

BWC



Brighton Women's Centre
Empowering women since 1974

womenscentre.org

Annual report
2024 – 2025

Celebrating 50
years of impact

Welcome from the Chair of Trustees

“As one woman in our community eloquently said, ‘I am now able to see clearly and feel I have a brighter future.’”

Dearest Friends, Supporters and Stakeholders,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this year’s Annual Report. As this marks my inaugural year as Chair of the Board of Trustees, I am pleased to reflect on a year marked by resilience and meaningful impact.

As has become a trend in our statistics in recent years, the number of women accessing our services has increased, this year by 14%. In 2024 - 2025, BWC supported 986 women and 14 children, and we report these growing statistics with mixed feelings; positive that more women are finding us, proud of the way our services continue to meet the needs of women in Sussex and yet saddened by the growing need for the provision we offer.

This need reflects the disproportionate and distinct challenges women still face - unaffordable childcare, food poverty, the cost-of-living crisis and a lack of appropriate housing. Our impactful ‘year in numbers’ shows how our foodbank, which supported 180 women and families, delivered an incredible 1203 parcels of food. In our peer support groups, we were there for 115 women through our in-person sessions, and 181 women were supported with their housing needs through our casework and Hub sessions. Our Ofsted Outstanding nursery – Toybox - gave 600 hours of low-cost childcare to women and children in need, and our therapy service was offered to 80 different women.

However, this is just a snapshot of the many positive things that have been achieved in the last year, and I hope this report goes some way to illustrating the immense impact that a women’s centre such as ours has in the lives of the women who need us most and the communities around them. As one woman in our community eloquently said, ‘I am now able to see clearly and feel I have a brighter future’.

On behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to our journey, volunteers and staff alike. Your support makes our work possible — and our collective vision achievable.

50 years on from our inception, we continue to have hope for a brighter future.

Amber Woodward-Brown
Chair of Trustees



Letter From the Director

“Being 50 is a milestone that made us remember and recognise the amazing legacy of BWC and celebrate the women who have made this organisation the one it is today.”

Welcome to this years very special BWC Annual Report - a year in which we celebrated 50 years of BWC. Much has changed over the years in women’s lives and for the organisation. Being 50 is a milestone that has made us remember and recognise the amazing legacy of BWC and celebrate the women who have made this organisation the one it is today.

From our early grassroots beginnings in Brighton and Hove, we now stand firm and tall with roots across Sussex and into Kent and Surrey. Through sustaining key partnerships and developing new ones across the region, we are reaching more women in need of our support.

Over the years, we have learnt so much from all the women that have been involved with BWC, and thanks to them we have developed and expanded our offer, not just across the geography, but also in the recognition that being a woman means different things to different women.

We hope to celebrate difference and at the same time stay firm in our feminist roots, a feminism that aims to achieve gender equity, and rights for women. This feminism is one that is open to people of all genders and from all walks of life, that recognises that all women experience oppression in different ways and that solidarity is with women, in all their diversities, so that every voice is heard, and everyone has a choice in their future.

In 2024, we were delighted after a lengthy period of co-production to launch our new 3-year Strategic Business Plan. Its intention is to revisit our roots and adopt aims that ensure women’s voices and our diversities sit at the heart of who we are and what we do.

So please join with me in celebrating this very special 50th year annual report.

Lisa Dando
Director



Celebrating 50 Years of BWC

This year, BWC volunteers and staff, past and present, gathered with dignitaries, trustees, friends, and supporters to celebrate the 50 years of achievement.

Hosted at the Hilton Brighton Metropole by Councillor Bella Sankey, Leader of the Brighton and Hove City Council, the celebration event featured numerous highlights including guest speakers, the launch of our new Strategic Business Plan, and of course a delicious vegan birthday cake!

BWC Chair of Trustees, Melissa Drayson, reflected on the last 50 years and the journey to where the charity is today. How this would not have been possible without the dedication, expertise and hard work of staff, volunteers and trustees over half a century.

“We’ve been successful in surviving the last 50 years, and we celebrate that we are still here for women. But I don’t think our founders in 1974, who created this safe space for women, would ever have dreamed we would still be needed to help fight for equality 50 years on!”

