



Brighton Women's Centre
Empowering women since 1974
womenscentre.org

Still needed Still here

Annual report
2023 – 2024

BWC works with a wide range of women with a wide range of needs. Most of our work takes place in areas of high deprivation with women experiencing issues linked to, or heightened by, poverty.

The cost-of-living crisis has hit women harder than men, and BWC has seen a huge rise in referrals to our services.

In 2023 – 2024, we supported 868 women and 14 children through one or more of our services.

Director's foreword

We look back on the last year with pride, and with much to celebrate as we approached our 50th year championing gender equality.

This year saw the continuing development of our new Strategic Business Plan launched in July after 18 months of consultation and consolidation. As an organisation, we had a lot to consider after a period of rapid growth, the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. We saw demand for our services continue at the same rate as the previous year.

As a team of self-identifying women, this did not stop us from embracing some innovative and exciting projects along the way. We achieved a quality assurance mark for our trauma-informed way of working with One Small Thing, we implemented a pilot project in partnership with the Kent Surrey Sussex Provider Collaborative for Secure Care consulting with women in forensic secure hospitals, and we maintained momentum with our networking and representation duties, amplifying women's voices through many different forums. These included as the women's specialist on the MoJ's Third Sector Reducing Re-offending Board and the Third Sector Strategic Partnerships Board as well as hosting a Ministerial visit and engaging with local and national Government officials. As a founding member of the National Women's Justice Coalition we also continued to champion the importance of women's community services.

50 years on there is still much to do. Whilst we're still needed, we'll still be here!

Lisa Dando
Director

A message from the Chair of Trustees

Last year, 868 women and 14 children accessed one or more of our services; representing a 23% increase since 2022. As an organisation, we've grown to meet this increased demand.

As you will read in this report, women across Sussex have a growing need for the services and spaces we are providing. The cost-of-living crisis has hit women hard. Often as the primary caregivers, many women earn and own less, leaving many struggling to heat their homes, feed and clothe themselves and their children.

Consequently, last year we distributed £6,000 from the government's Household Support Fund to help women who were struggling. Whether it be with food (our foodbank has seen a 30% rise in demand in the last year alone), housing support (our Women's Accommodation Support Service has seen a 71% increase in demand over the last two years) or women's safety (88% of women attending our hubs disclosed domestic abuse), BWC services are working hard to support as many women as we can. Our Inspire team continues to support women who find themselves in the Criminal Justice System - a system that lacks the support they need to tackle the root causes of their offending behaviour, while ToyBox Early Years remains a vital provider of childcare for families in Brighton.

This report offers just a snapshot of the crucially important work each BWC service provides. No matter which service a woman joins us through, BWC has continued to meet each woman where she is at, to truly hear her and to walk alongside her.

Melissa Drayson
Chair

Inspire

Positive alternatives for women in Sussex and Kent. Holistic, wraparound and gender-specific support for women caught up in the Criminal Justice System.

- Inspire delivered one-to-one trauma-informed support sessions to women in the criminal justice system through face-to-face meetings, using online channels and through assertive and flexible outreach by phone and text.
- The Inspire team delivered quality support to women, which was highlighted by the Ministry of Justice throughout the year, and consistently positive feedback from women.
- The service was staffed across Brighton and East and West Sussex. A Prison Link Worker was recruited and worked in partnership with the WASS team to support women who were in custody. She provided holistic, trauma-informed support around homelessness, housing and social inclusion at a pivotal moment in their lives.
- Inspire women consistently accessed in-person women's-only Hubs in Brighton & Hove, as well as East and West Sussex and there was well established attendance.
- The team worked proactively with Probation to manage referrals into the service through regular meetings. This meant women who are at most need of support were prioritised and the team was able to manage demand for the service.

209

referrals were received

164

women were supported

83%

of women reported an improvement in their attitudes, thinking and behaviour

Care not Custody

Out of Court Diversion for Women. An Early Intervention service in partnership with Probation.

- We worked with Probation and Sussex Police to launch Care not Custody, our new Out of Court Diversion for women coming into contact with the Police. Alongside this referral stream we worked closely with Probation to work assertively with women at the point where they were at risk of breaching their Probation Community Orders. This follows From Court to Support, a previous pilot project which demonstrated the effectiveness of assertive intervention at this crucial moment in women's lives.

