



East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership

Annual Report 2024-25



East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership (EAVAWP) is a multi-agency partnership established with the aim of addressing violence against women and girls, in all its forms, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, commercial sexual exploitation, honour based abuse and female genital mutilation. The EAVAWP sits within the strategic framework of the Community Plan 2015-2030, which is the sovereign and overarching planning document for East Ayrshire.

EAVAWP is comprised of representatives from Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership (EAHSCP), Council for Voluntary Organisations East Ayrshire, Community Justice Ayrshire Partnership, HMP Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire Women's Aid, Barnardo's, Break the Silence, ASSIST, Victim Support, the STAR Centre, Recovery Enterprises and East Ayrshire Council, including services across Education, Housing, Vibrant Communities, Early Years and Community Safety services.

EAVAWP contributes to the Safer Communities theme of the Community Plan through its work to: reduce inequality and build a fairer and more inclusive East Ayrshire; protect vulnerable people and families; encourage responsible citizenship and support positive health and wellbeing outcomes across the lifespan.

There are currently two actions in the Safer Communities Delivery plan 2024-27 which relate directly to the Violence against Women Partnership, these are in relation to the:

- Women's safety
- Commercial sexual exploitation.

Both of these areas will be reported on more fully in the body of the report.

Equally Safe

East Ayrshire Violence against Women Partnership works to the priorities of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls. It is co-owned by the Scottish Government and COSLA. The strategy was refreshed in 2023.

- [Scottish Government: Equally Safe 2023 - preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls: strategy](#)

Equally Safe 2023 clearly continues to identify that violence against women and girls has at its root cause gender inequality and the sexist and misogynist attitudes which perpetuate it. It sets out the Scottish Government and COSLA's renewed commitment to end violence against women and girls (VAWG), achieving this by working collaboratively with key partners across all sectors, placing an emphasis on engaging community planning partnerships and public protection forums. It clearly identifies VAWG as being everybody's core business and highlights key policies and legislation which underpin this work. Equally Safe 2023 promotes a whole systems, gendered response as well as essential collaboration with women and children with lived experience.

There is a welcome emphasis on:

- Universal services being central to achieving change in prevention of VAWG, further embedding primary prevention;
- a public health approach is adopted to recognise the impact upon Scottish society and provide an evidence based model to tackle VAWG;
- leadership and governance, accountability, measurement of progress and funding, and that considerations of VAWG and women's inequalities should be incorporated into all policies at a national and local level;
- identifying the links between the impact of VAWG upon women and the impact upon children; the strategy strengthens the links between VAWG and Child Protection or child wellbeing issues. VAWG is considered as both a violation of children's rights and women's rights;
- the impact upon boys and men and a recognition that boys and men may need different supports from women and girls, after experiencing gender based violence;
- the consideration of VAWG in a digital world, and the influence of misogyny and pornography upon young people who are increasingly exposed to harmful behaviours is also well represented.

Equally Safe priorities are:

- prevent VAWG before it occurs;
- support early intervention;
- build a broad and shared understanding across our society and communities of what VAWG is, how it affects those who experience it, its impact on society more generally, the scale of the problem, and what causes it – so that we can reduce the harm together;
- build political, institutional, sectoral, organisational, community, and personal commitment and contribution to preventing and tackling VAWG;
- hold perpetrators of VAWG to account, supporting change where possible;
- deliver sustainable, informed and safe specialist and universal service responses for victim/survivors that are holistic and meet victim/ survivors' individual needs;
- promote an intersectional approach to preventing, recognising, and responding to the compounding inequalities and risks that some women, children, and young people may experience as a result of their ethnicity, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or immigration status.

The vision remains for a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.

The Equally Safe Delivery Plan was published in August 2024 ([Equally Safe: delivery plan - gov.scot](#)). There are 14 deliverables across a broad range of areas with many actions being led at a national level. Many of the actions have a direct correlation to the work of East Ayrshire Violence Against Women partnership, reflected in the 2024-27 Strategic Plan.

EAVAWP Strategic Plan 2021-24

Activities continued in 2024-25 to progress the key outcomes which were identified in the EAVAWP 2021-24 Strategic Plan [EAVAWP Strategic Plan for 2021-24 \(PDF 4.7Mb\)](#). The monitoring framework that was developed and implemented in 2021 to enable quarterly examination and analysis of the progress of the key EAVAWP strategic themes and actions.

At the start of 2024, which served as a transition year from one plan to the next, 13 actions remained from the 2021-24 strategic plan that required to be completed. Over the course of 2024, the EAVAWP Advisory Group (previously Monitoring Group) continued to meet on a quarterly basis reviewing the progress being made. All 13 actions were completed by November 2024, or carried forward into the new plan, closing the implementation and monitoring of the 2021-24 strategic plan.

EAVAWP Strategic Plan 2024-27

The EAVAWP Strategic Plan 2021-24 expired in December 2023 and it was agreed by the EAVAWP and the Chief Officer's Group that 2024 would be a transitional year in which the new strategic plan would be developed. This was following the self-assessment activity which took place between April and June 2023, supported by the Improvement Service, during which three over-arching themes, or principles, were identified. At a further stakeholder consultation a fourth priority was added and these form the basis of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Plan 2024-27:

- Undertake a strategic needs assessment to gain a better understanding of the prevalence and impact of VAWG on our communities and what support is available and where there are key gaps/ areas of unmet need.
- Create meaningful and trauma-informed opportunities for victims/ survivors of VAWG to play a key role in shaping and monitoring the work of EAVAWP
- Progress activities to create cultural change around VAWG within key community settings
- Deliver sustainable, informed and safe specialist and universal service responses

The VAW Strategic Plan is now signed off by the Violence against Women Partnership and will soon be available. In order to get it to its current form it was subject to robust input from partners and stakeholders. Consultation sessions were also held with practitioners and women with lived experience.

Practitioners from a number of partners were invited to a planned session in January 2025 with representatives from Education, Housing, the Resettlement Team, Police, the STAR Centre: Ayrshire Rape Crisis, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Team and the Health Visiting and School nurse team attending. A copy of the plan and questions were sent out in advance of the session.

Practitioners identified that the language used in the plan is empowering for women and girls; that the plan is female-centred and points to women's right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; the plan challenges common held perceptions of violence against women and girls and has the potential

to educate/inform the wider community on this issue. People thought it was positive to see an informed approach to victim/ survivor centred trauma being progressed in the plan. Practitioners also welcomed the theme progressing the voices of women with lived experience.

Practitioners identified that the plan required to be sensitive to cultural differences across and between communities and take into account the needs of women with complex needs, as should the lived experience work. It was identified there are barriers to women accessing services, including rurality and these need to be considered. It was suggested that there should be greater information on what abuse is for people within our communities. The practitioners identified that much of the work they do aligns with actions in the plan. As a result of this consultation the plan has been strengthened in terms of intersectionality and supporting women with multiple disadvantages.

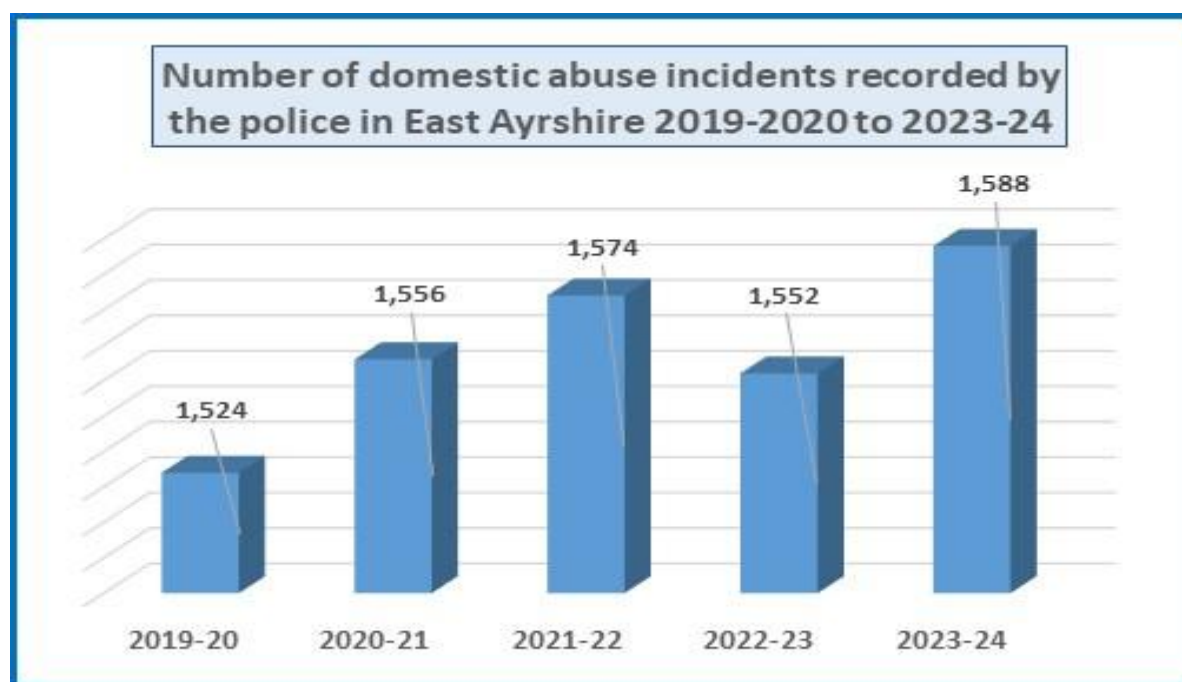
Two consultation sessions took place with participation groups hosted by East Ayrshire Women's Aid, one in Cumnock and one in Kilmarnock. These sessions were supported by the HSCP Participation and Engagement Officer and VAW Lead officer. The experiences of the women were complex and we were privileged by their willingness to share their experiences, their openness, honesty and desire to make things better for other women. All of the women had experienced services from education, social work, women's aid and the justice system, amongst others. The groups were supportive of the four strategic themes and the information they provided sat within these priorities as actions.

