

1970's

- The idea of a women's centre in Brighton was conceived as early as 1969 during meetings of the Brighton Women's Liberation group.
- During the late 1960s and 1970s, Brighton had a thriving community of women's interest groups which came together to form Brighton Women's Centre Committee (BWCC).
- The Women's Centre was formed in November 1974 by a collective of women who were determined to offer space where women could meet, on their own terms, to gain mutual support and overcome social isolation, and most importantly – feel safe.
- The first premises were opened in Buckingham Road in 1974.
- In its first year 1,160 women were helped. By 1978 increasing numbers of women came for free pregnancy testing.
- The Women's Centre operated in Buckingham Road for two years.



1970's

- The Women's Centre had an unsettled time and a number of temporary homes during the next few years. There was a brief stay in a flat in Moulsecombe, then a move to a room in the Resource Centre on North Road, where volunteers occupied a cold, tiny room which they had to share with some scouts. For some time there wasn't a telephone.
- The Women's Centre later moved to its own room with a phone (but no toilet) and could offer only a very limited service.
- It cost £5 a week which effectively used the annual £200 grant from East Sussex Social Services.
- For most of the early years the impetus behind the Women's Centre came through the committed efforts of volunteers, who nurtured the services women needed which were lacking in the mainstream.



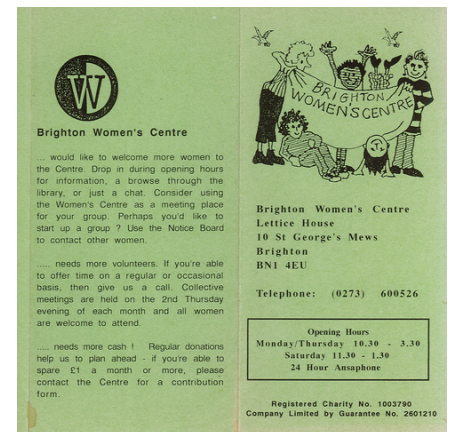
1980's

- By the late 1980s the Women's Centre was in desperate need of permanent accommodation. A group of women obtained a grant for a lease at 6 Marlborough Place in 1987.
- Services provided included free pregnancy testing with immediate results, contraception and abortion advice, information on law, housing, health and employment.
- Marlborough Place had limited space and could only offer very limited opening times. The priority was to move to bigger and better premises.



1980's

- In 1987 negotiations started with a private landlord to secure Lettice House, 10 St Georges Mews. This became home to Brighton & Hove Women's Centre for 12 years.
- It was first used in March 1988 to host Brighton's first International Women's Day (IWD).
- The Women's Centre at Lettice House officially opened its doors after renovations in June 1988 offering a drop-in, and space for an informal chat and a 'cuppa'.
- It was developing as an important resource for women in the area.
- Receiving 40 to 50 enquires a week, it became increasingly well known for its referral service and developed strong links with other crucial women's services. It was seen as a channel to Women's Aid (for women experiencing domestic violence).



1990's

- Brighton Women's Centre obtained charitable status in March 1991.
- A weekly post-abortion support group for women was closed by 1991, with support provided by a regular counselling service instead.
- It was widely recognised that Brighton Women's Centre was at the centre of the development of integrated services for women in Brighton & Hove.
- ToyBox, run by trained childcare assistants and volunteers, became a registered crèche in 1992. It was open to mothers in Brighton & Hove experiencing deprivation due to low income and to those facing language barriers.
- The Women's Aid Project closed in 1993 but reopened as the Brighton Women's Refuge (now RISE). Brighton Women's Centre took 100 enquiries, self-referrals self-referrals and agency referrals in just three months.
- In 1995 Brighton Women's Centre was run by two teams of trained volunteers on rota, but no paid staff. It was the only centre of its kind in the Sussex area.



1990's

- In 1995 Brighton Women's Centre received £4,600 funding from Brighton Borough Council.
- Free services included free contraceptive packs (provided by Street Outreach Services), legal advice sessions (provided by local solicitors), a weekly session for homeless women (provided by the Mental Health Project) and a welfare benefit consultation (provided by the Unemployed Centre).
- By October 1996 Brighton Women's Centre had its first paid employee.
- The Women's Drug Project developed from ToyBox staff responding to the needs of mothers who used the crèche. With growing credibility and reputation for the services offered, BWC received referrals from Brighton's Drugs Dependency Unit and the Probation and Community Alcohol Team.
- In 1997 the Women's Drug Project expanded, finding its own premises and changing its name to Brighton Oasis Project.
- When the lease on Lettice House expired Brighton Women's Centre moved to the Brighthelm Centre in North Road. The basement space was far from ideal and seen only as a temporary measure – in fact it was home for seven years. The crèche was relocated to Turner Playbase, a 15-minute walk away.



