

# **Still opening door for 1000's of abused women & children**

**Northern Ireland Women's Aid  
Federation**

## **Annual Report 1999 -2000**

**T**he year which saw the change of a decade, a century and a millennium was inevitably one of reflection and looking forward with hope to a better future. Domestic violence has a long and ignoble history and is embedded in culture. So when



launching our strategic development plan at Stormont, during a major international conference on domestic violence, it seemed appropriate to hold out a vision for the new century "Eliminating Domestic Violence".

Twenty-five years ago, the first refuge in Ireland opened its doors in Belfast to women and children escaping violence and abuse in the home. There is now much less tolerance of violence against women and a better awareness of the issues. Laws have been changed, and services developed. It will take continued commitment and a concerted effort by the whole community to change the cultural acceptance of violence. And change is essential. The RUC responded to over 15,000 domestic violence incidents last year, a significant increase from the year before. The Women's Aid Helpline also saw a 20% increase in calls, with staff and volunteers responding to over 10,000 calls for support and advice. Those who answer the calls hear at first hand the fear, anxiety, desperation, hopelessness and sometimes terror of those who call. The work of being there to listen, support and provide information fosters hope and changes lives.

Last year, the Women's Aid Helpline received 10,200 calls and around 3000 women and children stayed in refuges throughout Northern Ireland.

The year saw a number of key agencies working together for change. It is encouraging to see the churches taking on the challenge. The publication and launch of "Ending the Pain and Healing the Hurt- a guide for faith communities" was the result of an eighteen month collaborative effort with the four main churches and the Regional Forum on Domestic Violence.

NIWAF celebrated its 21<sup>st</sup> birthday during the year and to mark the occasion held a week long international poster exhibition in the Waterfront Hall. 'Visuals Against Violence' was launched by Monica McWilliams and was visited by hundreds of people.

A major government policy was announced - 'Supporting People'- which purports to bring major improvements to the quality of supported housing and services for vulnerable people. Whether the policy impacts positively on resources for abused women and children in the long



term will very much depend on partnerships and consultation with key government agencies. Our statistics indicate trends which need to be closely monitored in order that essential services remain viable during the transitional housing benefit phase and once 'Supporting People' is introduced in 2003.

The Government has stated its intention to build a partnership approach with local community services to ensure adequate and effective resources. This task requires much time and effort from NIWAF's member groups, regional staff and statutory partners. Adequate resources are essential for temporary housing and support services. We are working with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure this. Securing the long-term future of aftercare and outreach services is likely to ultimately reduce the pressure on housing. Therefore, negotiations need to have a broad perspective and some of these will undoubtedly take place within new structures. There are new partnerships to be built.

The times are changing and challenging. The new political institutions in Northern Ireland signify change and major opportunity. We look forward to challenging them to realise the vision of creating a democratic and peaceful society and eliminating domestic violence.

**Angela Courtney**

Regional Management Co-ordinator

# Training Training

NIWAF secured funding from Proteus this year to continue the development of NVQs within Women's Aid. The programme was expanded this time to include paid as well as voluntary workers. New work-based assessors are also in place with participants coming from all over Northern Ireland.

Supervisory Management, a vocational training course, continues with fourteen participants in the final stages of completing the NEBSM Certificate.

The New Worker Training Course, which is accredited by the N.I Open College Network (NIOCN) was developed by Belfast Women's Aid with support from NIWAF. Course evaluations have illustrated the effectiveness of both content and process.

The Introduction to Counselling, again accredited by NIOCN was also

successful and was accessed mostly by voluntary workers. The Certificate in Counselling was provided through a successful collaboration with Relate N.I.

Other non-accredited courses were organised which reflect the areas of expertise, knowledge and understanding required by workers in Women's Aid. These include Voluntary Management Skills, Child Protection, Training the Trainers, Recruitment and Selection and Values in Women's Aid.

Two clearly identified areas emerged in requests for external training. These were children and domestic violence and inter-agency strategic planning. Both of these areas will, it is hoped, be further developed by the NIWAF Development and Young Person's Project Workers throughout the next year.

Another busy year for the Young Person's Development Project! The 'No Fear' education pack continues to be a useful and popular information and activity tool for helping young people examine differences between healthy and abusive relationships. Women's Aid groups are working at different levels to promote the pack locally with schools and youth clubs. Feedback from organisations using the pack continues to be very positive and is being received internationally from countries such as Finland, France, America and Uganda.