The women often described difficult experiences with services and described not being believed, felt that services and practitioners did not have a full understanding of the complex nature of domestic abuse, or the behaviours of perpetrators. All of the women had experience of domestic abuse and they identified their experience would be improved if gender double standards weren't applied, practitioners were strengths based, practitioners partnered with survivors and held perpetrators to account. Although the women did not use this Safe & Together language, they identified the principles and core components. Women described gaps in services for children recovering from abuse and trauma. They also described the waiting times to get access to services for themselves. They detailed that support from organisations such as ASSIST were great, but this type of support needs to be extended and provided earlier.

Women also thought that wider public messaging detailing what abuse is would be helpful and would support women to identify this in their own lives. This messaging should be available throughout the whole life span. They felt this might have helped them from entering abusive relationships. Many of the women advised they did not realise they were in abusive relationships until they saw a media campaign. The women saw the value of lived experience work and were keen to be involved with the right time, support, encouragement, and relationships.

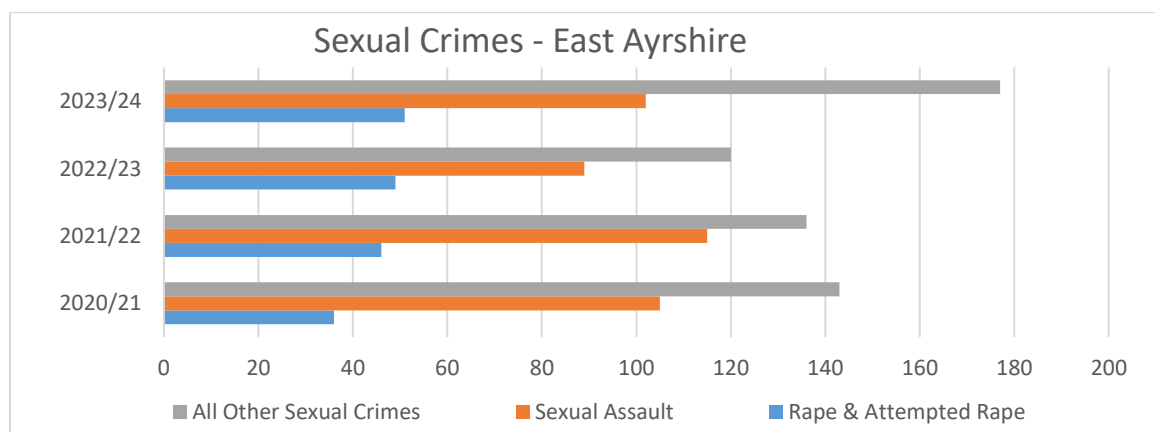
Public Protection activity

Throughout the period from March 2023 to December 2024, Police Scotland figures show the recorded incidents of domestic abuse in East Ayrshire. The figures for 2022-23 saw a drop in reported domestic abuse cases, which fell below the 2020-21 levels and was the first reported drop in figures since 2016- 2017¹. However, 2024-25 shows a further rise in reported crimes, evidencing a continuing upward trend. East Ayrshire reports the 8th highest number of domestic abuse incidents per 10,000 of population in Scotland (by local authority area).



Crimes of Sexual Violence in East Ayrshire

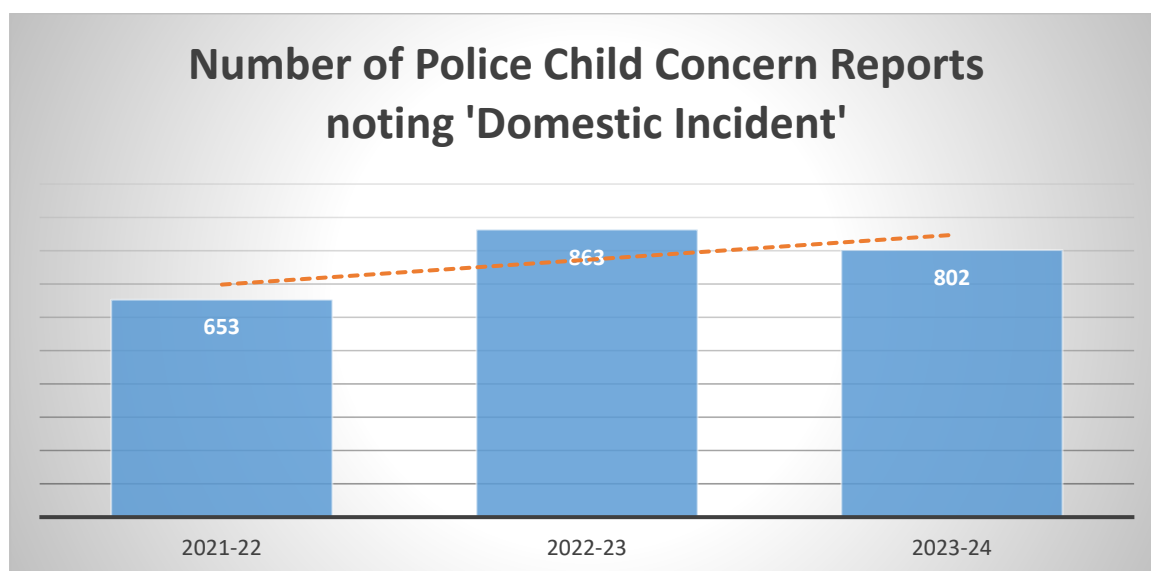
The graph below demonstrates that sexual violence is increasing year in year in East Ayrshire. Further work needs to be completed to identify age and gender of victim/survivor and whether reported crimes are recent or historic.



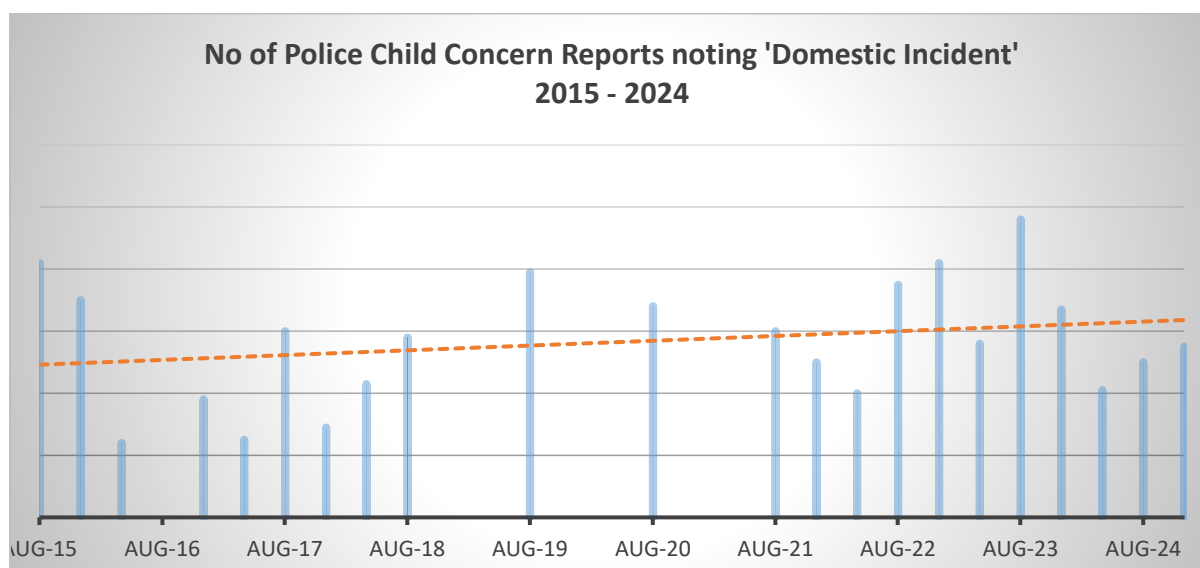
¹ Scottish Crime Recording Bulletin 2022-23

Child Protection Committee

Throughout 2024-25, East Ayrshire Council collected a wide range of data on vulnerable children, young people and families to support their response to child wellbeing and child protection concerns. The number of Police child concern reports received which notes a concern about a 'domestic incident' dropped from 863 in 2022-23² to 802 in 2023-24. Comparison of data from 2023/24 (August 2023 – July 24) notes a 7% reduction of child concern reports where domestic abuse is a concern factor in comparison to previous reporting figures of 2022/23.