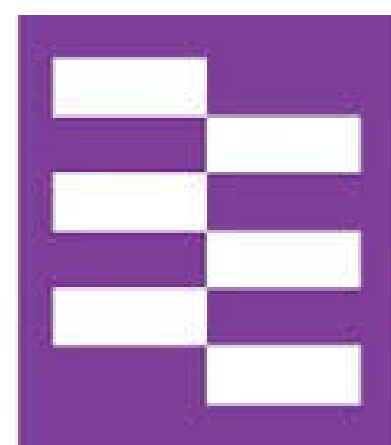
2000's

- Baroness Joyce Gould became Patron in 2000.
- Brighton & Hove City Council cut funding for community groups and voluntary organisations including Brighton Women's Centre which faced uncertainty and potential closure in late 2001.
- ToyBox Crèche was renamed ToyBox Pre-school in 2003.
- By 2006 the centre was facing another move. A major publicity campaign resulted in Michael Chowen generously offering 72 High Street as the new premises and BWC moved to Kemptown in May of that year.
- BWC was a member, and Chair, of the Women's Services Strategic Network (WSSN) - a partnership of women only services in the city with Brighton Oasis Project, RISE, Survivors' Network and Threshold (BHT). It existed to bring the organisations together to develop partnership working, share resources and information and network.



2000's

- Lisa Dando was appointed Director in 2008.
- BWC was a key provider of support, advice and counselling services for women who had experienced sexual violence as part of Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).
- As a result of Baroness Corston's Report in 2006, and funding announced by the Ministry of Justice, the Inspire Project was created in 2009 to offer support and rehabilitation to women in the Criminal Justice System in partnership with Probation.
- During 2009 - 2010 Inspire staff were recruited and Partnership Agreements established between the WSSN organisations and Surrey and Sussex Probation Trust. Strong links were developed with Criminal Justice Agencies and the Courts.
- Inspire was launched in February 2010 by keynote speaker Karen Page (Communities Lead, National Offender Management - Women's Team) and began receiving referrals from March 2010. The project had 90 referrals by November 2010.



Baroness Joyce Gould

The history of Brighton Women's Centre is one of commitment, determination and resolve, resolve to provide support, advice and guidance, needed by so many women, in a safe and secure environment. Today, celebrating its 50th year it is recognised as the leading women's charity in Brighton and Hove and beyond; the hub of a partnership with other specialist women's charities - a community of organisations.

Its success has been achieved by the foresight and vision of Director Lisa Dando, the team of committed staff, trustees and volunteers.

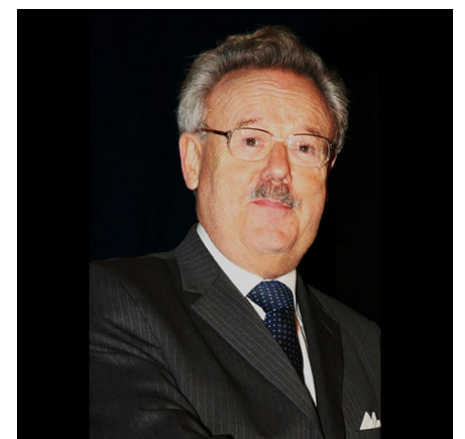
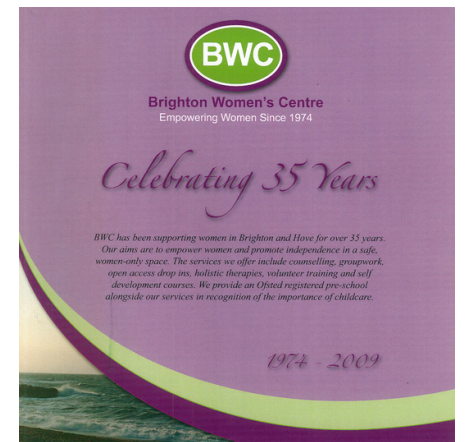
I feel honoured, as a past Patron, to have had a small part in the development of this amazing charity, the Brighton Women's Centre.