## Training

Training statistics for the project indicate that in 1999-2000 a total of 946 individuals, both internal and external, accessed training from the project. The most popular courses continue to be; Children Under Stress, No Fear, Child Protection and

Protective Behaviours for Children Under Stress.

External professionals availing of training include, youth leaders, teachers, social services, health professionals, inter agency groups etc. Workshops were also delivered at various conferences throughout the year.

## Stars in our midst

In May 1999, a group of 14 young people from Foyle and Fermanagh Women's Aid groups had the opportunity to travel to Boston to participate in a peer education programme concentrating on healthy relationships, conflict and resolution. The highlight of the trip was when the group performed their own piece of drama "The Joe Quigley Show" to an audience of approximately 150 people. So..., it was Boston last year, it could be Hollywood next!



## Looking to the future...

A steering group has been established to co-ordinate the development of a **training video** that will focus on children and domestic violence. It is hoped that the video will be launched in the early stages of 2001.

Developments continue with the production of a **primary school activity pack**. The pack will be based around the themes of the Protective Behaviours programme i.e.

- We all have the right to feel safe all the time
- There is nothing so awful or so small that we cannot talk about it with someone
- Others have the right to feel safe with us

The forthcoming year will include an extensive pilot project with the pack both internally to Women's Aid and externally with primary schools throughout Northern Ireland. Again it is hoped that the pack will be ready in the early stages of 2001.

**"You cannot assume anything about children and stress, you have to tune in, watch and listen."**

*Penelope Leach*

## Information Services

NIWAF's library catalogue has grown steadily over the year and now contains a wealth of domestic violence books, articles and related information. The library has been accessed by hundreds of students and members of the public. In January, NIWAF published its in-house website [www.niwaf.org](http://www.niwaf.org), a useful starting point for women seeking help, practitioners and students. NIWAF also produced Newsaid, a quarterly newsletter for Friends of Women's Aid, staff, funders and volunteers.

# Equality in Practice

## Equality in Practice

Late November hailed the arrival of the new Equality Project following on from the recent Ethnic Minorities Project, which produced the successful 'Violence on the Edge' training pack. This specifically tackles the issue of domestic violence among minority ethnic women & children.



The new Equality Project continues develop this work. At the same time, it looks to broaden its remit on equality *to include, to discuss, and to support the rights* of women & children from identified minority communities of interest. For example women & children with disabilities, from different cultures, of different sexual orientations and from a wide age range.

### *The story so far*

- 9 anti-discriminatory equality focused training sessions
- Extensive work and liaising with some identified minority communities of interest
- Wide consultation with Women's Aid groups on setting the equality agenda
- Involvement in responding to the new Statutory Duty Programmes of Equality (section 75 of NI Act)
- Distribution of equality materials & information on request

In the forthcoming year, the project will look for the development of 'Equality Roadshows'. These will facilitate a forum for exchange and awareness raising on equality as it relates to domestic violence.

# All together now. All together now..

From Downpatrick to Derry and from Coleraine to Kesh, all local domestic violence forums consolidated their work this year with Women's Aid providing key representation in all areas.

Local Women's Aid workers were called on to deliver inter-agency training as well as to reflect their expertise in projects such as the publication of directories and good practice guidelines. Women's Aid was regularly featured at seminars and presentations with specific communities of interest.

Many forums focussed on the introduction of the 1998 Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order and took the opportunity to invite local solicitors' associations to join their membership.

Innovative pieces of work completed by inter-agency forums include;

- a user satisfaction survey conducted with women leaving refuge.
- publication of good practice guidelines for trust hospital and community staff.
- a pilot voluntary perpetrators programme sponsored by a H&SS Trust and supported by the local Women's Aid group.





## Mapping the vision

This two day strategic planning programme was completed with the Causeway Domestic Violence Forum in February and is set to roll out to all other interested areas in the year to come. Mapping the Vision provides Forums with an opportunity to explore their community's needs and priorities in relation to domestic violence and to identify methods to meet gaps in services.

## Regional Forum on Domestic Violence

The Regional Forum continues to work to its remit and has developed its own strategic programme of activities. Work continues on issues such as the response of the criminal justice system while the research into male victims of domestic violence was progressed during the year. The Forum also published its website on the internet [www.domesticviolenceforum.org](http://www.domesticviolenceforum.org). The website contains information on the Forum as well as information on domestic violence.