Nevertheless it is noted overall, across the last 4 years, figures continue to rise in relation to the number of Police Child Concern Reports where 'Domestic Incident' is noted.



The above graph records Police Child Concern Reports where domestic abuse is a concern factor from August 2015 to December 2024. The table reports on three

² The Child Protection Committee reporting year is in line with the academic year, August- July ie Q1 August – October; Q2 November- January; Q3 February –April; Q4 May- July and as such differs from the VAWP reporting year.

marker points through each year (April, August, December) as a comparison point. While acknowledging gaps in the data reported, the trend line continues to demonstrate, for a further year, a continuing upward trajectory of children and young people who experience domestic abuse within family life.

The total number of children in East Ayrshire who were on the Child Protection Register at 11 March 2025 numbered 97, for 42 children (43%) there was a risk recorded in relation to domestic abuse, this is down 2.7 % from last year. Of Police child concerns, reported as a domestic incident, an average of 6.48% were then placed on the child protection register. This is an increase of 1.98 % from the last reported figure of 4.5% in 2023-24.

These figures demonstrate that while figures may fluctuate, domestic abuse continues to be a present, harmful and challenging factor in our communities, impacting on children and young people.

Adult Protection Committee

In order to promote a consistent approach to Public Protection within East Ayrshire the Adult Protection Lead Officer, Adult Protection Practice Improvement Co-ordinator and Violence against Women and Girls Lead Officer have been working together on a number of areas. Following the 2024 Multi Agency Adult Protection Audit it was identified that the existing Gender Based Violence risk assessment tool required to be reviewed. It is now an action in the Adult Protection Improvement Plan, this work is underway and due to be completed by December 2025.

The Adult Protection Committee recognise the cross cutting themes between violence against women and girls and adult protection.

For the period 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 under ASP/Adult Concern there were:

- 11 cases of gender based violence
- 1 case of forced Marriage

To share experience and resources, both partnerships now sit across the planning meetings for 16 Days of Action and Adult Protection Awareness Week. This has resulted in a supportive relationship to enhance public awareness of both agendas. An example of this was the Violence against Women Partnership having information stands at the Adult Support & Protection community events and Adult Protection supporting the Reclaim the Night Walk.

The National Forced Marriage Statutory Guidance was disseminated in October 2024. The Adult Protection, Child Protection and Violence Against Women Partnerships are working together to review the Ayrshire Forced Marriage Guidance and the dissemination of this.

Alcohol and Drug Partnership

The Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) recognise the intersection between alcohol and drug use and violence against women and girls. Due to this the ADP has supported the delivery of The Safe and Together Model to all clinical alcohol and drug teams. This model provides a framework for defining and discussing domestic abuse and ensures a holistic 'family centred' approach is delivered across our services.

With a drug and alcohol, focussed lens, the ADP has established a 'Whole Family Working Group' that is currently exploring a range of initiatives and programmes spanning both children's and adults services. The 'Whole Family Group' recognises the significance of each member of the family and the impact of the singular yet collective disadvantages they may be experiencing by supporting all involved. With cognisance to the significant trauma related to female substance use, the ADP are now delivering upon a commitment that all people referred for CBT/psychological support are seen within 18 weeks. All clinical staff across East Ayrshire services have now undertaken appropriate trauma training to provide trauma informed practice and the majority of these staff have completed trauma training to an 'enhanced level.'

The ADP has been working with the Violence against Women Partnership to plan and deliver training sessions aimed at supporting women affected by commercial sexual exploitation. These training sessions were developed through participation in the pan – Ayrshire commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) training for trainers. The training will provide comprehensive knowledge and skills to frontline staff and a potted version is available to community groups who are engaging with women who may disclose their involvement in selling or exchanging sex. Another key step taken is the sharing of the Building Bridges training (CSE Aware), which aims to guide partners in supporting a woman making a disclosure of selling or exchanging sex. The ADP is also encouraging partners to incorporate CSE enquiry in routine assessments, ensuring that women who may be experiencing exploitation receive the support they need.

With the involvement of the ADP Service Delivery Groups, inroads are being made to address the barriers women face when seeking treatment and support for substance use. Many women using alcohol and drugs also face additional challenges, such as the fear of stigma, a history of trauma, and specific vulnerabilities related to gender based violence. Recognising these barriers, the service delivery groups have ensured that women's needs are highlighted in their action plans, with a focus on improving access to treatment and support services.

Along with colleagues and partners, the ADP has recently launched the 'By My Side' application, which will be rolled out to EARN and ADP partners. This innovative tool is designed to support workers in assisting women to navigate services confidentially and without fear. The By My Side app has the potential to be a vital element in reducing barriers to accessing services/ care. This initiative, combined with the CSE

training has the potential to better meet the needs of women who may otherwise feel unable to engage with support services due to concerns about privacy or safety. Through fostering a culture of tailored support, integrating CSE into assessments, and using technology to ensure confidential access, the ADP and its partners are making progress in ensuring that women can access the help they need in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

East Ayrshire Equally Safe Return for 2023-24

The Equally Safe Quality Standards were published by the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Improvement Service in May 2018 (refreshed in April 2019), in close collaboration with the National VAW Network and other stakeholders.

The Equally Safe Quality Standards are presented across five key sections; the first four focus on the services/processes in place which support the four priorities identified in Equally Safe.

The Equally Safe Quality Standards respond to the goals set out in Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence against Women and Girls and in the Violence against Women Partnership Guidance (PDF 2Mb), in relation to performance management. East Ayrshire has been submitting an annual qualitative and quantitative return against these Standards since 2018³.

Referrals for all forms of VAWG in East Ayrshire

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Children 0-15	124	210	258	237
Age 16-25	180	265	281	332
Age 26+	697	636	656	1049
Age not recorded	65	89	278	25
Total numbers of referrals	1066	1200	1473	1643

In respect of all violence against women, referrals have gone up across all services by 11.5% in 2023-24. For young women aged 16-25, our results show referrals to specialist services has increased by 18% compared to 2022-23. A positive theme which emerged from the Equally Safe Return was that across all age groups, women, girls and children are reporting greater feelings of safety after accessing specialist VAWG services in East Ayrshire.

2023-24	No of referrals	Engagement: Reported feeling unsafe/ as being at risk	Exit: Reported feeling safer/ assessed at less risk	%
Children 0-15	237	74	72	97%
Women 16-25	332	214	155	72%
Women 26+	1049	679	473	70%

³ The full East Ayrshire report 2023-24 is attached as Appendix One

There is a concern across EAVAWP about increased numbers of referrals for women, girls and children who experience gender based violence and who require the support of specialist VAWG services in East Ayrshire. There is also a concern regarding the current challenges that VAWG services are experiencing with regards to stable funding, and whether this could be impacting on achieving outcomes for women and girls. This led to a work stream developing in this area involving specialist services. A Position Statement on the Increasing Demand on Specialist VAW services was presented to the Chief Officer's Group in September 2024. The specialist services group continue to meet quarterly to monitor concerns including those which may require escalation.

Equally Safe workforce developments

Equally Safe at Work (ESAW) is an innovative employer accreditation programme developed by Close the Gap, Scotland's expert policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market equality. It supports employers to improve their employment practice to advance gender equality at work and prevent violence against women and girls, which is both a cause and consequence of wider gender inequality and affects all aspects of women's lives, including in the workplace.

Equally Safe at Work was developed to support the implementation of Equally Safe, Scotland's national strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. It is a tried and tested way for employers to improve their practice, tackle the gender pay gap and better support victim-survivors in the workplace. Employers that take steps to advance gender equality at work are more innovative, more productive, better able to manage skills gaps, and are more protected from the costly risk of discrimination.

East Ayrshire Council - ESAW



East Ayrshire Council embarked on this programme in summer in 2022, and quickly established a working group to take forward the actions required to achieve Bronze status. One campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse and sexual harassment was to have information placed on refuse lorries which go into the heart of communities, to provide residents with information on where they can access help, should they need it. The Council achieved Bronze status in November 2023 and is

presently embedding the ethos of the bronze criteria whilst working towards commencing the silver accreditation.