Guests heard from Councillor Bella Sankey who shared Brighton and Hove City Council’s vision for an inclusive and fairer city and journalist and author, Nell Frizzell, who spoke eloquently about her work to understand and celebrate the vital work undertaken by women’s centres. The formalities concluded with Lisa Dando, BWC Director, launching the new Strategic Business Plan.

Later in the year, our AGM offered a further opportunity to mark the 50th anniversary of BWC. Hosted by Councillor Amanda Grimshaw, this event focussed on hearing the voices of women, those we have supported, and those we can learn from. We heard Kerry*, who bravely recounted the long period of extreme violence and coercion she had endured at the hands of a partner, and Jojo* who arrived homeless and without support in Brighton.

Kerry and Jojo shared their experience of BWC. The one-to-one counselling, the support, the advice and signposting, all provided in safe, kind and welcoming spaces, helping them to rebuild their lives. It was no surprise that both women received a standing ovation.

The many voices, and the feedback we receive from the women we support, continues to drive our passion and our ambition. In the words of BWC Director Lisa Dando;



“Over 50 years, BWC has weathered many storms and encountered many highs and lows, much like the lives of many of the women we meet. Whenever I’m asked about BWC, I describe our longevity as bittersweet. We’ve been successful in surviving the last 50 years, and we celebrate that we are still here for women. But I don’t think our founders in 1974, who created this safe space for women, would ever have dreamed we would still be needed to help fight for equality 50 years on!”



*Names have been changed to protect identities

Counselling and Therapeutic Services

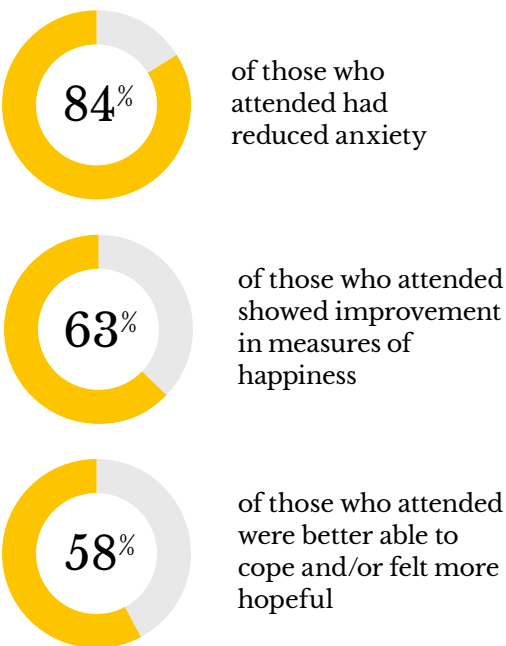
The Counselling and Therapeutic Services provide time-limited, trauma-informed therapy with a broad range of modalities, including talking therapies and creative approaches. This service supports women who would struggle to access therapy and other services due to complex challenges relating to their physical or mental health, relationships and financial circumstances.

Overview:

- A total of 481 therapy sessions were delivered along with 85 assessments.
- 68 women had at least one therapy session during the year, and around 80 women were offered on-going therapy.
- We have noticed an increased complexity in the circumstances women are facing, evidenced by the number of safeguarding concerns, pre-trial therapy conditions required by family and criminal court proceedings and women on the waiting list getting in touch due to increased urgency.
- We have further noticed increasing demand for services, with the waiting list around four months longer now than it was a year ago. As such, care is taken to signpost women to alternative provisions, such as BWC's Support Hubs, during their wait for therapy.

