the criminal justice system offers a vital entry point for those who would not very often access mainstream sexual/domestic abuse support.

### Open

We deliver the Women's Community Rehabilitation Service on behalf of HM Prison and Probation Service across Cornwall, Devon and Dorset. Women are referred directly to us by Probation and HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire which is the closest women's prison for the area.

**The Open Service offers holistic, trauma responsive, practical and emotional support on a wide range of issues including housing, mental health, domestic abuse, parenting, substance use, education and employment.**

**334** women supported

I remember my Probation Officer saying "You are going to do some work with The Women's Centre Cornwall". I felt scared and dubious. It meant that after years of having people turn their backs on me, I was finally being offered opportunities, which meant I had to open up. Meeting my support worker was amazing. She taught me so much about how to deal with things, but also about my own behaviours. For the first time, someone said that I didn't have to put up with things that were not acceptable. She helped me to see behaviours around me and that it was okay to say no. She made it all make sense.

### Open Mentoring

Our Open Mentoring team offers support to women who have offended or who are at risk of offending.

In February 2023, the Open Mentoring Service was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation from Devon and Cornwall Police.

When I met my mentor I was in a dark place, working on autopilot and masking life. Now it's like I am waking up after a deep sleep and the light has gone on and I'm discovering who I really am.

**21** women supported by our Mentors

**14** new Mentors trained



## Prison Link Work

**The closest women's prison to Cornwall is around 150 miles away in Gloucestershire.**

Our Prison Link Worker supports women in HMP Eastwood Park Prison, offering emotional and practical support around housing, benefits, clothing, phones and transport.

For most of the women we support in custody, The Women's Centre Cornwall are their only bridge between prison and home, often one of their only sources of connection and support.

Following the support given in prison, very often we meet women on the morning of their release, give them mobile phones and clothes if needed, and help them on their long journeys to enable them to arrive home safely and make contact with their Probation officer.

“ Thank you for always being there. It's been a lifeline for me and one person I have been able to open up to the most. Gutted it had to come to an end but I'll never forget, thank you. ”

“ This organisation saved my life. Before prison, during prison and after prison. So much so I will be volunteering with them next year. They empower women, are feminists and they stand by you through thick and thin. ”

**72** women supported whilst in  
HMP Eastwood Park Prison

“ My Prison Link Worker took me to the train station and bought me an Easter egg. Honestly as a 38-year old woman that broke me, in the nicest way possible. It's the small things that make the difference. ”

## Support for women experiencing/at risk of homelessness

### Assertive Outreach

We provide targeted support for women experiencing or at risk of homelessness who are often in that situation as a result of abuse, facing greater ongoing risks. As a partner in Trevi's SPARK Project, we received 138 referrals for women experiencing serious and complex barriers such as homelessness, involvement in the sex industry and substance use. 57% of women engaging in SPARK had experienced domestic abuse and 14% had been sexually exploited or prostituted. In addition to receiving referrals from other agencies, the team regularly undertook 'assertive outreach' in the community. This involved going out to key locations such as known rough sleeper and temporary accommodation hotspots to proactively find women who could benefit from the service.

**145** women supported by our  
Assertive Outreach teams

We meet women where they are at, from their tent to their temporary accommodation and anywhere in between. We don't see any women as being too 'high risk' or 'too aggressive'. We are there to support.

### Krefta

In September 2022 we launched our new Krefta Kernow service, working in partnership with West Cornwall Women's Aid to support adults fleeing domestic abuse who are not able to access specialist domestic abuse accommodation such as refuges. Our partner, Konnect Communities, supported 16 men during this time.

The success of the service has been ensured by developing a very close working relationship with Cornwall Housing, and demonstrates that the Krefta Service is absolutely essential in Cornwall.