NHS Ayrshire & Arran -ESAW

NHS Ayrshire & Arran was awarded Equally Safe at Work development accreditation on 6 November 2023 following a 12-month pilot programme. The accreditation demonstrates the organisation's commitment to prevent violence against women and to promote gender equality. The ultimate aim is to ensure gender equality within NHS Ayrshire & Arran practices and processes and to demonstrate the commitment to preventing violence against women.

East Ayrshire Council- Employee Support and Report Hub

East Ayrshire Council is committed to ensuring it is a safe, diverse and welcoming workplace for everyone, with respect to various aspects of their individuality. With this, the Council has created a new 'Employee Support + Report Hub' which provides resources for all employees facing any issues, both internally and externally. The resources available are for those experiencing harassment, discrimination, bullying and for anyone witnessing this happening. This includes gender based violence.

Employees are able to access this hub at work or at home. East Ayrshire Council does not stand for harm of any kind, but understands that it can happen. The new hub will improve these situations, with the anonymous data collected used to target any services or areas that may experience repeated reports being submitted.

East Ayrshire Council - Period Dignity

During the Covid -19 lockdown rules, and the closure of most public buildings, the Council launched an online ordering service providing free access to sanitary products in August 2020, for any resident across East Ayrshire who needs them. This is part of the Council's drive to end period poverty backed by funding from the Scottish Government. Many girls and women are unable to meet the relatively high cost of basic sanitary products, meaning they might miss school or work, lose confidence, or have to forego opportunities because they can't afford to buy them.

Residents can now receive two months' worth of Hey Girls period products at a time by filling out an online form or ordering by phone.⁴ Hey Girls is an award-winning social enterprise organisation which provides ethically sourced biodegradable

⁴ <https://eastayrshi.re/FSP> or call 01563 554400 The online form should be completed on a per person basis. If there are multiple people in a household who require products one form for each person should be completed. Products may take up to three weeks to arrive depending on demand. If you have any queries the PPP.Division@east-ayrshire.gov.uk can be contacted.

products at cost price. It aims to eliminate the stigma of period poverty with the promise that for every product bought, they will provide one free to a woman/girl in need. The Council believe that it is important that sanitary products are accessible for all members of our community.

East Ayrshire Education Services

Equally Safe at School is a public health approach to preventing gender based violence through working with school communities. Throughout 2024-25, and building on the success at St Joseph's Academy, Kilmarnock Academy have been working on the Equally Safe at School resource, a whole school approach to preventing gender based violence. The ESAS surveys have been carried out and the Senior Leadership Team have had a close look at the survey results, by gender and by year group, prior to creating an action plan for each year group. They have also continued to develop their Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme.

Supported by the Campus Police Officers, the majority of secondary schools have staff and senior pupils trained and they are delivering MVP in their school. Regular updates are provided via the MVP Team, termly coordinator meetings and the Health and Wellbeing Newsletter.

This year, three primary schools have taken part in the Education Scotland's Everyone's Included programme which looks to address gender-based issues in ECCs and Primary settings. The HWB and Equity Education Officer is working with the schools to build on this training to embed staff CLPL and [Everyone's Included](#) and / or [Gender 10 resources](#) in their settings.

Trauma Informed Contact and Care update

Trauma Informed Contact and Care (TICC) is a joint Police and Education early intervention, safeguarding and wellbeing initiative. The aim of the initiative is to support children and young people exposed to domestic abuse by ensuring that ECC's and schools are notified by Police Scotland, before the start of the next school day, when an incident has occurred in the previous 24 hours. TICC implementation began at the end of 2021 with rollout being completed in January 2024. This means that all children and young people in an education establishment in Ayrshire are benefitting from a wide range of supports based on their needs. There is a better understanding of domestic abuse and support is offered following established GIRFEC processes. The final rollout will be for children and young people who are not in a school or ECC.

In 2024 the Child and Young Person Police Wellbeing Concern Process was reintroduced whereby wellbeing concerns identified by the police are sent directly to the named person services in health and education. This allows for earlier intervention by universal services. The GIRFEC Child's Pathway is followed and, if appropriate, other agencies including third sector and social work are invited to a Team with the Family meeting to discuss appropriate supports and ensure a robust plan to improve wellbeing outcomes.

Safer Schools App

Safer Schools App is specifically designed with safeguarding in mind and is the main form of communication with parents and carers. The App supports parents and carers to navigate the online world with a huge amount of content which is informative. App users have access to national and local supports including information from Scottish Women's Aid; Refuge: 'What is Domestic abuse?'; the NSPCC; information on Female Genital Mutilation and on forced marriage. The App content cannot be tracked so there is no way of someone looking at the device and monitoring use of the App.

East Ayrshire Housing Services - Households Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Housing Services work closely with East Ayrshire Women's Aid, to reduce the number of women and children accessing emergency temporary accommodation to ensure a quick transition into settled accommodation, where necessary. In 2023-24, 73 females cited a dispute within their household, violent or abusive, as the reason for homelessness, compared to 84 in 2022-23. Lone parents aged over 25 accounted for the highest number of presentations at 40 cases. There were 33 cases from single female households aged over 25.

Measure	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total women fleeing DV	81	90	90	70	84	73
(of which lone parents)	45	41	39	36	43	40
(of which single females)	36	49	51	34	41	33

The majority of households experiencing violence or abuse obtained a Council tenancy: 29 households in 2023-24, followed by 6 households gaining a housing association tenancy and 23 returning to their current accommodation.

A Housing Staff Protocol for Domestic Abuse was implemented in 2020 with accompanying training to raise awareness of housing and tenancy rights to staff supporting tenants and housing applicants experiencing domestic abuse. The protocol has informed prevention activities to ensure that all frontline Housing employees feel confident in being able to offer advice to someone disclosing domestic abuse and are aware of the range of local and national support services, either to enable the survivor and any dependants to safely remain in the home, or be supported to move home.

The Housing Service continues to be represented on the East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership with full collaboration and input into the Partnership's Strategic Plan 2024-2027 and the Equally Safe Annual Return to the Scottish Government to improve safety, wellbeing and equality for all women and girls in East Ayrshire. A representative from Housing Services attends the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in East Ayrshire.

NHS Ayrshire & Arran

The Willows – Sexual Assault Response Coordination Service

The commencement of the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) 2021 in April 2022 requires health boards to provide services for those who experience rape or sexual assault including those who choose to self-refer for Forensic Medical Examination. Health boards in the West of Scotland have adopted a hub and spoke model with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde providing specialist Forensic Medical Services in NHS Ayrshire and Arran from The Willows. This has been available for Police referrals since June 2021 and from April 2022 is fully open to all referrals, including those who wish to self-refer.

Gender Based Violence action plan

The NHS Ayrshire and Arran (NHS A&A) Gender Based Violence (GBV) Steering Group (NHS GBV Group) developed the NHS A&A GBV Action Plan (2021-26). The focus of this action plan is to continue to strengthen the role of the health system to address GBV. The action plan is based on the World Health Assembly (WHA) Global Action Plan (2016). In addition, the NHS GBV Group continue to implement the key NHS actions within Equally Safe: Scotland Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

Routine Enquiry

The Routine Enquiry Training Programme continues to be developed by NHS GBV Lead Officers and Specialist Support Service, Women's Aid, focusing on new evidence and up to date statistics and data. Based on staff feedback and new emerging issues, the training has been updated to include more information on commercial sexual exploitation and intersectionality.

Routine Enquiry continues to be delivered in priority settings. Since April 2024, NHS GBV Officers and Practitioners have delivered three sessions and four refresher sessions. They continue to work to provide sessions that meet the needs of the service and maximise staff attendance. This has included meeting specific needs of services such as Mental Health and Addictions.

GBV training programme

In 2023-24, NHS GBV Practitioners developed a new GBV training programme based on "Selective Enquiry" for Healthcare Assistants. In 2024-25, one session was delivered to Maternity Care Assistants and Sexual Health Support Workers. The feedback from staff who attended was extremely positive and further training sessions have been planned in the coming months.

Specialist support services

East Ayrshire Women's Aid update 2024-25

East Ayrshire Women's Aid provide a holistic pathway of services which aim to support women and children experiencing domestic abuse from the point of crisis right through to sustainable safety and independence.

Between 1st April 2024 and 26th March 2025, 426 women, children and young people contacted or were referred to East Ayrshire Women's Aid for the first time. Throughout the year, 596 women, children and young people received support. 23 women and 24 children lived in the refuge.

Throughout 2024-25, Women's Aid has played an active role in EAVAWP including Equally Safe at Work, Equally Safe in Practice, Safe Spaces Scheme, 16 Days of Action and the continued development of the partnership's Strategic Plan. EAWA provides IDAA support to women referred to Ayrshire MARAC and are members of the MARAC Governance Group.