Patron of BWC



2000's

- November 2009 saw the remarkable achievement of 35 years of Brighton Women's Centre's existence as a women-only space offering support, advice and services for women by women.
- The milestone was celebrated with a wonderful event at the Old Market where some of the women who were involved in the early days of BWC shared their experiences - including Dorothy Sheridan, a volunteer between 1980 - 1982 and Kate Page a volunteer between 1977 - 1982.
- The celebration was attended by Councillor Garry Peltzer-Dunn - Deputy Mayor of Brighton; Baroness Joyce Gould - BWC Patron and Michael Chowen - BWC Benefactor.



2010's

- As more and more women and families came under financial pressure, Brighton Women's Centre signed up with Fareshare, a charity distributing surplus food from local companies to charities. Food items were distributed to women free of charge at the centres' weekly drop-ins.
- ToyBox Pre-School continued to work with the Early Childhood Project (ECP) as well as Turner Children's Centre and the Children and Families Service .
- BWC's counselling service saw a 40% increase in referrals on the previous year, but the cost for low-cost counselling over a 12-week period remained the same since the service began in 2006.
- Between January 2010 and 2011, the Inspire partnership supported over 500 women in the Criminal Justice System with accommodation, finance, benefit and debt advice, access to education and employment, specialist domestic and sexual violence support, access to health and mental health provision, family and parenting support and support around alcohol and substance misuse and sex working.



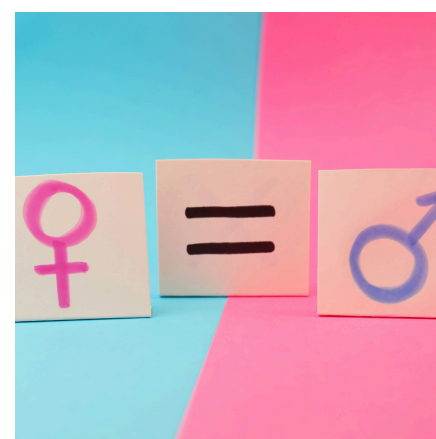
2010's

- In 2012 'Which?' reported' a third of women surveyed say they run out of money before the end of the month. Demand for our Fareshare food donation service rose rapidly and over 20 bags of food were distributed per week.
- Through the Social Return on Investment study of Inspire (2012), BWC evidenced that for every £1 invested, £3.57 was generated in social value for women, children and society.
- ToyBox Pre-School's successful registration with Ofsted allowed delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.



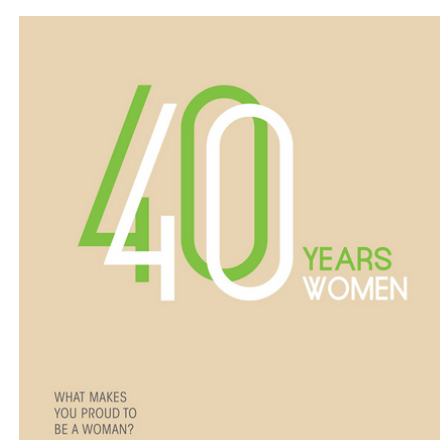
2010's

- In June 2013 BWC took on a second building at 22 Richmond Place to meet growing demand on its services.
- BWC was chosen by Councillor Bill Randall to be one of his Charities for the Mayoral Year.
- Negotiations with Brighton and Hove Integrated Care Services, that commenced in spring 2013, culminated with BWC's Counselling Services being commissioned by Brighton and Hove Well Being Service (BHWS) to offer up to 12 weeks of counselling for women experiencing anxiety and/or depression.



2010's

- ToyBox Pre-School received a very good report following an Ofsted inspection in February. ToyBox move from Kemptown to Richmond Place in June 2013.
- Re-Unite Sussex was established by Inspire to support women whose children got taken into care when they went to prison - 95% of children loose their family home as opposed to only 5% when a father is imprisoned. Without children women were not a priority need for housing and without appropriate accommodation children could not be returned to their care.
- Inspire's trauma-informed approach to working with clients was enhanced after attending two-day intensive training at Cambridge University with Dr Stephanie Covington.
- As BWC celebrated its 40th Birthday, demand for services increased with a 70% increase in women accessing the drop-In and use of the foodbank continued to grow.