## Housing & Homelessness

Women's Aid was involved in a number of projects involving aspects of housing and homelessness.

In particular, the Council for the Homeless commissioned research into the needs of homeless people who have a disability. Women's Aid was represented on its steering group.

Critical changes to the way homelessness will be funded in the future created the need to review Women's Aid services and financial arrangements. Supporting People and the Housing Benefit Transitional Payments occupied much time and effort and will continue to be a major issue for local Women's Aid groups and NIWAF.

Federation Forum sub groups addressed a number of housing issues including the drafting of the Licence Agreement and Rules for Co-operative Living.

# Local groups Local groups

**Ballymena** Women's Aid had another busy and demanding year with the refuge remaining almost at 100% occupancy throughout. Firm links have been established with statutory/voluntary agencies and community groups in both Ballymena and in Antrim. The employment of a Family Support and Aftercare Worker has enabled the development of services for women outside the refuge and families who have moved and need ongoing support.

**Belfast** Women's Aid celebrated its twenty-fifth birthday this year and like any other year the challenges remain in striving to keep domestic violence high on the public agenda and to maintain the services offered to women and children. In the last quarter of a century Belfast Women's Aid has, like other groups, witnessed and been part of a movement for social change that has steadfastly continued to demonstrate the power of self-help. New legislation and a



**A new Women's Aid refuge**

growth in awareness of the issues around domestic violence, new attitudes, policies and new resources have all added weight towards an eradication of violence in the home.

However, it is important to continue the work that Women's Aid is doing and meet new challenges as they arise.

Another busy year for all aspects of **Coleraine** Women's Aid services. Despite the new legislation relating to domestic violence which promised greater protection for women to remain in their own homes, refuge occupancy levels remained high.

## A little bit of stats....

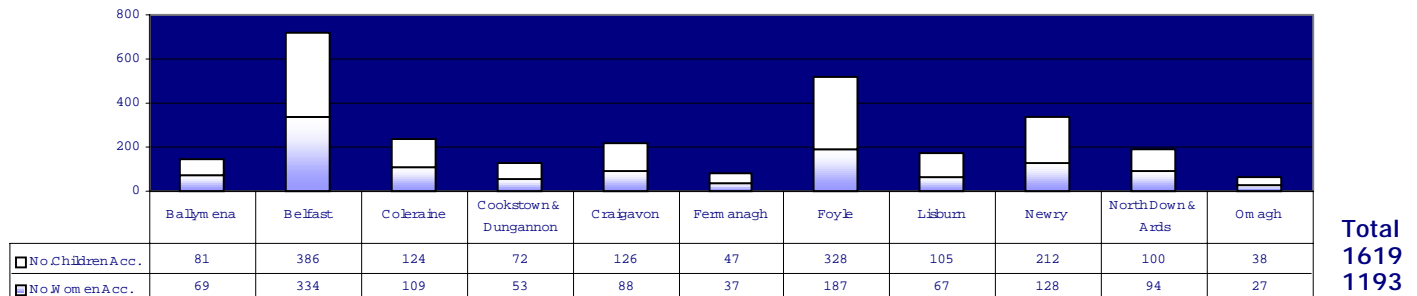
Over one third of the women who stayed in refuges last year spent at least one month there. Another 10% (more than 100 families) stayed for more than 5 months.

While living in a refuge for such a long period of time may be difficult for some families, there can also be advantages. Many women appreciate the extended support from workers and volunteers. Children continue to benefit from talking, playing and getting involved in a variety of recreational and educational activities.

Women's Aid believes in self-help and that women who have experienced domestic violence are often best at supporting and understanding each other. Women who stay in refuges for long periods of time frequently become involved in groupwork, training and personal development opportunities.

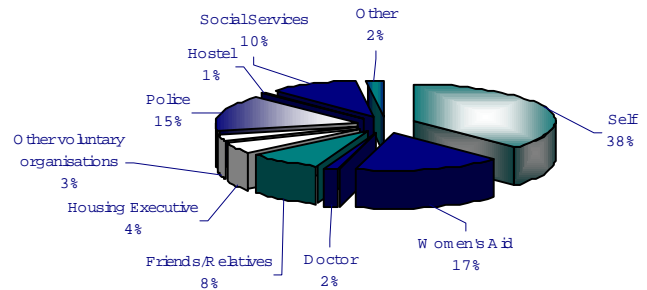
The length of time families spend in refuges must be taken into account in the discussions and plans about Supporting People. Funding to continue to provide safe and supportive accommodation for abused women must be identified and secured without a loss of provision or confidence.