**152** women with wide ranging needs including poverty, mental health, homelessness, addictions and histories of abuse received practical and emotional support

**36** women were physically supported to leave their homes when fleeing a perpetrator

## Promoting equity of access to services for women in under-served communities

### #NeverTooLate

The #NeverTooLate project raises awareness about the sexual and domestic abuse experiences of older women. This year we have continued to deliver the Older People's Pilot Project (OPP) alongside Cornwall Council and Age UK Cornwall. At the heart of this project is the belief that older people must have a voice in explaining what the impact of domestic and/or sexual abuse has been on their lives, telling us about what has been helpful but also what was not. The experiences of OPP participants formed the basis of our [Making A Difference Report](#) for Cornwall and Devon Commissioners. We are continuing to work with Commissioners and partners to develop and coordinated community response to working with older people experiencing DASV.

**33** people bravely shared their experiences and views

**30** professionals were consulted



**52%**  
rise in referrals from women over 60 seeking support for DASV

### International Women's Group

This year, our team delivered a Cornwall Council-funded project to improve support for European women facing sexual/domestic abuse, especially when language is a barrier. Through community engagement, we collaborated with local migrant women to understand their challenges in accessing information and support. Our report highlighted recommended best practices alongside local realities in Cornwall, and was shared with Safer Cornwall Domestic Abuse and the Sexual Violence Partnership Board. Additionally, we piloted pre-ESOL classes at the Women's Centre and reviewed communication materials for accessibility.

We collaborated with women from Romanian, Bulgarian, Portuguese and Ukrainian communities to co-produce their recommendations to improve support for migrant European women experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence

**48** women attended Coffee, Chat & Craft sessions

**16** women attended language courses

## DIVAS

The DIVAS' own agreed mission statement is: **"A group of women with learning disabilities and autism who fight for their rights against discrimination and abuse and get their voices heard".**

We aim to empower the DIVAS to be creative, have fun and reach their potential through participation, training and volunteering. As one of the DIVAS group says "I have got a learning disability, I can do anything anyone else can, with the right support I can do it."

This year the DIVAS supported 11 women with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergence to access our Specialist Support Service, aiding their healing journey after abuse.

The DIVAS also functions both as a peer support group, helping to reduce isolation, build connections and enable women to meet others with similar life experiences.

Furthermore, the DIVAS group functions as a peer educator group, designing and delivering training to increase understanding of learning disability and neurodivergence, reduce barriers and improve support.

Brilliantly run training session - so great to hear from the DIVAS and have so much good practice and so many tips shared with us on how to improve our services, given so generously and supportively. And really appreciate the fantastic resources.  
- Oxford Rape Crisis Centre

This year the DIVAS have consulted with those in power to create system change, including the Ministry of Justice, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the national police project 'Operation Soteria'.

**12** women from the DIVAS group attended weekly Peer Support meetings





## Raising Awareness

### Campaigning and Influencing

Our social media channels continue to serve as important and growing means of communication, awareness raising and support. Through these platforms, we are able to inspire and empower women, spread essential messages challenging rape myths and misogyny, raise awareness about our work and keep women informed about relevant services and events.

Our most shared post was created to raise awareness about the national government alarm that was due to go off on all compatible phones across the UK, which would have put many women experiencing domestic abuse at risk if they had hidden phones. The post was shared many times reaching 55,735 people on Instagram and prompting 151 new followers.

We continue to be involved in numerous strategic forums to represent women and girls including Reducing Reoffending Boards, and Safer Cornwall's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership, where we inform policy leads and commissioners about the drivers of abuse and survivors' experiences and needs.

### Reclaim The Night

The Women's Centre Cornwall has held Reclaim The Night events in Cornwall since 2004, amplifying the message that we as women refuse to be held responsible, controlled or blamed because of the actions of male perpetrators.

This year we displayed 103 pairs of shoes as well as lighting candles and laying flowers to represent every single woman who was murdered in the UK during the year, mostly by men known to them. Hundreds of women marched in outrage that women and girls are still subject to this epidemic of male violence and abuse.