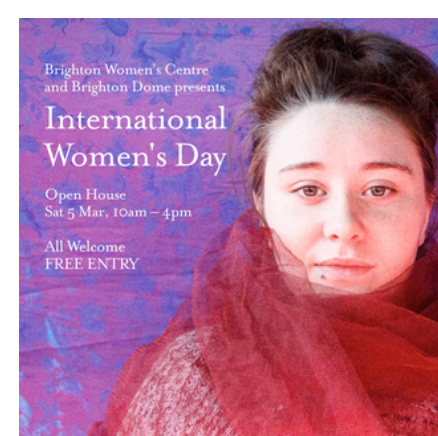
2010's

- In 2015 Inspire won a Highly Commended award from the Criminal Justice Alliance presented by HRH The Princess Royal.
- BWC Volunteer Services was formed in 2015, incorporating the Peer Group Drop-In, Foodbank, Holistic Therapies and Mentoring.
- The Inspire project expanded with the award of a contract from Kent Surrey Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company to deliver gender specific support for women on Community Orders and post-prison sentence.
- The Period.Project was developed in response to the number of women using the foodbank and drop-in who requested sanitary products.
- BWC received funding from Sussex Homeless Outreach Reconnection & Engagement (SHORE) to provide gender specific support to rough sleepers in partnership with Worthing Churches Homeless Projects in 2015.
- Following a successful bid to the Cabinet Office and Big Lottery Local Sustainability Fund, a focus on marketing and communications resulted in BWC rebranding in 2016. Other key areas addressed for the future sustainability of the organisation included fundraising and partnerships, and service re-design.



2010's

- A pilot project between BWC and the Brighton & Hove Well Being Service enabled the appointment of a short-term Engagement Support Worker to provide additional support so women living with multiple disadvantage could access and engage with the range of BWC services.
- BWC hosted a visit from Caroline Dinenage MP and Police and Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne; as well as from The Prison Reform Trust as part of their work with Transforming Justice for women offenders.
- In 2016, after sixteen years of supporting BWC as its Patron, Baroness Joyce Gould sadly stepped down.
- For the first time International Women's Day was celebrated at Brighton Dome and Brighton Museum.
- BWC hosted a specially commissioned photography exhibition, entitled "I Am Brighton Women's Centre", depicting some of the women who make up the organisation.



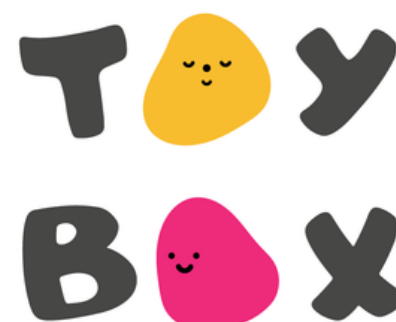
2010's

- Public sector austerity and reductions in contracts resulted in a move into one building in June with a re-structured service provision. The counselling service with the Brighton and Hove Well-being Service was terminated in November 2017 due to financial constraints.
- Volunteer Services partnered with Mothers Uncovered as part of the City Council's Third Sector Investment Programme. Mothers Uncovered facilitated sessions where a professional chef cooked a variety of dishes from food available at the foodbank.
- ToyBox received an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in October 2017.
- A grant from the Lloyds Bank Foundation secured the Women's Accommodation Support Service in East Sussex and helped BWC expand hubs to Worthing and St Leonards in partnership with WCHP (Worthing Churches Homeless Project) and Seaview Project.
- After his visit to BWC, Rory Geoghegan, Head of Criminal Justice at the Centre for Social Justice, cited the charity as an excellent example of a women's centre diverting women from the Criminal Justice System in their report 'A Women Centred Approach'.



2010's

- The drop-in services and foodbank moved to St Mary's Church in St James's Street in July 2018.
- BWC began a new pilot in partnership with the pan Sussex Musculoskeletal (MSK) Service led by Here.
- Probation staff co-located to BWC hubs to improve accessibility for women.
- ToyBox staff attended training on Domestic Abuse and Violence together with local-preschools, children centres and nurseries.
- BWC hosted a visit from Claire Wiggins, Deputy Director, National Probation Service, Women's Team to promote and advocate for the work of Inspire and Women's Community Services in advance of the Female Offender funding opportunity attached to the Female Offender Strategy. This visit was very well received with high praise for BWC's work and outcomes achieved for women.
- BWC hosted another successful IWD Celebration at Brighton Dome. Juno Dawson, British trans author of young adult fiction and non-fiction discussed her book, The Gender Games.