One of the main reasons why families have to spend so long in refuges is the high demand on social housing in some parts of Northern Ireland. With changes to the housing selection scheme due to be implemented later in 2000, it will be important to monitor how women intimidated out of their homes by abusive partners are supported to rebuild their lives in houses of their own.



How many women and children stayed in refuges?

## Sources of referrals to the refuge



The Women's Centre is the base for the group's aftercare, outreach and community focused activities. Initially funded for a 3 year period, the Outreach Support Project officially ended in December 1999 and an evaluation is being commissioned. Early indications suggest it has surpassed all expectations, exceeding project targets during the first 18 months.

Continuity of funding enabled the development of services and the strengthening of relationships with statutory and voluntary agencies. The quality of services and their growing reputation is reflected in the increasing number of referrals from these bodies.

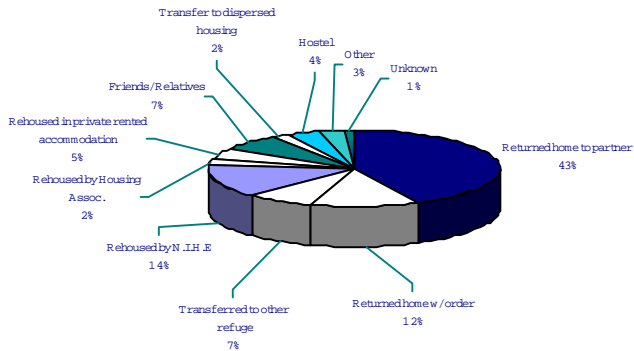
During 1999-2000, **Cookstown & Dungannon** Women's Aid, like many other groups went through upheaval, feeling the impact of not only the new legislation but also the more proactive police response. However, services continued and there has been more emphasis on developing the outreach service in rural areas.

In February 2000, a new centre was opened in Dungannon with a development worker based there. Weekly domestic violence 'clinics' have been set up in Aghnaclough and Coalisland. Added to this and at long last, an afternoon 'clinic' has been set up in Magherafelt in the local women's centre.

Last year, the number of families using **Craigavon** Women's Aid refuge has increased dramatically on the previous years. For the first time 100% occupancy was reached.

The multi-agency liaison support arrangement assists with this high occupancy rate and includes a Domestic Violence Officer, Health Visitor, Social Worker, Education Welfare Officer and Travellers Support Worker.

## Leaving the refuge



The Moving On/Journey to Freedom programme has been oversubscribed and they are now being delivered in rural areas for those who are unable to attend the Centre. Successful fundraising secured funds to purchase and refurbish a new centre with three new workers, to continue outreach/aftercare work.

Craigavon Women's Aid looks forward to the future and new development plans, the most exciting of these being the progression to counselling, move on housing and a satellite office to maintain a presence in Craigavon.

This has been a very eventful year for **Fermanagh** Women's Aid. Due to the falling demands for refuge accommodation and increasing demands for community based services, information and support, it was decided to move from the refuge

in March 2000. The groups' activities are now based at more accessible premises in the centre of Enniskillen where aftercare drop-in facilities to support women and children can continue. Community based childcare activities still form a large area of work, the highlight of the year being the trip to America for some of the children from the aftercare project. There are weekly programmes supporting women in the aftercare group and development work continues with the aim of reaching those suffering from domestic violence that are normally isolated from the community.

The external changes in legislation, funding and the progression of interagency work have all had an impact on **Foyle** Women's Aid. The refuge in Foyle Road has been handed back so that a specialised project can be developed by N&W Housing. A new site has been acquired with N&W Housing to provide 8 flats that families can move on to with the aim of decreasing long-term stays in refuge.

Plans are being developed to maximise the use of all the buildings on site at Ashley Wood refuge. It is

hoped to create play areas, quiet areas and improve the quality of services for the varying needs of families.

Pathways Aftercare Centre has proved to be a much needed local resource with a monthly increase in demand for advice and support.