Outcome statistics

Using the Core Ten Outcome Measures at the start and end of therapy, we found that:



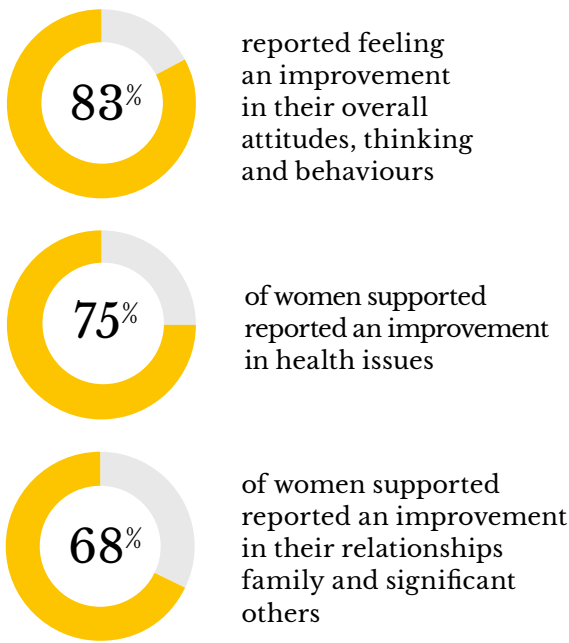
Inspire

Positive alternatives for women in the Criminal Justice System in Sussex and Kent. Inspire provides holistic, wrap-around and gender-specific support for women in the Criminal Justice System. Our Community Rehabilitation Service is funded by the Ministry of Justice and works in partnership with Kent, Surrey and Sussex Probation Service.

Overview:

- Over the year, Inspire received 239 referrals, and supported 216 of those women.
- The Inspire team delivered quality support to women, which was highlighted by the Ministry of Justice and received consistent positive feedback from women.
- The introduction of the Probation reset and changes to caseloads as a result, meant a period of adjustment for all. Work by our caseworker in Kent through our partnership with Advance continued positively.
- Inspire uses a blended method of delivery, using both online, and in-person delivery for one-to-one casework. Service users consistently accessed in-person hubs, allowing connections to be built with other services including the Pause Project, Emerging Futures and the Eastbourne Foodbank to name a few.

Outcome statistics



“The 12 weeks of sessions have been incredibly supportive and helpful. I hadn’t expected as many quantum leaps as I’ve taken with this block of sessions. I’ve been really impressed with my abilities to integrate and embody the changes spoken about each week that were needed, into my life, I feel that my intentions at the start have been met, and it’s exceeded expectations. Thank you!”

“I am a lot more positive, less anxious and a lot calmer, I am now able to see clearly and feel I have a brighter future. I have realised now that I do have a future and am learning how to prioritise myself and make better decisions that will make my life easier.”

Care Not Custody

Our Out of Court Diversion for women involved with the Police, is funded by the Ministry of Justice and is in partnership with Sussex Police. The scheme also provides support for women in breach of, or at risk of breaching, their Probation Community Orders.

Overview:

- We received 103 referrals from the police in 2024/2025 - 26 from Brighton, 53 from East Sussex and 24 from West Sussex.
- Women were offered a blended approach, across one-to-one, face-to-face support, in our BWC hubs or other appropriate venues, when possible, and phone contact when one-to one was not geographically possible. Women were also met at Brighton Breach Court and offered support to re-engage with their probation officer.
- The most common offence being referred into Care Not Custody by Sussex Police is assault. We're encouraged that in most cases the victim is supportive of the CNC diversion as an outcome as they want the woman referred to access help.
- In January 2025, the Care Not Custody team was informed that an additional year of funding had been granted to continue delivery until March 2026.

Outcome statistics



“You have been supportive and given me the strength to take actions. You’ve made me feel entitled to being heard. Monday is never a good day, but when we have calls it helps and sets me up for the week.”

KSS Mental Health Collaborative Pathway

Connecting with women in adult secure mental health wards as part of the Women’s Secure Pathway, in partnership with the Kent Surrey Sussex Mental Health Provider Collaborative.

Overview:

Following the success of our pilot project in 2023/2024 we were invited to work on the development of a project offering women-centred, trauma-informed support to women in secure forensic units across Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

- Following a successful consultation and pilot in 2023/2024, we launched the Women’s Secure Pathway Project.
- In partnership with the KSS Mental Health Provider Collaborative of 3 NHS Trusts and Woking Women’s Support Centre, BWC developed a model for a service which can deliver consistent trauma-informed 1-1 support and weekly group activities to women on the 4 secure wards within this region.
- One-to-one Community Link Worker sessions will provide women transitioning into the community with practical information and support.