## Walk My Walk

This year we designed and delivered 'Walk My Walk' - an outreach project funded by the Home Office. This place-based project saw outreach workers engaging with women and girls across Truro by providing activities and events in women only spaces, creating space for them to talk about their experiences of VAWG, access support and have their voices heard. We provided information and recommendations to the Home Office around women's safety.

As part of this project, we created pathways to involve marginalised groups including women with learning disabilities, older women and Black and minoritised women. We hosted 'The Othered Woman', Cornwall's first Black Feminism event in collaboration with Black Voices Cornwall and The Olive Project which was a resounding success.

"Incredible exhibition! As a Black woman I can see myself represented and I love it. I hope to see more of this across Cornwall featuring the achievements of Black people"

## Partnership working

We have worked with several partner organisations to improve services and outcomes across the peninsula for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Some of our partnerships include:

**Peninsula Women's Alliance** The Women's Centre Cornwall, Trevi, Co-Lab and Olive Project

**Sorella Peer Support Project** The Women's Centre Cornwall, Trevi and Devon Rape Crisis

**Krefta Kernow** The Women's Centre Cornwall, West Cornwall Women's Aid and Konnect Communities

**Older People's Project** The Women's Centre Cornwall and Age UK Cornwall

Therapeutic sexual violence partnership for Devon and Cornwall with CLEAR, Devon Rape Crisis and Olive Project

Working with Children's Society and CLEAR to deliver sexual violence support to young women

## Lived Experience

Our Lived Experience Groups are formed from women who have accessed our services. Women first complete our Hear My Voice workshops before joining the Lived Experience Groups:

**"This course has empowered me so much and has made me think about what I want and what I want to do to help people. It's given me so much positive vibes and has boosted me. And the people have been so supportive"**

We work with our Lived Experience Groups to design new services as well as review what we are currently doing. We also support them to take part in research, consultations, campaigns and awareness raising.

**"We are not just a tick box. We are heard. We give our side of our experiences. I could never have believed I could have gone from that child to being here. Our roots are growing and coming up above ground". Woman from a Lived Experience Group**

As well as being informed by the voices of women within these groups, many women within our staff and volunteer team have lived experience of sexual violence, domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, some of whom have previously accessed our support services:



have lived experience  
of any form of sexual  
and/or domestic  
violence



have lived experience  
of any form of sexual  
violence



have experienced a  
criminal conviction



have previously  
accessed TWCC  
services

## Fundraising

Thank you to our funders who enable us to continue and build upon this vital work for women and girls across Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and at HMP Eastwood Park. This year our principal sources of funding were charitable trusts, grants and commissioned services.



## Community support

We have been grateful to receive some incredible support from people within our communities. A wonderful woman named Laura cycled the length of Ireland and raised over £1,700 for us which was then matched by The Big Give. Laura is now also training and volunteering with us on a fundraising basis.

## Charity of the year

We were named Cornwall Council's Charity of the Year in 2022-23, raising awareness of the support we offer across Cornwall. Pauline Giles, Chairperson of Cornwall Council said "This is truly a cause after my own heart. The key to this kind of work is providing a safe, non-judgmental space for women and girls to come forward and access vital support."



## Join The Community

In a world in which women and girls are subjected to increasing levels of harm, services such as ours are needed now more than ever.

We invite people in our community to join us in taking action to end violence against women and girls.

Join us by signing up to our newsletter, follow us on social media, consider supporting our work by becoming a Friend or making a one off donation.

We witness the very real impact of the support we offer - through the journeys women take to remember their power and create new futures for themselves, their families and society.

This work takes community, we thank you for being part of it.



**website** [womenscentrecornwall.org.uk](https://womenscentrecornwall.org.uk)



**helpline** 01208 77099



**women's forum** [campfireforum.org.uk](https://campfireforum.org.uk)

@WomensCentreCornwall

