

Our vision is for a just, safe and kind society where women are inspired, and helped, to reach their unique positive potential. Where good health, and positive relationships, are valued and nurtured.

Womens Health Matters reduces health inequalities experienced by women from communities across Leeds. Our group work, peer support and intensive one to one support creates safe environments where women can build trusting relationships and begin to recover their health and regain control of their lives. In addition our outreach work allows us to broaden our reach to a wide range of women who have often found it more difficult to work with statutory services.



Womens Health Matters

“Just to say a big thank you to Womens Health Matters for their input in my life. They have restored my dignity as a woman.”

“This is brilliant, it’s the first time I’ve really been listened to, thank you.”

5723 women reached by our services

Intensive support for 547 women

We worked with women and girls aged 13 - 92

We ran 410 group sessions

359 women received one to one support

CHAIR’S REPORT

WHM first began to offer its services to the women of Leeds 30 years ago. We are proud and privileged to have supported tens of thousands of women in this time. Despite significant changes over this period we have stayed true to our mission; to reduce the health inequalities experienced by women across the city. We diversified our funding streams and undertook internal development to increase our sustainability for future years. We received national recognition of our expertise in the field of DV by securing Tampon Tax funding until 2020. WHM also continued to innovate and our work with women whose children are being cared for by someone else provides an excellent example of this. I am confident we will celebrate many more birthdays with this same combination of hard work, creativity and commitment to a feminist, women-centred service model. Last year I said that “WHM succeeds because of the women who use our services, volunteer to help others, work for us in paid positions and who make up the Board of Trustees”. This continues to be the case. In spite of the increasing additional demands that are placed on all of these women, I know that they will continue to contribute their time, energy and vision. I would like to say a huge thank you to all of them for this and for making it such an honour to be Chair.

Alison Cater

GROUP WORK & ONE TO ONE

In a 2016 survey of 98 women we support intensively, the findings showed that 57% had experienced domestic, emotional or sexual abuse, and that 30% were sexually assaulted or raped as a child. Such experiences shatter confidence, prevent healthy relationships and damage health. 62% of clients reported experiencing loneliness, and more than half of them had, or had previously had, a mental health issue. 70% of the women lived in Leeds's 10 most deprived wards.

Our group and one to one support is at the heart of WHM's approach. We focus on the woman rather than single issues to work successfully with women experiencing a combination of complex challenges. We create a safe space where women draw support from one another to talk about issues, often for the first time. They can build trusting relationships and work at their own pace.

"I felt really guilty and to blame for letting my children see and hear the domestic violence, nobody had explained to me how we get to this place and why we stay, now I understand what has happened to me and I can start to make more positive decisions."

We expanded our DV work, running five support groups across South, East and West of the city. The Key provided support for young women aged 13-25 who have experienced or who are at risk of experiencing, domestic abuse or unhealthy relationships.

Footsteps supported women whose children have to live with someone else, at any stage in their journey, whether children were being cared for by someone else while an assessment takes place, or were permanently in the care of someone else/adopted. WHM helped women understand the issues leading to their children being removed and gave them a chance to plan for the future. In an evaluation session 100% of the women told us they are able to make more positive parenting choices.

Rainbow Hearts group continued to offer a safe, friendly space for women seeking asylum to come together, which reduced social isolation. 109 women from 24 countries attended over the year. We were awarded funding from The Leeds Fund to further develop the work, to assist women in the group to better manage their mental health and create fluid pathways to a range of support services. A participant described the group as a "Place of temporary freedom from stress, anxiety, loneliness, anger, bitterness, worthlessness, condemnation, regret, guilt – a problem free place."

WHM enables women to build their strength and resilience. Our survey found 91% increased their self-esteem, 87% were more self-confident and 86% were less lonely. More than 80% had stronger support networks and 86% felt more empowered to make choices. 92% of women attending our domestic violence project changed or ended an abusive relationship. In our work with young women at risk of abuse, 80% improved their relationships with family members, 73% improved relationships with their partner and 70% said they felt safer.

OUTREACH

Information and advice to 2259 women

2917 reached with cancer screening information

Not all our work provides intensive support. Many women receive information that helps them make decisions and to access the health care and support to which they are entitled. WHM has a proven record of being able to connect and build trust with those who often avoid statutory services. When women contacted the Information & Enquiry Service by phone and email, domestic violence and mental health consistently generated the highest volume of contact. Our cancer screening awareness support, through workshops and information stalls, supported the prevention of lung, breast and bowel cancer and encouraged uptake of screening. 64% of women were over 50 years old. 51% we spoke to were from BME communities. After talking to us, 93% of women who were undecided or had decided not to attend their next mammogram, told us they would now attend.

PARTNERSHIPS & SUSTAINABILITY

WHM continued strong relations with referring agencies that know and trust our work. A Children's Centre worker told us she was amazed by the level of engagement and disclosure, and then by the level of confidence gained quickly, by a woman attending our DV group.