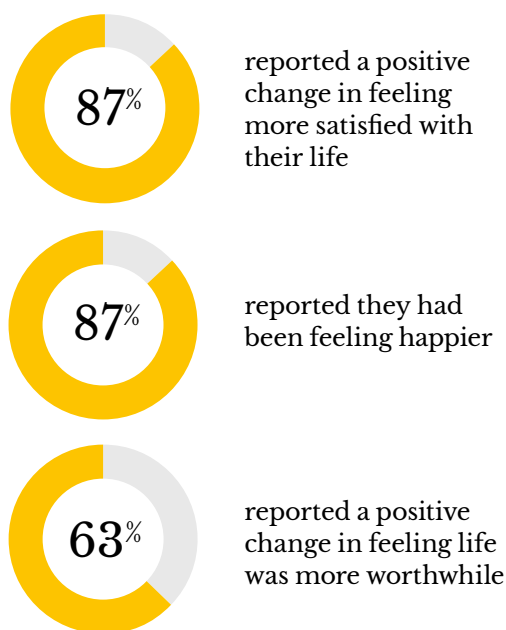
Muscular-Skeletal Linkwork Support (MSK)

The MSK Link-worker project is a partnership between BWC and the Sussex MSK Partnership (SMSKP), providing advice and information to women accessing the SMSKP service who need additional support.

Overview:

- From April 2024, a caseload of 13 women and waitlist of 60 women were carried over into the new financial year. There were an additional 53 new referrals.
- A total of 289 support sessions were offered, including 71 face-to-face sessions. The service offered up to ten support sessions, either remote over the phone or face-to-face at BWC or Crawley Hospital. Compared to previous years, we noticed a rise of women engaging for the full ten sessions.
- Many of the women presented with other health difficulties, including Menopause, Long Covid, COPD, Asthma, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Osteoporosis and Obesity.
- Sadly, due to NHS cuts, funding for the project was stopped in March 2025, with a three-month notice period. The partnership and the service ended in June 2025.

Outcome statistics



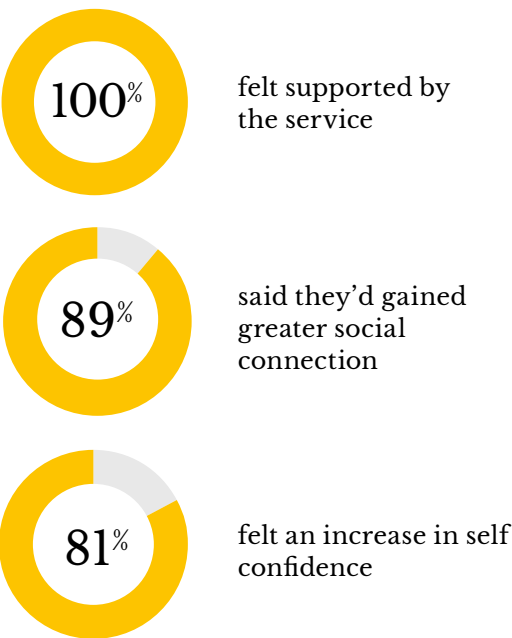
Peer-to-Peer Service

The Peer-to-Peer Service (P2P) provides supportive peer groups to enable women to build relationships with other women, and to promote a kinder relationship with themselves. The Service allows women to gain confidence and connection through peer support, whilst accessing opportunities for developing new skills and experiences through being involved in the service in a way that feels safe and comfortable.

Overview:

- The Peer Service held 115 in person groups and 42 online Peer groups. The Menopause support group was held 12 times, and the online Release and Reset Group was held 42 times.
- Themes that arose over the course of the year included a need for support when navigating health services, the menopause, trauma and neurodiversity.
- There were many self-referrals for the Peer Service, and it remained a popular provision throughout the year. Of 67 referrals, 52% were self-referrals, 18% came from internal services and 30% from external professionals.
- We also held 7 in person workshops and socials, with an additional 4 meet ups for those on the waiting list. In addition, the service carried out 8 sessions of Peer Facilitator Supervision, and 7 of Peer Facilitator Training.
- The service secured additional funding, allowing it to continue beyond its original end date of November 2024.