East Ayrshire Women's Aid also deliver multi-agency domestic abuse training on behalf of the partnership. Courses delivered include:

- The Dynamics of Domestic Abuse
- Children and Young People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse
- Identifying Risk and Supporting Recovery
- Domestic Abuse & Substance Abuse
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation

ASSIST update

In East Ayrshire, ASSIST is currently supporting 62 clients, with 125 open referrals. Across the West Command area of Police Scotland, ASSIST is supporting a total of 1289 clients. From April 1, 2024, to March 31 2025, ASSIST received 263 referrals in East Ayrshire, which represents a decrease of approximately 13.5% compared to the previous year. This year, ASSIST supported 125 high-risk clients through the MARAC process, with 14 of these cases still open.

ASSIST continues to receive funding from the Victim Centred Approach Fund (VCAF) and the Scottish Government. Additionally, ASSIST benefits from the Delivering Equally Safe (DES) funding, which supports initiatives aimed at preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

STAR Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire update

The STAR Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire has continued to develop over the past year and are currently recruiting a new Centre Manager to ensure sustained leadership and continuity for the team. In addition, the Advocacy position has been filled, enabling the STAR Centre to take on a full caseload once again and reopen the Advocacy waitlist, which had been previously closed.

Service level agreements remain on track to be exceeded: 90% of adults are expected to be seen within 6 months, and 90% of children within 3 months for support services. The Advocacy service continues to respond swiftly, with a maximum response time of 2 days for recent assaults or police referrals. The STAR Centre continues to offer crucial support throughout the justice process, including in-court assistance when required.

In the past year, the STAR Centre has also expanded their online presence, launching a new Young Person's portal on their website, designed to remove barriers for young people seeking support. The portal serves as a safe, easily accessible entry point for those looking to engage with our services.

The STAR Centre contributed to East Ayrshire's 16 Days of Activism campaign as a member of the planning committee, and supported the campaign by offering a webinar on online misogyny and incel culture, highlighting the impact of these issues on young people and society. Additionally, the STAR Centre collaborated with other Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisations in East Ayrshire to engage young people and help raise awareness during the campaign.

The Sexual Violence Prevention Team continues to deliver vital educational sessions within secondary schools, youth groups, and college campuses across Ayrshire, talking to young people about gender-based violence, inequality, and respectful relationships. These sessions also ensure that young people are aware of where to seek support when needed. The STAR Centre remains committed to collecting ongoing evaluation data from service users to continue improving services and ensure the evolving needs of service users are met.

Break The Silence update

Break the Silence make a profound and positive difference in the lives of those affected by childhood sexual trauma, their partners and family members. Break the Silence offer a professional counselling service using a range of therapeutic modalities with all psychotherapists professionally qualified and holding membership with a professional body.

The organisation is a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and adheres to The Ethical Framework for Counselling Professions. Break The Silence secured BACP Service Accreditation in 2024 and successfully completed renewal in 2025 demonstrating that they offer an

accountable, ethical, professional and responsive service to clients, staff, volunteers and stakeholders.

As a trauma-informed organisation, the Team work collaboratively at the client's pace, facilitating positive change through healing, challenging the effects of sexual trauma and assisting post-traumatic growth while upholding the values of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. The charity explores opportunities to influence, promoting early intervention and prevention through a range of approaches and represents the collective voice of those affected by sexual trauma to educate and inform, reducing inequalities by improving education and understanding of trauma in our communities.

The Team participate in a range of events, partnerships and networks including; Violence Against Women Partnership (East Ayrshire), Cross Party Group for Adult Survivors, National Prevention Group, National Prevention Group's Sub Group focussing on Sibling Sexual Abuse, The Survivors Trust, Survivors of Childhood Abuse Support network and more.

The outcomes for clients vary as support is tailored to meet the needs of the individual but focussing on; safety and stabilisation, processing trauma, and transitioning beyond trauma for healthier, improved lives.

Like most third sector organisations, 2024/25 has been a challenging year with rising costs, increased demand and economic uncertainty. Despite the challenges, the Team have continued to work with passion, dedication and commitment to provide the best possible service for clients and stakeholders and to ensure swift access to professional support for those in need.

Break The Silence understand that it can often be the biggest challenge to take that first step to reach out for support. Most survivors take many years to take that first step and some sadly never do. It's imperative to ensure clients can access specialist services in a way that meets their needs. Break The Silence offer face to face in person counselling through outreach localities, telephone counselling, asynchronous counselling and video counselling to promote choice and to accommodate individual preferences and needs.

Break The Silence are committed to continuous improvement; working closely with their client led advisory group, listening to client feedback; better utilisation and analysis of data; working in partnership with other agencies and networks; and by accessing latest research through memberships, subscriptions, conferences and events.

Barnardo's update

Barnardo's offers support to parents, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse where alcohol is a factor through their Safe And Together Service. Intensive 1-2-1 support is provided based on the needs of both the adults and the

children and young people. Support/Safety plans are negotiated and agreed with parents and children. Support levels vary and are determined by factors such as individual needs, urgency and complexity of family and individual circumstances. 43 families received support from a Barnardo's project worker who provided a direct service to 82 children and young people. This included working alongside perpetrators of abuse.

Barnardo's Safe and Together service has worked to facilitate:

- Children and Young People's Seasons for Growth programme
- the Seasons for Growth Adult Programme

This meant supporting 56 children and young people and 41 Parents & Carers within the adult Sessions groups. Additionally, intensive support was delivered where families simply could not cope or manage a group setting, 13 families benefited from this approach.

Barnardo's continues to facilitate the Triple P programme, a family intervention for parents of children who have or are at risk of developing behavioural problems.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service support for Violence Against Women

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) continues to promote the newly revised 'Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSV)' initiative, which allows risks to be identified within the home and advice provided to occupants. The SFRS will provide smoke, heat and CO2 detection, as well as other fire safety equipment (where criteria is met and supply available) to mitigate the risk of fire within the home. The new referral system which went 'live' in February 2025, allows for partner referrals to be directed to the dedicated Community Action Team, allowing SFRS to provide the best and most effective service to women experiencing Domestic Abuse within Ayrshire. The new process also allows partners to monitor the progress of referrals made to SFRS using dedicated service login accounts, which will enhance the communication pathways and provide a more joined-up approach to level of support provided to victims.

SFRS crews are trained to identify concerns/risk to the occupants and will notify partners using the AP1/CPW process. SFRS continue to support partners by acting on the HFSV referrals received and share relevant information at monthly MARAC meetings.

SFRS within Ayrshire have also identified the need for early communication surrounding the threat of Deliberate Fire Setting to victims' households and property. Locally, SFRS are in dialogue with the MARAC Governance Team, and are committed to finding a solution to the challenges faced.

Throughout 2024-25, the SFRS have continued to support East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership, especially around the '16 Days of Action Against

Gender Based Violence' campaign. During this period, SFRS hosted a White Ribbon 'Pledge' signing at Kilmarnock Fire Station and supported the '16 Days of Action' planning team by assisting with organising and attending various events.

The crews at Kilmarnock Fire Station continue to support the 'White Ribbon' campaign, and practice the 'Safe Spaces' centred training received by Woman's Aid in 2023, which focussed on:

- Understanding Domestic Abuse
- How to ask
- How to respond
- Identifying risk; and
- MARAC and DASH-RIC.

Finally, SFRS continue to support partners in the development of 'Support' Groups for women suffering the effects of violence throughout Ayrshire.

Police Scotland support for Violence Against Women

Police Scotland have continued to actively support the violence against women and girls agenda throughout 2024-25, both undertaking and being involved in a number of key initiatives across East Ayrshire. These have included the Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO) continuing to link in with partners on a weekly basis as part of HMP Kilmarnock re-integration discussions to identify domestic abuse perpetrators and identify risks prior to their release.

Police Scotland have also offered support and reassurance to young females within schools through campus police officer presentations as part of PSE input. A key role for Police Scotland has also been in preventing violence and providing access to early intervention through campus officer's engagement within schools and delivering various subjects relating to domestic abuse. Police Scotland launched a new training programme during the 16 days of action, called 'You, Me, Together.' This has been launched in each secondary school across East Ayrshire and is available as a training package to be used at any time throughout the PSE curriculum. 'You, Me, Together' focuses on domestic abuse, teenage relationships and coercive and controlling behaviour. The learning intentions of the programme are to explain the different elements of coercive controlling behaviour; to identify when a relationship is becoming abusive as a result of coercive control and to have an awareness of 'Police powers and legislation' around coercive controlling behaviour.

As active participants in the 16 days of action, Police participated in the events throughout the 16 days of action calendar. Following on from the pan-Ayrshire conference on commercial sexual exploitation in 2023, Police have committed to training the LALO Sergeants across Ayrshire in commercial sexual exploitation, along with partners, and supported by the Women's Support project. This training is currently being rolled out to new recruits within the Ayrshire division and will be extended to other officers in the near future.

Police response to domestic abuse

Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Team (DAST) officers undertake daily safeguarding contacts with victims to ensure the welfare and safety of those most vulnerable within our communities. The DAST now has a dedicated DS to ensure the risk for all domestic incidents throughout the division are efficiently assessed. The team work closely with the Investigation Unit.

The Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU) continue to take ownership of serious, complex and protracted enquiries into high level perpetrators of domestic abuse. The officers work closely with partner agencies to ensure victims of Domestic Abuse are safeguarded and supported during the investigation process. The number of non-recent enquiries undertaken by the team has noticeably increased over the last year which reflects the increase in confidence of victims to report offences. The DAIU also performs a critical safeguarding role 'out of hours' to ensure the immediate safety of victims is assessed and addressed, they also assist to deliver DSDAS notices.

The number of applications to the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS) continues to significantly increase year on year which reflects the increased awareness of the scheme amongst practitioners and the public. Applications are mainly submitted by Police, partner agencies or concerned relatives, although there has been a noticeable increase in the number of 'Right to ask' applications from potential victims themselves. Regardless of who makes the application, a disclosure allows the person receiving the information to make an informed decision on whether to continue their relationship.

MARAC has been in place within East Ayrshire for over two years. Monthly meetings take place via Teams where information is shared to address safeguarding measures and support for high-risk victims who may or may not have reported the perpetrator.

MATAC monthly meetings are held within Ayrshire to identify and target serial perpetrators of domestic abuse. These investigations are undertaken in conjunction with the Domestic Abuse Task Force (DATF) to maximise investigative opportunity and provide the best service with positive outcomes for victims.

East Ayrshire Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference 2024-25 (MARAC)

The Ayrshire MARAC commenced operationally in August 2022 and has continued, throughout 2024-25, to make a significant contribution to improving the safety of victims of domestic abuse at risk of significant harm or death across Ayrshire.

There are three local MARAC meetings – one in each of the local authority areas in Ayrshire, centrally and consistently supported by the MARAC Coordination Team. In East Ayrshire, all of the Agency Representatives (Education, Police, Housing, Women's Aid, ASSIST, Children & Young Peoples' services, Adult services, Justice services, Health services, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service) continue to support the

local meetings and several new Agency Representatives have been trained and supported to join the MARAC in 2024-25.

MARAC meetings take place monthly in East Ayrshire. In 2024-25, 12 meetings took place with 155 cases referred – 152 females and 3 males. Full MARAC data and analysis for East Ayrshire (and the whole of Ayrshire) will be available in the Ayrshire MARAC Annual Performance Report 2024-25.

The Ayrshire wide MARAC Governance Group provides strategic direction from MARAC Leads. This Group meets quarterly and reports into the EAVAWP.

Additionally, a local Agency Representatives Group has continued to meet after every East Ayrshire MARAC to provide support to representatives and allow a two-way feedback process to the MARAC Coordination Team. This local Group meets quarterly but can also convene as required to support the Agency Representatives. The programme of local MARAC training has now become an integrated part of the EAVAWP annual training calendar.

A number of developmental and improvement activities have taken place in 2024-25, all overseen by the MARAC Governance Group. As a result of the reflective learning and development session in June 2023, an action plan has been in place to support identified improvements. Actions completed in 2024-25 have included:

- Improving the interface between MARAC and Adult Support & Protection:
- Improving the alignment of MARAC and Safe & Together:
- Expanding MARAC learning opportunities to a wider group of agencies across Ayrshire.

Work continues on several other improvement actions, including:

- Exploring how to gather information to understand the impact of the MARAC process for individuals;
- Exploring and improving the MARAC information flow with primary care, including MARAC markers for primary care;
- Exploring and developing local perpetrator mapping & intervention tools in respect of MARAC risks;
- Exploring responses to and developing local confidence in relation to specific risks & safety involving perpetrators and repeat referrals;
- Developing a proportionate programme of regular self-evaluation and quality assurance work to support improvements in MARAC practice and governance.

16 Days of Action to Eradicate Gender Based Violence, November – December 2024



The international campaign of 16 Days of Action to Eradicate Gender Based Violence runs between 25 November and 10 December every year, and is in its 34th year, having been established in 1991.

The 2024 theme continued to be 'Imagine a Scotland without Gender Based Violence'. The East Ayrshire multi-agency planning group agreed that the focus in 2024 should be on making greater links with, and raising awareness within, East Ayrshire communities. In order to achieve this it was agreed there would be a programme of work with young people and a 'Festival of Learning' webinar programme which would be offered to practitioners and members of the community alike. The White Ribbon campaign would also have a greater presence in the community.

White Ribbon

The White Ribbon events commenced on 25 November with the launch of East Ayrshire's White Ribbon campaign which was supported by ScotRail and the British Transport Police and held at Kilmarnock Train station. The public engaged well with this event which saw hundreds of pledges being made never to condone, commit or remain silent about violence against women.



The following day saw a further White Ribbon pledge signing at Tesco on West Shaw Street in Kilmarnock. This was well supported by Tesco staff and the public who made pledges and engaged in conversations with the team present. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service hosted an event on the evening of 4 December with crews signing the pledge, and a final event was held at Cumnock Community Hospital on Friday 6 December. A White Ribbon steering group has now been established to take forward this work.

Work with young people

As part of the commitment to engage with the community, the 16 days planning group undertook work with young people to raise awareness of gender based violence. This work was led by the Star Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire, East Ayrshire's Women's Aid and Police Scotland.

Staff from the Star Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire team in collaboration with EA Women's Aid, visited SL33 to engage young people in discussions about gender-based violence. The session culminated in the creation of vibrant posters. A similar workshop took place at SL66 in Cumnock, where the young people also expressed their hopes for a violence-free world through poster-making. These artworks were displayed at WG13 after the East Ayrshire Reclaim the Night march, forming a thought-provoking background for the evening's speeches.

The STAR Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire also reached out to students at Ayrshire College by participating in their 16 Days of Activism fairs. They engaged with young people at the Kilmarnock campus sparking meaningful conversations and providing resources on gender-based violence. To extend their message further, they collaborated with Ayrshire College's Student Association to create engaging social

media content for Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), offering students ways to join the campaign.

East Ayrshire Women's Aid delivered a Gender-based violence session to 'The Hive', Cumnock which resulted in 3 GBV videos being made for 16 Days of Action. 10 young people created and edited these videos over several days and the results were fantastic. These were also shared at the Reclaim the Night March after event.

Police Scotland also engaged young people during 16 days of action across four of East Ayrshire's high schools, Robert Burns Academy, Loudoun, Stewarton and the Grange. In Robert Burns Academy, all S6 pupils participated in White Ribbon signing pledges along with Campus Officer, PC Aitken.



'You, Me, Together' inputs were delivered to pupils at Loudoun Academy and Stewarton Academy. There was a collaborative session between PC Rae and East Ayrshire Women's Aid delivering input to S2 pupils in relation to gender based violence. In Grange Academy, talks were delivered to 50 pupils from mixed year groups on the White Ribbon campaign and domestic abuse. Finally, the Pitching In Programme saw the Star Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire and the Police delivering an input on sexual violence to the young people who attend a weekly session at Rugby Park, Kilmarnock.

Reclaim the Night walk 26 November 2024



Following on from the White Ribbon signing at Tesco, participants gathered in the Tesco car park to march to Reclaim the Night. The route included a walk through Howard Park and onto John Finnie Street to finish at Kilmarnock Cross. The march was well attended with between 70-80 people present, with numbers being up from the previous year. Approximately 40 people attended the after event. The march was well supported by colleagues from Police Scotland, Star Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, East Ayrshire Women's Aid, EAHSCP and EA Environmental service who attended with the bin lorries hosting anti-violence against women messages on them. The march was well supported by elected members including Provost Leitch.

Women from four of the groups run by East Ayrshire Women's Aid Women's Wellbeing Worker decided they wanted to contribute to the 16 days of Action Against Gender Based Violence as part of their participation work. They researched the history of Reclaim the Night. The women prepared for the march by making placards and rehearsing chants. Ten women and four of their children including two 14 year old boys attended. Some comments were:

"It makes me angry that nearly 50 years after the first Reclaim the Night march that the streets are still not safe for women to walk at night!"

"I felt proud to be out on the streets supporting my Mum and all the other women"

"My boy understands why it is important for women to reclaim the night. He is part of the change, he will talk to his friends and call them out if need be"

“I attended 'reclaim the night march with my thirteen year old daughter and eight year old son. It was a great experience for her. It was her (& mine) first march. It was very inspiring for her to be a part of this event. It got us chatting about women's rights and what it means to her.”

“A great night with fantastic women to say no more to violence against women and girls. I would never walk through the Howard Park on my own in the dark as I wouldn't feel safe. Women still face violence from day to day harassment to sex assault and murder. Hopefully these walks can highlight that this behaviour is totally unacceptable and not just banter or men being men.”