We know we achieve the greatest results by harnessing the strengths and assets of the wider community and are committed to working in partnerships throughout the city. We continued to co-chair the Leeds Maternity Services Liaison Committee, bringing together maternity services practitioners and women who have recently been pregnant and given birth, to effect changes and improvements to services. 18 health professionals and 12 service users actively participated. We were a founder partner of the Women's Lives Leeds consortium, delivering a £2 million 4 years Big Lottery Fund project for women and girls in Leeds. This will reach greater numbers of vulnerable women with holistic, joined-up support, no matter where in the city they live. One of our roles is to host a Complex Needs Worker whose specialism is working with pregnant women and women at risk of or have had their children removed.

The securing of exciting new partnerships was key to developing our sustainability. We entered a partnership with Leeds Women's Aid, Behind Closed Doors and HALT to competitively bid for and win the contract for the 5-year Leeds Domestic Violence Service from April 2017. WHM will deliver the DV group support. We launched the new Best Start Peer Support service in S&E Leeds with lead partner Touchstone and Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust. With People in Action and Connect in the North we piloted new Feelgood courses for women with learning disabilities.

Through securing funding from the Cabinet Office Local Sustainability Fund, delivered by the Big Lottery Fund, we significantly developed two strands to enhance our sustainability into future years. We diversified income streams and secured vital multi year funding. In addition, we ran a new team development programme, building a resilient and cohesive team.

VOICE & ACCESS

"I feel I have gained more confidence since coming to the group. I feel stronger and more assertive to speak up in different situations I deal with on a day-to-day basis. I don't feel as isolated. I want to look for new opportunities for myself, focus on me more." (HOPE participant, disabled women's group)

In a 2016 survey, completed with 98 women with whom we work intensively, 53% said they were not receiving support from anywhere else, other than WHM, and 84% said the support we provided wasn't available anywhere else. We have a strong commitment to ensuring women's voices are heard and that they can access services. We work to empower them when dealing with professionals and others in their lives. Women said our support increased their understanding and confidence in their own coping strategies and ability to speak up. In a survey with our young mum's group, YUMs, all participants stated that the project had helped them find out about and access other services and workers that could help them. It enabled them to develop skills, confidence and self-esteem and helped them make healthy choices for themselves and their families.

WHM has a rich history of engaging with the women we work with to shape and develop the services we offer. We consistently weave this through our work to ensure we meet the depth and changing needs of those we support. We secured Big Lottery Fund funding in early 2017 to develop a new Advisory Group of peer evaluators, from women who have been supported by WHM. They will attend our projects to speak directly to other women. We believe this will create honest, informative conversations and a skills development opportunity for the peer evaluators.

"I can sleep tonight now without worrying about her, I've been so worried about her" – a GP who made a referral to Include (young women and pregnancy project)



Thank You

Thank you to our funders, partners and supporters whose invaluable commitment to WHM enables us to improve the health and wellbeing of women across Leeds.

Key Funders and Partners



Thank you also to our wonderful volunteers who help us reach further into the communities of Leeds and extend what we can achieve together. Our Trustees guide the vision of our charity and ensure stability and strong governance. Together, you donated **881 hours** to WHM.

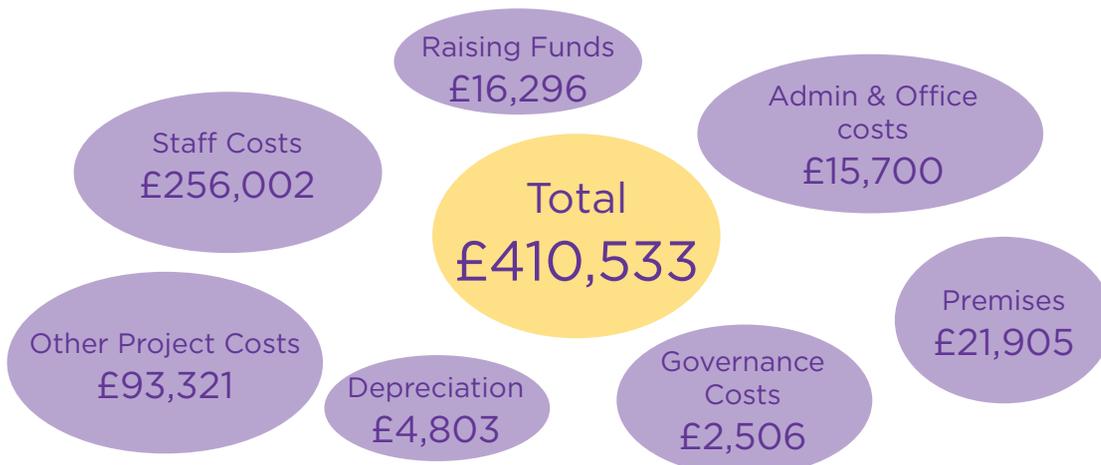
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Alison Cater (Chair) Caroline Schonrock (Treasurer) Amie Tolson Hannah Jones
 Emma Dickens Victoria Thirlaway Shazma Waqas Tracey Glanville

FUNDING SOURCES



EXPENDITURE



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