Outcome statistics



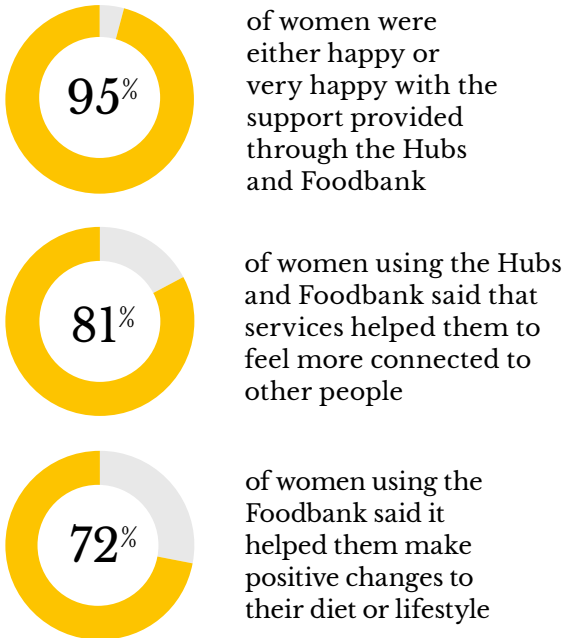
Support Services

Providing emotional and practical support in safe, open-access, trauma informed spaces through our weekly Women's Hubs, Foodbank and Support email inbox.

Overview:

- In total, 134 hub sessions were held, supporting 180 women.
- Hubs provided in-person support in safe, women-only environments, and this year focussed on embedding the Domestic Abuse Senior Practitioner into the Hub.
- This year, we saw an increase in the number of women accessing our support that have disabilities or long-term health issues. This has been an ongoing theme, with 88% of service users reporting a health issue that impacts their ability to live their daily lives.
- The Senior Practitioner provided support to women disclosing Domestic or Sexual Abuse via the Hubs and ongoing casework support to women in need of a more thorough intervention. A total of 17 women received specialist support of this kind between July 2024-March 2025.
- Volunteer attendance and retention was higher than average. We operated 3 Support Hubs per week across the city.
- Our foodbank held 50 sessions, supporting 136 households with a combined 1203 parcels of food.
- The Support Inbox saw 66 women access support and signposting via email.

Outcome statistics



“BWC has been key to my ability to improve my mental health and wellbeing over the last two years. [...] There is no judging - with the encouragement of others in the group and the facilitator I feel heard, valued and have made lifelong connections [...] Thank you to everyone at BWC for helping me help myself; for trusting me and allowing me to break down my walls and see the goodness in others.”

“I went to the hub for the second time on Monday evening and found it really comforting. I’ve completely isolated myself for 8 months due to trauma this year, so it was wonderful to have a space to socialise and feel safe.”

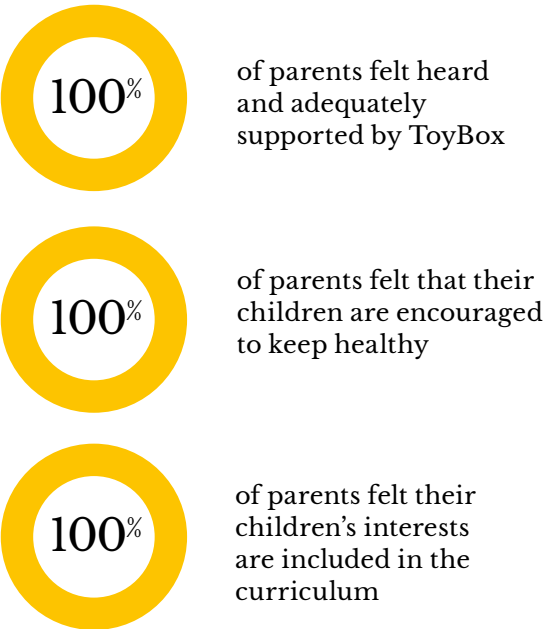
ToyBox Early Years Education

ToyBox offers inclusive, trauma-informed Early Years education and support for children 0-5yrs from low-income families facing multiple disadvantages.

