

# NOWHERE TO TURN 2024

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Findings from the eighth year of the  
No Woman Turned Away project



women's aid  
until women & children are safe

## Author

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## Acknowledgments

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We are extremely grateful to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for continuing to fund the No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project. This funding has provided support for women who face structural inequalities and barriers to accessing safe accommodation, and detailed monitoring of the journeys of survivors seeking safety from domestic abuse.

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Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. For 50 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs.

We are a federation of 176 organisations which provide 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards.

We hold the largest national data set on domestic abuse and use research and evidence to inform all our work. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Our support services, which include our Live Chat, email service, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people in their first relationships), dedicated service for professionals, the national Women's Aid Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

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# Key findings from the **No Woman Turned Away** project

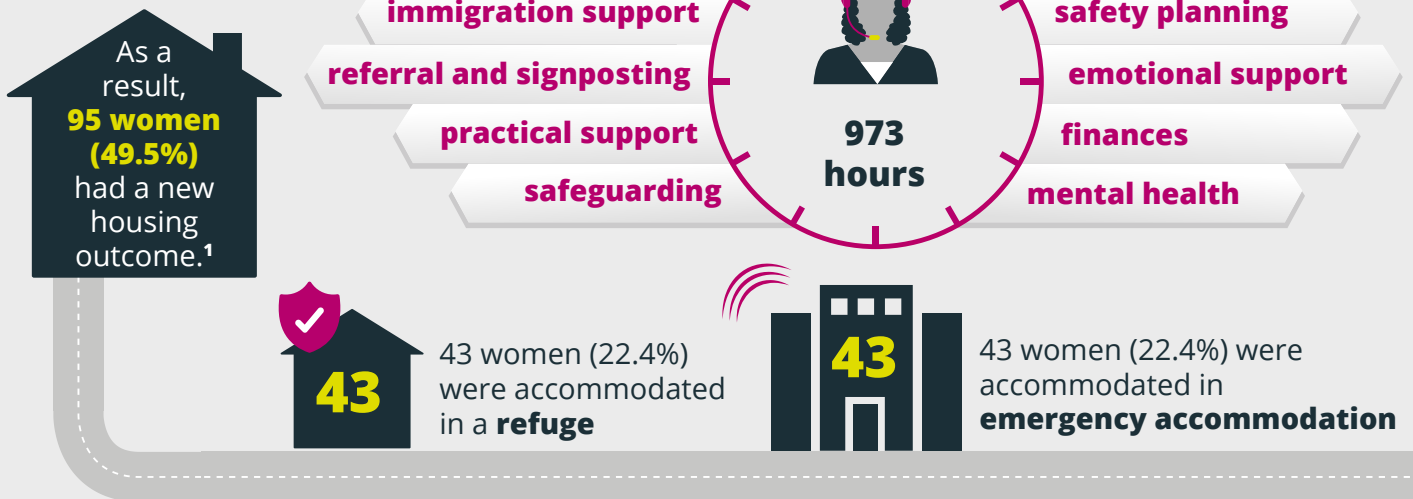


**204 women** engaged and finished support between 1st January 2023 and the 31st December 2023.

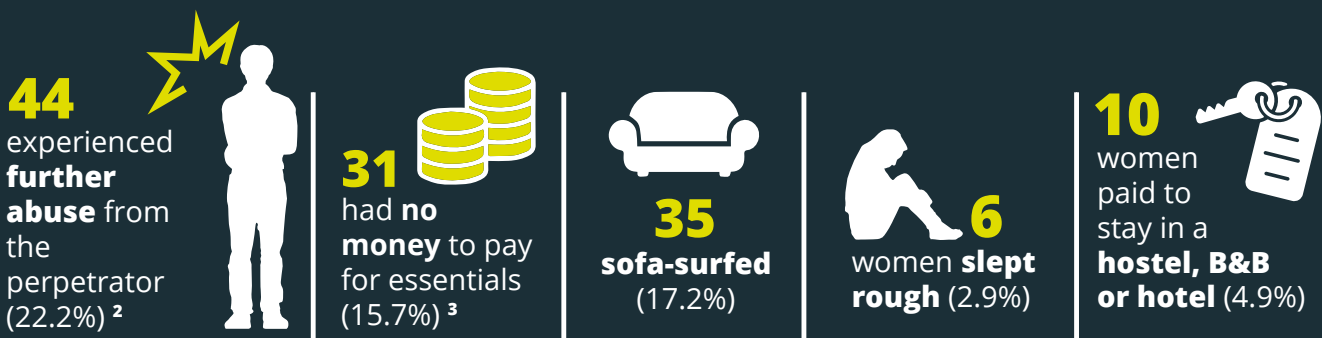
<b>92 (45.1%)</b>	had <b>no recourse to public funds</b>
<b>86 (42.2%)</b>	were from <b>Black and minoritised backgrounds</b>
<b>58 (28.4%)</b>	had <b>disabilities</b>

## The NWTa project support

The NWTa specialist practitioners provided **over 973 hours** of support in total to the 204 women.



## What happened while waiting for a refuge space?



<sup>1</sup> This data is based on 192 women where the outcome at the end of support from the NWTa project was recorded.  
<sup>2</sup> This data is based on 198 women where abuse profile was recorded.  
<sup>3</sup> This data is based on 198 women.