Foyle has a very strong Interagency Forum, who have proven to be committed to working collaboratively towards eliminating domestic violence. After a very successful well-attended local conference, domestic violence remains highly publicised in the local media. Derry City Council has funded training for all council staff and leaflets on domestic violence for all public buildings. Foyle Women's Aid negotiated a room for Women's Aid within the local courts and with much help from Judge Burgess, a court users committee has now been set up. Cross border work also continues with the North West Consortium. Funding has been secured for work with young people.

**78% of women who stayed in refuge say that their abuser was their husband, boyfriend or live in partner and 11% say their abuser was a family member**



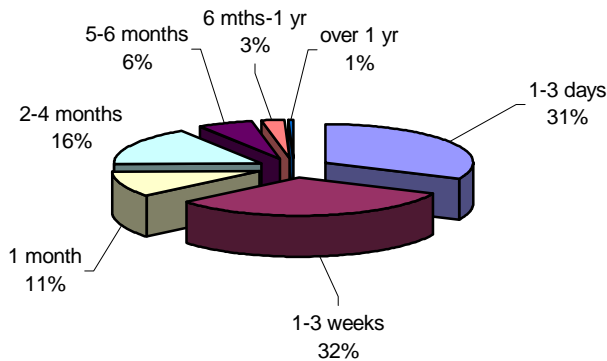
**Playroom in Lisburn Refuge**

As the youngest member of the Federation, **Lisburn** Women's Aid experienced an exciting and eventful year. In partnership with Ulidia Housing Association a new purpose built, 33-bed refuge "Sophia House" was opened in mid-June.

In October, Lisburn Women's Aid celebrated their achievements with a launch of services in the Linen Centre with special guest Monica McWilliams and around 100 other guests. The highlight of the event was a moving 'Wishing Tree' ceremony. A private party and tree planting ceremony was later held at the refuge. Lisburn is still very much in a developmental stage and the learning curve is steep.

During the year, **Newry** Women's Aid recruited a full-time counsellor /Support Worker, a part-time Childcare Worker and many new volunteers. The Centre has built a sound partnership with Newry and Mourne College, enabling a wide range of courses to be offered. These include, The Delta Programme, OWL,

### Average length of stay in a refuge



DIY, Beauty Therapy, Interior Design, adult Literacy and CLAIT to name a few. All courses are free and are delivered by fully qualified tutors. A new computer suite enables students and staff to access the internet and attend computer classes. In addition

to this, Newry as always has worked hard assisting women and children who have suffered domestic violence, through refuge provision and outreach/aftercare as well as raising awareness in the community.

In addition to the usual services of emergency accommodation, advice/information and aftercare, **North Down & Ards** Women's Aid has completed a year of extensive outreach, training and preventative work.

The Ards Outreach Project has developed to include weekly 'surgeries' in Portaferry, Donaghadee, Kircubbin and Ballywalter. The preventative work with schools has increased and we are pleased that more schools have included this important study of abusive/healthy relationships in their course work.

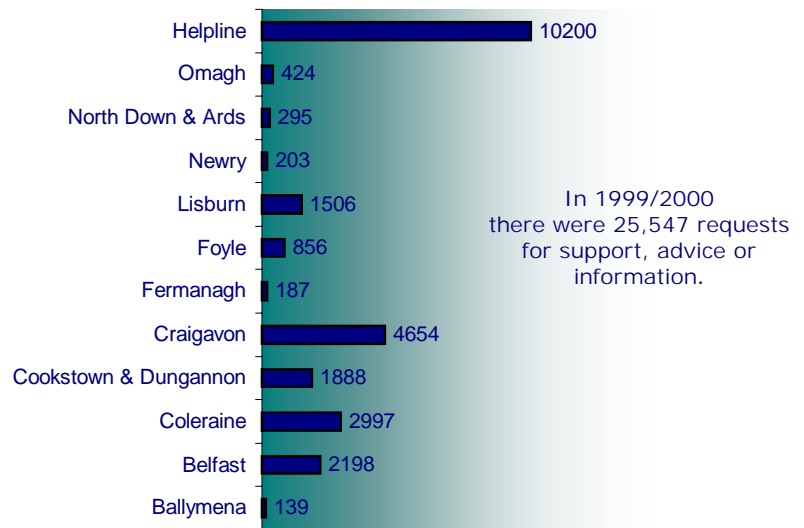
Due to the extensive training carried out within the statutory agencies last year, statistics this year show an increase in referrals from agencies, proving that ongoing training is essential. It is hoped to place more focus on church and community groups in the coming year.