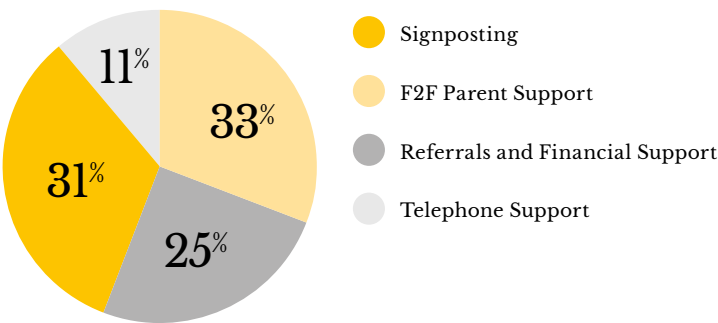
Overview:

- Toybox was open for 600 hours. During this time, 14 children were supported, with 874 childcare sessions provided.
- ToyBox continues to play a vital role in meeting the complex needs of its community. We worked to offset where services might be less accessible for families, with ToyBox staff making appropriate referrals post-enrolment.
- A key achievement was the introduction of a targeted SEND pathway, enabling early identification and timely access to relevant services. We experienced a rise in numbers of children needing speech, language, and SEND support. As such, staff have undertaken Makaton and communication training.
- As well as classroom-based learning and play, the children accessed trips to the Museum, Brighton Corn Exchange, Brighton Fringe, Brighton Festival, Beach School and green spaces. We also arranged visits from the fire service and a dentist.

Outcome statistics



Statistics of parent support 24-25



“There is no other provision like Toybox. Community and connection is at the heart of everything the team do. I am so sad it is our time to leave. I can’t thank you enough.”

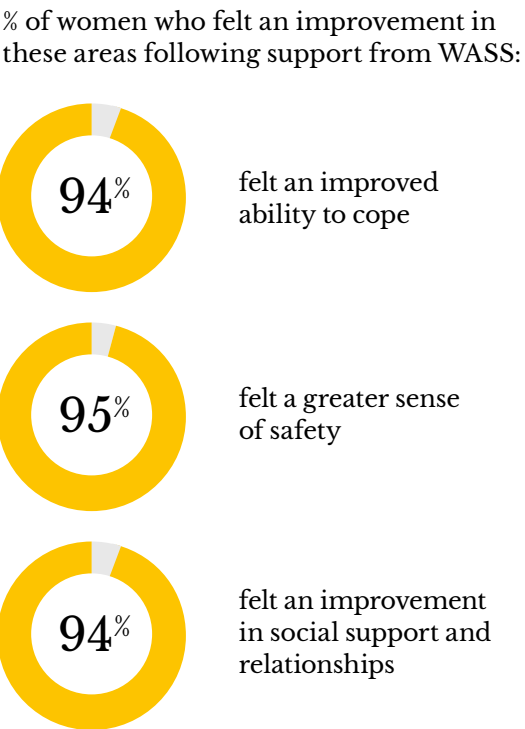
Women’s Accommodation Support Service (WASS)

The Women’s Accommodation Support Service (WASS) offers trauma-informed, women-centred one-to-one casework support to improve access to safe accommodation as well as signposting, peer support and access to practical support including food, toiletries and clothes.

Overview:

- In total, 181 Women were supported through Casework or the Hubs – many women receive support through a combination of both services
- Our Worthing Hub relaunched in partnership with The Probation Service Breakfast Club and relocated to larger venue.
- The Feasibility Study into Safe Accommodation for Women Leaving Custody in Sussex was completed, in partnership with Commonweal Housing.
- Funding was extended for core WASS services, with new funding awarded by the Domestic Abuse Small Grants funds in East and West Sussex. This allowed WASS to increase capacity to support more women who have experienced Domestic Abuse and/or Sexual Violence in those areas.
- We saw an increase in women who have no recourse to public funds, and limited access to welfare. We worked with the Foodbank, children’s services, the Home Office and others to provide both practical and emotional support.