“Last night, I joined an empowering Reclaim the Night march in Kilmaronock. Standing shoulder to shoulder with others, I felt the strength of a community determined to make our streets safer and our voices louder. This was more than a march; it was a statement. A call to end violence, harassment, and fear, and to reclaim not just the night, but our power, our freedom, and our right to feel safe. To everyone who walked, chanted, and stood in solidarity—thank you for reminding me that together, we are unstoppable.”

The after event was held at WG13 where teas and coffees were provided. Speeches were heard from Provost Claire Leitch, East Ayrshire Council, Lainey McKinlay, Chairperson of the STAR Centre: Ayrshire Rape Crisis and Darcie Hamilton, Student President of Ayrshire College. On display were posters made by young people from SL33/ SL66 and the night was rounded off with a screening of videos produced by young people from the Hive.

Women's Safety Survey in East Ayrshire

The Women's Safety Survey was undertaken in 2021 to develop an understanding about the feelings of safety women and girls experience across East Ayrshire. This was later supported by a series of guided walks, led by Housing Services which were undertaken in three communities, Kilmaronock, Galston and Auchinleck in 2022-23. The purpose of these walks was to capture the experiences of women who live, work and visit the area.

A report was completed with the following recommendations:

- Consider repeating the process of the Guided Walks during darker hours
- Consider the possibility of introducing a local initiative similar to I Clean my Space and involving colleagues in Vibrant Communities, Town Centre Regeneration and local stakeholders
- Consider promoting apps for Women's Personal Safety e.g, Hollie Guard which is a free app that turns your phone into a personal safety device.

This actions from the Women's Safety Survey sit with the Safer Communities Delivery Group, however the EAVAWP continues to support this work by:

- promoting the Hollie Guard app in training and engagement events it undertakes

- promoting the Hollie Guard app through specialist VAW services

Future Actions include:

- Promoting the Hollie Guard App on the public facing violence against women webpages
- Hosting a public facing webinar during 16 day of Action 2025 from Hollie Guard.

The Safe Spaces update

The Safe Spaces – Smile on Service was developed in 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions to support those experiencing domestic abuse to access specialist support through a 'safe space' at the North West Area Resource Centre, Kilmarnock. People can:

- Phone the Police to report domestic abuse or access further support;
- Access the National Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (services for Men are accessible too)
- Access East Ayrshire Women's Aid for confidential support at a time and place that meets a person's safety & needs (services for children are available)
- Access information on support services to take away or use as appropriate.

The initiative was led by the Public Dental Service (PDS) and East Ayrshire Women's Aid who continue to provide ongoing training to staff within the Public Dental Service (PDS) at North West Area Resource Centre, Kilmarnock. Staff identify a physical space and designated staff member at each daily huddle.

Women can access the Smile on Service by:

- Attending the NWAC during normal opening hours and going to the Public Dental Services reception and asking for the Smile on Service.
- A staff member will confirm they are there for the Smile on Service and will show them to the confidential Safe Space. Once inside, all the specialist domestic abuse support information will be available to access.

Work has been taking place throughout 2024 to develop a safe space within Centrestage, Kilmarnock which will provide similar access to information. Staff at Centrestage have completed their training with East Ayrshire Women's Aid and the service will soon be available.

Campaign on commercial sexual exploitation

During 16 Days of Action to Eradicate Gender Based Violence 2023, EAVAWP along with partners in North and South Ayrshire VAWPs and the Women's Support Project launched a campaign on commercial sexual exploitation. The campaign 'Imagine a Scotland without Commercial Sexual Exploitation' involved a practitioner event for 150 people, followed by the Inside/Outside exhibition which promoted the voices of women with lived experience of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).



One aim of the 16 days CSE campaign was to create a legacy and highlight the links between child sexual exploitation/ child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation. A second aim was to begin to establish a network of professionals across Ayrshire with confidence, knowledge and skills to support women who sell or exchange sex.

The Women's Support project trained eleven people across Ayrshire in 2024 to be trainers in CSE. This included three Police Local Area Liaison Officers who will roll this training out across the Ayrshire Police in 2024-2025. In East Ayrshire there are three CSE trainers and the training is offered through the integrated VAW calendar involving the Protection and Learning Team, East Ayrshire Women's Aid and the ADP.

This approach will support delivery of the action in the Safer Communities' Delivery Plan:

Support and offer public protection with regard to Commercial Sexual Exploitation:

- Raise awareness and gather information about scale of Commercial Sexual Exploitation in East Ayrshire
- Identify support, help and prevention activity available in East Ayrshire
- Partners will offer public protection support to people looking to remove themselves from Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

As part of this ongoing work, and in order to meet an outstanding priority in the 2021-24 Violence Against Women strategic plan, East Ayrshire's Position Statement on Prostitution was refreshed in 2024. The East Ayrshire Violence Against Women Partnership Position Statement on CSE has been updated to reflect national and international policies and to reflect the Equally Safe 2023 position on CSE. The Position statement was endorsed by Full Council in September 2024 and East Ayrshire Women's Aid in October 2024, with a number of other agencies currently affirming their endorsement.

The yearlong campaign on CSE closed with a multi-agency pan-Ayrshire Leadership event on CSE during 16 days of Action 2024. This event was supported by the Women's Support project and involved leaders making pledges to influence their networks and organisations to support staff to support women experiencing CSE. This is part of an approach to make this work core business rather than a campaign. Training on CSE is offered 3-4 times per year and the Building Bridges resource developed by CSE Aware is available on Learnpro.

Learning and Development

Safe and Together Implementation Plan – 2024-25

The key principles of the Safe & Together Model are to keep children who have experienced domestic abuse safe and together with their non-abusive parent, while supporting and acknowledging the non-abusive parents' protective efforts. It ensures perpetrators are held accountable for their abuse, while connecting them to their parenting (figure) role to reduce ongoing risk of harm where safe to do so.

The Safe & Together Model focuses on gender bias, survivor strengths, protective factors and the impact of perpetrators' patterns of behaviour on the family functioning. This challenges previous approaches of victim blaming and non-accountability of perpetrators. The aim is to ensure positive outcomes for children in respect of their safety and wellbeing through keeping them safe and together with the non-abusing parent.

The Scottish Government provided funding for the pan-Ayrshire Safe & Together Lead Officer until March 2025 through the Delivering Equally Safe fund. The Lead Officer was in post from September 2022 until December 2024, and was tasked with implementing the model across the three Ayrshire HSCPs, and further, through developing practice, process and cultural change in respect of domestic abuse.

Training delivery continued throughout 2024 with Core training being delivered twice a year, a number of Overview training days are also being offered as part of the integrated VAW calendar. Training has now reached the majority of Children & Families Social Workers and Team Managers. Training will continue to prioritise places for those within children's services, however overview training is on offer to adult services including mental health and recovery services.

A key development for practice and culture change has been the Safe & Together Facilitators (formerly known as Champions) which is made up of a group of volunteers from both Social Work and Health Visiting services. The group have been working hard to practice the model and develop their understanding of domestic abuse-informed practice, in addition to the demands of their frontline responsibilities. Their increased confidence and ability in applying the model is now notable, while their association with the model has served to promote it within their teams, spark discussions and maintain S&T at the forefront of practitioner thinking.

Implementation progress was measured through a Case File Audit in late October 2024. The audit allowed for an understanding of where the strengths lie in practice, what the learning needs are and what families experiences are, this will be key to inform implementation activities. The consistent theme emerging from this evaluation is the need to develop services' understanding of coercive control, and what this means for both women and children's daily lives. This will lead to enhanced risk assessment through application of the model, which will in turn influence a collaborative and more effective, strengths-based response to risk management and mitigation of domestic abuse.

Implementation activities, over the last two years have built upon S&T training which commenced in 2020, creating a solid foundation from which culture, practice and process change can progress. The multi agency implementation group will continue to deliver on the plan, and respond to challenges and barriers to model implementation.

Equally Safe in Practice (ESiP)

EAVAWP recommends the use of the Equally Safe in Practice modules across the Partnership. The modules are Together for Gender Equality, Understanding Domestic Abuse and Understanding Sexual Violence. The modules have been

produced by Scottish Women's Aid in conjunction with the Scottish Government and are available, free, for the public sector. They are part of a public health approach to preventing and ending violence against women and girls.

The modules have been made available on Learnpro for EAC staff, HSCP staff, EA Leisure Trust and Ayrshire Roads Alliance. This complements the Equally Safe at Work approach.

The modules are non-mandatory and have been supported by a positive communication campaign including staff bulletins and screen savers. The modules are supported by additional resources which provide information about where to access support locally, local Gender Based Violence policies and the Employee Report and Support Hub.

Implementation will be supported via actions in service improvement plans. These are three year plans and an action has been added to plans for EAC council, ARA and EA Leisure Trust. The target is to have 75% staff having completed all modules over three years. Professional and Craft workers will be targeted simultaneously.