It has been very rewarding to see so many women's lives being turned around by the 'Journey to Freedom' courses run from the centre. These have been continuous throughout the year and now include an evening group to accommodate employed women. The success of 'Transformers' (an afterschools group for young people who have experienced domestic violence) has reinforced North Down & Ards Women's Aid determination to expand and develop this vital work.

**Omagh** Women's Aid Resource Centre has continued to provide opportunities for training, personal development, relaxation and socialisation for the women using their service. The centre has offered courses in assertiveness, coping with stress, creative home improvements, women's health, ceramics and complimentary health to name a few. The centre

continues to be very well supported throughout the local community.

In January, Omagh opened its new purpose built 15-bed refuge. In September, the Rural Outreach Project recommenced with secure funding for 18 months. Eight rural villages are visited monthly. The project has had an impact in raising awareness of domestic violence generally and the additional difficulties faced by rural women and children in particular.





Since 1978 (the last 21 years)  
Over 33,000 women & children  
have been accommodated in  
Women's Aid refuges in  
Northern Ireland

A big **thank**

**you** from all the  
local Women's Aid groups to  
volunteers for their  
invaluable support given  
throughout the year.

Another big

**thank**

**you** also goes out  
to all those who give  
donations and helped  
financially!

86,836 People  
have been given  
advice and

24 Hour Helpline 090 331818

NORTHERN IRELAND

Women's  
AID  
FEDERATION

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# Help is at hand...

## Who calls the Helpline?

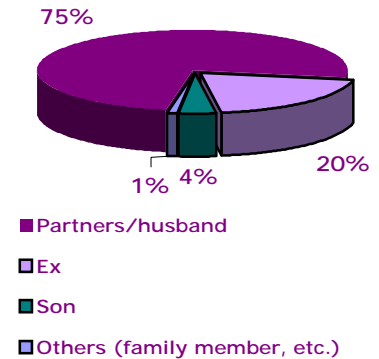


**C**alls to the helpline have steadily increased over the last year. In fact, statistics show a 20% increase on last year's figures with a total of 10,200 calls made throughout the year. 75% of these calls came from women in crisis and there were around 600 children involved in these situations in some form or another. One of the main concerns for women calling the helpline is that of their children's happiness and well-being. In particular, child contact arrangements with their absent parent have been causing difficulties.

Almost one fifth (17%) of the calls to the Helpline came from key statutory services. Police officers, health visitors, social workers and other healthcare professionals use the helpline as a means of increasing support to the women and families they work with. This further underlines the need for secure funding from a variety of sources for this vital service which supports both women in crisis and the agencies working with them.

Currently, approximately 850 calls per month are being answered. Around 60% of calls came from the greater Belfast area. However, there has been a noticeable increase in calls from rural areas, especially from North Down and Ards, Lisburn, Downpatrick and the Ballymena areas. The helpline also received many calls from England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. These calls came in at evenings and weekends, reflecting the fact that Women's Aid in England, Scotland and Wales do not have a 24-hour helpline.

## Who is the Abuser?



Once again, two paid members of staff and around 30 volunteers worked tirelessly 24 hours a day, all year round to provide this vital service to women and children suffering domestic violence. Without their commitment thousands of women in crisis situations would not have had the much needed support last year.

Making ends meet  
Making ends meet

Accounts to follow

The Salamander Charity Trust  
Charities Aid Foundation  
Lloyds T.S.B Foundation  
Training for Women's Network  
NIPSA  
Children in Need  
Proteus  
The Allen Lane Foundation  
The Oak Foundation  
The Esme Mitchell Trust  
Global Fund for Women  
MSF Union  
Enkalon Foundation  
John Moores Foundation  
The Esme Fairbairn Trust  
NIE  
Friends of Women's Aid  
DHSS  
Zurich financial Services  
HIHE  
Royal Ulster Constabulary  
NIVDA  
South & East Belfast H&SS Trust  
Northern Ireland Office  
NIVT  
Volunteers  
Individual Donators  
And all those who have contributed  
anonymously throughout the yaer.