Outcome statistics



“I love coming [to the Worthing Hub]. There is a really good atmosphere, and I feel the staff really care and want to help [...] I can come and feel safe and be me. My English is not so good, but I always feel included.”

Kerry's Story

“They believed, they acknowledged, they were my voice they were my protection, they were my guidance.”



Kerry* was made a ward of the court at an early age but was regularly placed back with her father who abused her. In her twenties, the revelation that Kerry's father was abusing her niece reignited the trauma of her childhood and Kerry started drinking to get through the day. As her drinking escalated, Kerry's mental health deteriorated, and she found herself in a violent relationship. She attempted to take her own life more than once, was in and out of police custody and appeared in court repeatedly. She struggled with her mental health so much that on occasion she refused to leave the safety of the cells.

“As a child I was locked in a room and only allowed out to go to school, yet as an adult I felt safer in custody, behind a locked door, than I did out in the world.”

At sentencing, the judge realised how desperately Kerry needed help and sentenced her to attend support sessions at Brighton Women's Centre. Kerry thought that meant saying sorry and telling people what they wanted to hear.

But by her third session something changed because Kerry had found a safe place where she could talk about the trauma she had experienced.

By working with her BWC caseworker, Kerry learned to set boundaries to keep herself safe; she found her voice and most importantly, learned how to forgive herself and others. She was no longer ashamed.

“There is no manual that could teach what the women at BWC provide - absolutely none. And I should know I've been through a range of mental health professionals that I hadn't connected with or been able to discuss my trauma with; none I felt safe with to open up to. What they provided me with was something so precious and unbelievable: giving me a voice, empowering myself and not being ashamed of what had happened, what I had been through what I had done.

I value Brighton Women's Centre with everything I have. BWC not only helped rebuild me mentally; they helped rehouse me and saved my life because without their tools and knowledge I would not be here today. They have encouraged me to become a functioning member of society with social skills and social boundaries.

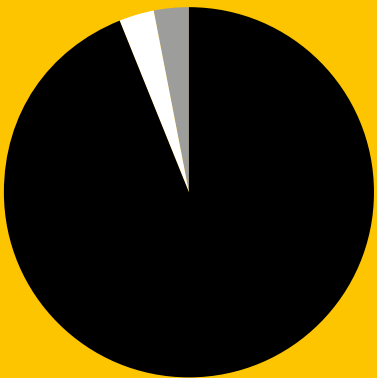
They believed, they acknowledged, they were my voice they were my protection, they were my guidance. Their commitment, compassion, dedication and patience is priceless to women who are at their most vulnerable. Without these services many women would be left trapped in cycles of domestic violence, addictions and mental health issues to name but a few.

To give someone hope, that is something precious and unbelievable and BWC certainly is the hope that many women need.”

* Kerry's story reflects a real woman's experience, but her name has been changed to protect her identity.

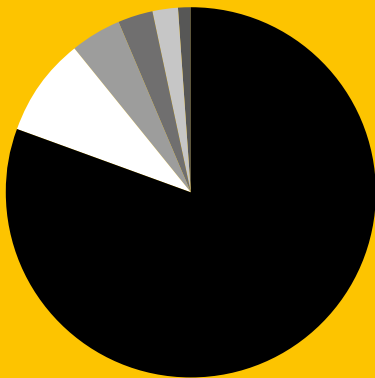
Accounts

Income



- Contracts/Grants £1,273,334
- Fundraising £39,638
- Earned Income £40,678
- Total income £1,353,650**

Expenditure



- Staff Costs £1,098,023
- Direct Costs £118,723
- Fundraising £59,734
- Office Costs £41,562
- Establishment Costs £31,965
- Governance Costs £12,839
- Total expenditure £1,362,846**

We gratefully thank all of our partners and funders



David Family Foundation | Lennox Trust | Munro Charitable Trust | Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust | Together Co | Worthing and Adur Council

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Thank you to all our supporters for celebrating our 50th anniversary with us.