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It's a privilege to work with women at a vital moment where they could breach their Probation community order, and intervene before women experience the on-going trauma of a system that is not designed to offer support for issues that have usually arisen from trauma and multiple disadvantages.

Care not Custody caseworker

Mental Health Support Coordinator

One-to-One support to help women achieve healthy social networks and the right support in the community.

- The Mental Health Support Coordinator (MHSC) provided a pathway for women to receive trauma-informed mental health support through working closely alongside statutory mental health services.
- The MHSC helped women navigate primary and secondary mental health services which opened up further avenues of support for those women with additional needs including substance misuse, unemployment and sexual violence.
- One-to-one meetings were held in person and support plans co-produced with women to support recovery from mental ill health in a holistic way. This involved advocacy, coaching and organising referrals to specialist services.

15

women were supported in total by the MHSC and received individualised trauma-informed casework according to their needs

Data supports that positive outcomes have been achieved through the work of the MHSC

Musculoskeletal (MSK) Link Worker Project

A women-centred partnership with the Sussex MSK Partnership for self-identifying women with musculoskeletal conditions within the Brighton and Hove, Crawley, Horsham & mid-Sussex areas.

- We provided trauma-informed, emotional and practical support on a range of issues, including mental health, physical health, housing, benefits, relationships and well-being.
- One-to-one support sessions were provided either over the phone or face-to-face at BWC or in Crawley Hospital.
- We offered a safe, confidential, non-judgmental space for women to reflect on the challenges of living with chronic conditions, offering support and strategies to help with self-care and well-being.
- The caseworker's hours were increased between October 2023 – February 2024 and a second caseworker was successfully recruited, meaning additional capacity for the team to provide support.

39

women supported (14.7% increase on previous year)

238

support sessions delivered (20.8% increase on previous year)

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A safe space to talk. I can speak in confidence and know I'm not being judged or that my personal information will be shared with others.

84%

of women reported a positive change in feeling more satisfied with their life.

Support Services

Safe, women-only spaces where women can be themselves while finding information, and emotional and practical support.

- Our Women's Hubs provided free in-person, practical and emotional support and information in safe, women-only environments. Emphasis this year was placed on returning to the pre-pandemic three Hub model we have been commissioned to run. We held three sessions per week in different community spaces spread across Brighton & Hove, including an Out of Hours Hub. A crèche provision was available through ToyBox Early Years, our childcare provision.
- The Support and Information Phonenumber was set-up during the pandemic to provide emotional and practical support to women via phone and email, including signposting and referrals into BWC and other local services. The service was closed in March 2024 following the re-opening of our in-person Wednesday Hub.
- Our weekly foodbank supported 146 households with 1165 parcels of food including store cupboard items, fresh fruit and vegetables, toiletries and period products. The cost-of-living crisis continued to cause high demand for the service which also resulted in low food supplies.
- Five volunteers completed our volunteer training programme. Two volunteers moved into paid employment with BWC.
- The Women's Hub services were run by four staff members, one of whom is a Senior Practitioner with specialist training to support women who have experienced domestic and sexual abuse, and 13 volunteers.

226

women supported

178

sessions provided through Hubs, the phone line and foodbank

96%

of women reported feeling more connected

(94%)

of women reported feeling less isolated

81%

of women said that support services helped them to cope with the challenges in their lives

“

The Women's Hub alongside the foodbank has made me feel less anxious and get me time to decompress. I like to connect with other people because I don't get to do it often in a safe space.

ToyBox Early Years

Ofsted-registered 'Outstanding' childcare setting and crèche providing quality education in a caring and learning environment for children aged 3 months - 5 years.

- ToyBox was rated outstanding in all areas following an Ofsted inspection in July 2023. The Ofsted Inspector commented on how our leadership, partnerships with parents and children's well-being was held at the heart of our service, ensuring the children are "highly valued, respected and strongly supported by nurturing practitioners".
- Our curriculum was meticulously planned around each child's interests. The range of activities included singing circles, yoga, dancing, mark making, numbers and messy activities. Children also had frequent visits to local parks, the library, museum, beach, Pavilion gardens, the i360 and more. ToyBox were given free tickets to experience Touch and Glow at the Brighton Dome in December.
- Parents were invited to stay and play Christmas party sessions with face paints, party games and prizes. The children prepared most of the party food which included baking cakes and cheese straws.
- ToyBox staff supported parents through daily morning check ins and dedicated time to talk about their challenges.
- Demand for places continued to be high with increased enquiries from linked services such as children centres, social workers, and UOK partners.