Integrated VAW calendar

The integrated VAW calendar was launched in May 2024 and is circulated to partners quarterly by the HSCP Protection and Learning Team. The calendar contains training provided by the MARAC team, the East Ayrshire HSCP Protection and Learning Team, the NHS GBV team, East Ayrshire Women's Aid, the STAR Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire and Amina. It also promotes online modules regarding Trauma and Equally Safe in Practice.

Future developments for the EAVAWP

Throughout 2025 the following pieces of work will be undertaken as identified throughout this report:

- the implementation of the East Ayrshire Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Plan 2024-27, including the strategic needs assessment and developing work on lived and living experience.
- development days for EAVAWP membership focussing on roles, responsibilities and remit.

Implementation officer and persons to contact:

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Supplementary Information

East Ayrshire Women's Aid

C is 18 with a small, 8 week old baby. She hadn't had an easy upbringing and moved from one place to another but she had her own house now with her partner and baby boy. Agencies involved in the baby's welfare highlighted significant risks to him by his dad's behaviour and actions. There was evidence of abusive behaviour to both C and the baby. C felt she had no other option but to go.

C found herself in a strange environment, didn't know anyone, left everything behind in the house except for essentials. She was resistant and reluctant to stop contact with her partner, as she still loved him and believed he could & would change. At first, C was insistent that he wasn't abusive, it was just his way of carrying on, joking, he was young, it was his family's way. She believed she was just as bad, if not worse for arguing back, calling him names, retaliating when he lashed out. The previous night, C's baby was removed from her care by social work. They had put a safety plan in place prior to her moving to refuge of no contact with her partner, but he had coerced his way into the house she was staying in, arguing with her and smashing her phone.

C was distraught, distressed and completely devastated. She couldn't believe this was happening. All she wanted was for them to be happy and her baby to be with her. The baby went into foster care temporarily and C remained in refuge that first night, despite everything. Fortunately, she had already made connections with some of the women who she met earlier in the day. That helped her through those early stages of grief, losing her baby and being alone for the first time. C sat until after midnight talking to them. They all rallied round and supported her. The next day, C was determined and committed to making sure she did everything to get her baby back.

We spent time talking about C's experiences and the dynamics of domestic abuse. C eventually began to acknowledge that her partner was abusive and that she wasn't to blame for what happened. He was violent, verbally abusive, extremely controlling and jealous. He had also been abusive towards their tiny, fragile baby. Chatting to other women reinforced this and gave C the strength and confidence to fight for her baby's return to her care. She stopped contact with her, now, ex-partner and stayed in refuge, made friends and saw her baby for contact with the social workers. They were very supportive towards C and the baby, understanding the dilemma she had faced and pressure she was under.

In the matter of just over a week, C's life had dramatically changed. After a meeting with other agencies, it was decided that the baby would be returned to C's care in refuge. C was over the moon. She was relieved and happy to have her baby back.

It was soon arranged by C, her mum and social work that she would move to live in a refuge, close to her mum and family. This would provide a safer environment for them both, further away from her ex-partner and his family.

CASE STUDY:

R was referred by multiple agencies. She was considered high risk because her partner had assaulted her and knocked her unconscious. She was admitted to hospital and kept in for a few days with a head wound. She did not report to the police. She had told agencies the information in confidence and became upset when it was raised as a child protection concern. She became very defensive, and she closed down, not responding to calls or texts, not opening the door for visits and not sending the children to school. There were multiple people contacting her about her safety.

East Ayrshire Women's Aid initially contacted her by phone and text, she didn't respond. I thought she would be overwhelmed by the volume of people trying to contact her and I sent a text saying so. I let her know that she didn't have to respond to me, but that I wanted to help her navigate through the many agencies involved. She agreed to see me, and we arranged for her health visitor to come with her for support.

She was estranged from her partner who was the father of her youngest child. It took time for her to accept that her partner was violent, she believed it was only while drunk and never when the children were around. She believed the risk was all hers and she had the right to make her own decisions and that her ex-partner had rights to see his child. We worked from that point of view and incorporated the perspective of social work mapped to the decline in her mental health.

I spoke to her social worker and let her know that R felt vulnerable because so many agencies were now involved and all of them calling her. She had trusted someone by disclosing what had been happening in her relationship and then she felt alone and unsupported with everyone negatively judging her choices. Her social worker reassured her that she is a great mum and the children are thriving. Free to look at her situation without pressure, she accepted that without controlling his access into her life, she would never be well or safe. The realisation was a shock, and she has looked at putting a contact regime in place which avoids him turning up whenever he wants.

COMMENTS FROM SERVICE USERS:

'Thank you for calling me back and checking in. I'm much better now and things have calmed down. I feel that I am in control.'

'Thank you so much. You've been amazing. I really appreciate it.'

'Thank you for your support. I honestly am beyond grateful. It's helped my head so much, I definitely needed to clear up my thought process.'

Thank you so much for today. I feel so drained but relieved I got everything out.
Thank you again x

'Learning my own value and that I am not a failure. When I first reached out for support, I felt invisible and that's a scary place to be. You have helped me find myself again'

'I really wasn't expecting much from coming here but you have really got me thinking. I like the way you challenge me, even if it is difficult at the time. I feel like I am beginning to find me for the first time.'

The Star Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire

SERVICE USER FEEDBACK:

"During my sessions [worker] has been so professional, supportive, kind, and understanding. She went above and beyond for me as she was able to give me appointments at times that suited me - she came in earlier to meet my needs. [Worker] has helped me in the few sessions we had more than the support I've had for over 3 years now. The compassion levels and knowledge and understanding she has is amazing and I have enjoyed and appreciated the support that has been provided".

"To say my experience from STAR and [Worker] has literally changed my life is an understatement. To reach 62 years of age and have suffered for the vast majority of my whole life I only wish I had met an [Worker] earlier in my life. Everything would and could have been so very different. Then again [Worker] is unique, and it took a lifetime to meet someone who had the gift, kindness and compassion, to care enough to bring something out in me that no one had ever been able to offer or could offer.

Before my sessions my life was going absolutely nowhere. Stuck and trapped in a cul-de-sac, in a spiral of sadness bereft of any hope of change and a worthwhile future. She single-handedly changed my whole perspective and understanding of who I am. That is a huge statement, but 100% true. My focus now at the end of my sessions is to prove the change and newfound confidence she has inspired within me is and can be truly life changing and make it happen. What more can I say but repeat what I said to her personally, 'You have changed my life, and I will be forever in your debt!!'"

"[Worker] was nothing but compassionate, understanding and thoughtful throughout the whole time and I've been in and out of services to do with mental health a lot, and what they do at STAR feels more personal. I felt like I was chatting with a friend rather than a counsellor she was really easy to open up to and trust I felt really seen and heard throughout my time with [Worker]. So, I thank STAR and [Worker] for helping me along my journey"

"[Worker] was amazing in every way. I have never felt so empowered with a helping professional as I have done with her."

“[Worker] was what I needed, someone who asked the hard questions and didn't go in a roundabout way, she was straight to point which I liked.”

“[Worker] was amazing start to finish, she made me feel seen and heard which is something that I really needed to be able to gain confidence with going to court. She supported me every step of the way and I'll never be able to thank her enough for everything she has done for me. Without the STAR Centre I would still be lost and broken always remember the difference you all make.”

Break The Silence

In October 2024 the charity conducted an anonymous service survey with active clients to gauge their performance across a range of areas. From respondents they confirm:

On initial contact, were staff professional, helpful and responsive?

94% strongly agreed and 6% agreed

Was your counsellor professional and understanding?

96% strongly agreed, 4% agreed

Did Break the Silence treat you with dignity and respect?

98% strongly agreed, 2% agreed

Could you access services in a way that meets your needs?

81% strongly agreed, 19% agreed

CLIENT FEEDBACK:

“I found everyone at Break The Silence very friendly and kind which made the experience a lot easier. Therapy has been a difficult experience but very much needed and very helpful. The people at Break The Silence have all made a bad experience a lot easier for me”.

“They treat you like an individual and not diagnostic criteria, the process is catered to you and how you wish to handle your trauma, not a check box exercise. You're met with warmth, patience, and understanding, something I firmly believe is required for survivors to truly heal”.

“Break The Silence provides a service that is badly needed, a charity that allows survivors not only to heal but to find coping mechanisms that allows them to flourish in life”.

“Working with BTS has been life-changing for me. A really positive experience despite the darkness of the issues we were dealing with”.

“It is important for me to be able to connect with the counsellor as it helps me feel relaxed and comfortable meaning I will feel safe enough to trust them. I was uncertain at first due to my choice to meet online, however, this has worked well for me to allow me to attend the sessions due to demands on my time to travel and to visually see the person rather than be on a phone”.

“The support of BTS has allowed me to face the fears of the past and present, in a safe, secure and protective environment. The BTS counsellors helped me to see a way forward and to help give me steps to rebuild myself for my future”.

“I feel safe, heard and seen. And not fighting this battle all alone”.

Appendix One: East Ayrshire Equally Safe Returns Report