2010's

- BWC celebrated 45 years of supporting and empowering women by hosting its first conference 'Time for Unity' bringing together women we have helped over the years and other support services. The special day at the Brighthelm Centre featured entertainment, workshops, stalls and panel discussions on gender equality and women in the criminal justice system.
- Speakers included Katy Bourne, OBE, Dr Shona Minson (Centre of Criminology University of Oxford), Helen Pankhurst, Lady Edwina Grosvenor, Baroness and Helena Kennedy QC. Baroness Helen Margaret Newlove gave the keynote speech.
- The BWC Conference was immensely successful with excellent feedback. Staff delivered a workshop on becoming trauma responsive which was very well received.
- The Commonweal funded Couples First? Research project commissioned from Homeless Link was completed and the BWC Director presented the findings at a national St. Mungo's event.
- BWC was one of ten charities chosen by the Mayor, Councillor Alexandra Phillips, to benefit from funds raised at a charity gala dinner in Brighton's historic Royal Pavilion in September.



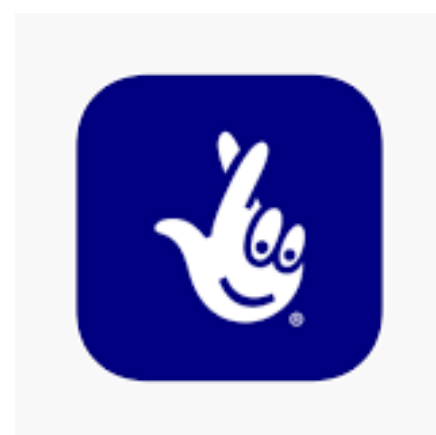
2020's

- BWC WASS team delivered a workshop on gender responsive services for homeless women as part of the Turning Tides annual conference.
- BWC services were impacted by Covid-19, and wherever possible all front line services were delivered remotely. Some services were put on hold or suspended. We supported women with phones and IT devices so they could stay in touch.
- BWC created a helpline open twice a week to support users of our hubs. Covered by staff and volunteers who used their support skills to listen and signposting.
- BWC was awarded HMPPS Innovation funding for a two-year 'From Court to Support' pilot project to support women in breach court or at risk of breach.
- A new mental health drop-in, funded by Community Roots, launched at Preston Park Recovery Centre in November 2020.



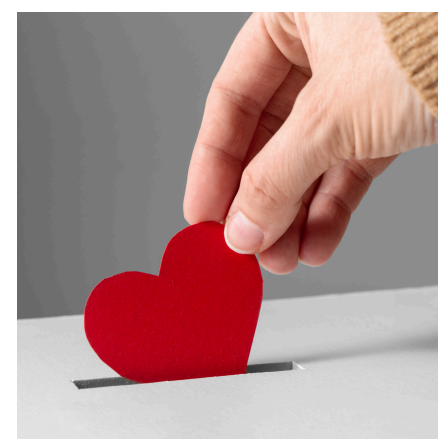
2020's

- The Support and Information Phone Line was maintained throughout 2021 as services were adapted as pandemic restrictions evolved.
- The Eastbourne Women's Hub re-opened in November 2021 at a larger venue to welcome more women and better accommodate staff from BWC, Probation and other organisations.
- From October 2021 the MSK referral area was extended outside of Brighton & Hove to include women based in Crawley, Horsham and mid-Sussex.
- The Peer to Peer Support Service received three-year funding from The National Lottery in November 2021 to expand groups into East and West Sussex. As well as workshops and course programmes, the groups included more consolidated employment, education and volunteering opportunity pathways.
- An organisational wide Service User Forum was created.



2020's

- ToyBox offered remote support to families until January 2022 due to the pandemic. Since reopening an abundance of new families joined and the service began to reach capacity.
- Families were referred for additional support including Pelican Parcels to help with clothing, shoes, school uniform and toys.
- The 50+ peer group funded through Ageing Well came to an end as a result of a restructure of the Ageing Well partnership.
- Two members of the WASS team undertook IDVA qualification and other staff members had further training in recognition of the fact that a large number of homeless and insecurely housed women supported by BWC experience abuse and sexual violence.
- BWC was one of 40 women's centres and charities awarded funding to provide access to specialist support to help women in the Criminal Justice System get their lives back on track. The £761,280 funding boost enabled BWC to provide tailored support for women living with multiple disadvantages through childcare provision, counselling and psychotherapy.



2020's

- ToyBox maintained an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in July 2023.
- In 2024, for the first time, BWC's turnover will be over one million pounds. From its origins as a volunteer-led organisation, BWC now has a staff team of 40 women working alongside 30 volunteers.
- Our founders, who created this safe space for women, may never have dreamed we'd still be needed 50 years on. But whilst we're still needed, we'll be here - building on our convictions for a future where women are free from inequality.