14
children supported

142
support sessions provided to parents

570
hours of childcare provided

“

ToyBox has been a very important part of my daughter's life. It is a space she feels safe and a community she feels she belongs to. She has learnt to play and care for kids of different ages and backgrounds, cultivating empathy, responsibility, and a diversity of interpersonal skills.

Women's Accommodation Support Service

Information, advocacy and support for homeless and insecurely housed women across Sussex.

- Through its flexible, trauma-informed approach the Women's Accommodation Support Service (WASS) team provided light touch information over the phone or at one of the weekly women's Hubs, and longer term casework, advocacy and information so women understood their options and rights. Support was led by each woman and included a number of interrelated areas of need, as well as advocacy with statutory services around parenting issues, domestic abuse, trauma, health, finances and employment.
- Our weekly women-only Hubs in Eastbourne, St Leonards-On-Sea and Worthing offered a safe space for any self-identifying woman to access advice, information and informal support as well as positive peer interactions. The Hubs acted as a step into more intense casework when needed and also a point of contact for as long as a woman needed it.
- WASS has two IDVA qualified members of the team. They have used the learning to build on existing knowledge and confidence in supporting women who have experienced domestic abuse. Women's homelessness is intrinsically linked to experiences of abuse and violence and over 85% of the women supported by WASS disclosed current or historic experiences of domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or controlling behaviour, so this specialism is vital to hold within the team.
- WASS received funding from CommonWeal Housing to carry out a feasibility study into accommodation for women leaving custody in response to the challenges that women we support have experienced with finding appropriate safe places to stay when leaving prison.

170
women supported through casework

87
women supported at women-only Hubs

33
women supported through casework with the Prison Link Worker since January 2024

(89%)
of women reported reducing risks and feeling safe

87%
of women reported a good quality of life and being healthy

“

I have been coming to the Hub for a long time now. Geri has been amazing, she has helped me with my confidence and sorting everything out. Isabela is so friendly and makes everyone feel so welcomed, she is always there to help if needed. I really enjoy coming to the Hub.

Tools to Restore Emotional Well-being Workshops

Developing individual strategies to restore emotional well-being.

- Tools to Restore Emotional Well-being workshops, named by the first group of women to attend, were developed in partnership between the Women's Accommodation Support Service, the Women's Peer to Peer Support Service and Service Users.
- A series of six sessions focused on developing understanding of the nervous system and the impact of trauma on the body and mind and building individual 'toolboxes' of strategies to use when experiencing a trauma response or challenging emotion.
- A series of six workshops were run in Worthing, Brighton and Eastbourne.

24

women attended the Tools to Restore Emotional Well-being workshops

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I'm really grateful for the tools that I'm already using daily. Knowledge has given me solutions. It's also nice to be around a supportive and kind environment. Thank you.

Women's Forensic Mental Health Pathway Pilot

Women's Forensic Mental Health Pathway pilot in partnership with the Kent Surrey Sussex Provider Collaborative (adult secure).

- BWC conducted a three-month consultation with the KSS Provider Collaborative of support services available to women across two forensic secure hospitals in the Sussex and Kent areas.
- The initial consultation, in collaboration with Recovery Partners, looked at women's support needs in the two hospitals and gathered feedback in order to implement well-being activities that would help women in the hospitals to improve their mental health and transition into the community.
- Recommendations from the initial consultation were piloted on the wards over three months. There were three streams of activities to create 'building blocks' of support that could be used later to implement a streamlined service:
 - One-to-one Community Link Worker sessions provided women transitioning into the community with practical information and signposting as well as confidence-building support.
 - The Enhancement Worker facilitated group activities that included an enrichment club with art, horticulture and mindfulness activities, an exercise club and a cooking / nutrition club.
 - Women had access to free or low-cost clothes and toiletries through a ward marketplace.

24

women supported

18

Enhancement Worker group sessions were held across both wards

7

one-to-one Community Link Worker sessions were held

Women's Peer to Peer Support Service

Supportive peer groups across Sussex to build relationships with other women.

- Our six peer groups continued throughout the year with an additional weekly group added in Eastbourne in June. Our weekly energy reset session continued as did our range of courses and workshops. These have included emotional regulation sessions, a sound bath, bookbinding and puppetry, as well as the completion of our long running SHIFT creative programme.
- SHIFT finished with a Community Takeover gallery event at the Phoenix Art Space, and culminated with a public Open Mic night, hosted by AFLO. The Poet. Five women read their own spoken words out in front of an audience, and three women had their words spoken by Peer to Peer staff.
- We ran two in-house Peer Facilitator training courses, covering peer support values, the recovery model, boundaries, group dynamics, structure and activities, and safety.
- This year witnessed developments in the knowledge base and planning around co-production, laying the foundational work for practical application within the service. This included the setup of our BWC-wide forum for women. We conducted an external evaluation of the Peer to Peer Service this year, inviting peers to take part in the design of the evaluation and be involved in the evaluation findings.
- Other ways women have been involved in the service have been choosing and leading on peer group activities, selecting new workshop themes, reviewing co-production approaches, processes and policies, writing part of our monthly P2P Newsletter and acting as P2P Ambassadors at our peer participant waiting list social events.

224

peer groups held over the year (47% increase on previous year)

106

women participated in groups, courses and workshops (18% increase on previous year)

23

peers were involved, giving back their time and input to the service

90%

gained greater social connection from their engagement in the service

“

BWC [P2P] prove what they are just by how they speak, very calming, very reassuring, assuring, makes you feel very welcomed and part of something.

Women's Therapeutic Services

Specialist, short-term, women-centred counselling and movement therapies.

- The service continued to offer 12 sessions of talking therapy (Psychodynamic, Humanistic and Integrative) as well as Dance Movement Psychotherapy. This was available to clients either attending in-person at BWC or by video call.
- Retention of therapists was good during the year with half of the 12-strong team consisting of qualified therapists. Our therapists in training continued to grow and develop in confidence.
- The service benefited from a domestic violence workshop as well as training on working therapeutically with survivors of sexual violence from renowned therapist and writer, Christiane Sanderson. The training was to increase skill and understanding of the therapy team as a high proportion of clients are affected by these issues.
- The government's target for the NHS Talking Therapies (previously IAPT service) is for 50% of patients to significantly improve their mental health. Our improvement rates are roughly in line with those for the IAPT service and it is worth noting that many of the women that we work with have mental health difficulties that are more severe or enduring than the "mild to moderate" level deemed appropriate for NHS Talking Therapies.
- Within the framework of CORE 10 thresholds we found that as well as 77% of women accessing counselling at BWC showing an overall improvement, 54% of women would be classed as 'recovered' at the end of therapy with a majority of these having moved from clinically significant distress.

52

women received therapy
(18.2% increase on previous year)

542

therapy sessions were attended

88%

of women reported reduced
hopelessness and/or
greater happiness

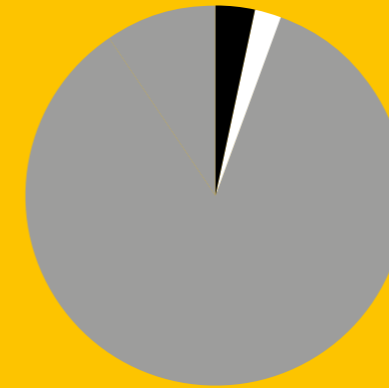
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I felt very comfortable and safe. I am very grateful to BWC. Keep doing what you're doing. You're awesome.

Accounts

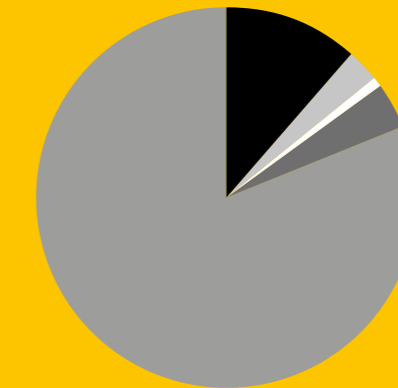
BWC experienced substantial growth during 2023 -2024 with a 59% increase in income and 38% in associated expenditure. This was due to significant new funding from the Ministry of Justice, NHS, Sussex PCC and National Lottery. The new funding has gone towards both new and existing projects.

Income



- Contracts/Grants £1,360,019
 - Fundraising £45,656
 - Earned Income £31,563
- Total income £1,437,238**

Expenditure



- Staff Costs £998,410
 - Direct Costs £143,453
 - Office Costs £46,255
 - Establishment Costs £35,333
 - Governance Costs £9,282
- Total expenditure £1,232,733**

We gratefully thank all of our partners and funders



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