## Introduction and methodology

Women's Aid's recent *Domestic Abuse Report* found that there continues to be insufficient refuge spaces available for survivors of domestic abuse, with an estimated 61.0% of referrals into refuge rejected in the 2022-23 financial year (Women's Aid, 2024). Additionally, almost half (49.0%) of domestic abuse services had been running an area of their service in 2022-23 without any dedicated funding, with services 'by and for' minoritised groups of survivors even more severely under-funded. This report evaluates the No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project and its current role in the context of insufficient refuge spaces, an underfunded network of domestic abuse services and increased demand.

Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the report examines the impact of the NWTa project for the women and their children who received support, and the local domestic abuse services that the NWTa practitioners work alongside. We examine what the project tells us about refuge provision and gaps in the current infrastructure, and the unsuitable nature of non-refuge temporary accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse.

Copies of all editions of *Nowhere To Turn* can be downloaded for free online at:

[www.womensaid.org.uk/  
what-we-do/research/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/)

The report draws on the following data sources:

### 1. Quantitative data collected by the NWTa specialist practitioners

The quantitative data used in this report was recorded<sup>4</sup> by the NWTa specialist practitioners on Women's Aid's case management and outcomes monitoring system On Track (OT)<sup>5</sup>.

The practitioners collected data on women's support needs, demographics, experiences of abuse, the barriers they have faced, what happened to them while they waited for a refuge or other safe accommodation, and outcomes. The practitioners collected information on women's experiences with statutory services, the time spent on each case and the types of support they provided.

The On Track data shared in this report covers the time period 1st January 2023 – 31st December 2023.

### 2. Qualitative data collected by the NWTa specialist practitioners

Qualitative analysis of case notes from On Track were also used to create the anonymised case studies in this report. All survivors whose stories are used in this report gave consent to their data being used for the purposes of research and fundraising.

<sup>4</sup> Data was only stored on the On Track system if women gave their consent.

<sup>5</sup> On Track is the Women's Aid Oasis-based case management and outcomes monitoring system. For further information please see: [www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/ontrack/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/ontrack/)

## PART 1

# Introducing the No Woman Turned Away project

The No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project has been funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)<sup>6</sup> since January 2016, and continues to provide dedicated support to survivors of domestic abuse who face structural inequalities<sup>7</sup> and barriers to accessing a refuge space. The NWTa project provides telephone, text and email support to women in England looking for a refuge space or other safe accommodation and employs specialist domestic abuse practitioners and one dedicated research and evaluation officer. The project is embedded within Women's Aid's wider direct services structure which provides support through one senior specialist practitioner<sup>8</sup> and management capacity.

In its eighth year, the NWTa project remains as significant as ever in offering support to women and children fleeing domestic abuse. Domestic abuse services are still reporting that many survivors have been unable to afford to leave the perpetrator and have often experienced economic abuse, which has been exacerbated by the increased cost-of-living. As outlined by End Violence Against Women (2024), in 2023, the United Nations' poverty envoy highlighted that over one-fifth of the UK population is at risk of poverty, with certain groups disproportionately affected including Black and minoritised groups<sup>9</sup>, children and disabled people. This can make it more difficult for many survivors to leave the perpetrator(s) and find a safe place to live.

## How many referrals did the NWTa project receive?

A total of 338 referrals (322 individual women and 16 repeat referrals) were made to the NWTa project between the 1st of January 2023 and the 31st of December 2023. Of these, 246 (72.8%) went on to receive support from the NWTa project and 92 (27.2%) did not. Of the 246 who received support, 26 women decided they did not want to continue accessing support<sup>10</sup>, for example because they felt unable to leave the perpetrator at that time. The NWTa practitioners provided initial support via telephone, text message or email to the majority of these women. One woman was provided with supporting documents around immigration and for some of the 26 women, the practitioner also liaised with other services that were providing support. The practitioners also offered to provide specific support if and when needed, such as with challenging statutory services.

As in previous years, the most common reason women did not go on to receive support was that the specialist practitioners had been unable to make contact (45.7%). As explored in Women's Aid (2022a), during this time, survivors may be unable to answer their phone or may not have mobile phone credit to return the specialist practitioner's calls. **Table 1** shows the other reasons why women did not go on to receive support from NWTa.

<sup>6</sup> Until 2021, DLUHC was known as the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

<sup>7</sup> Structural inequality describes inequality in opportunity, treatment or status for some groups of people which is embedded in social structures such as health, education and justice and which reflect and reinforce ingrained prejudices. The impact on individuals can include restricted opportunities and choices and the creation of barriers to accessing services. They have wide ranging impacts including on how a woman experiences domestic abuse, how she talks about it or who she talks to and how she accesses support of all kinds.

<sup>8</sup> Thank you to the Sara Charlton Foundation and OKA for providing funding for the senior specialist domestic abuse practitioner for the NWTa project.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'Black and minoritised' is used to talk about survivors who have experienced marginalisation and exclusion because of structural racism. However, it is important to note that this is a broad term that can include women from a wide range of backgrounds and therefore can overlook differences within these groups (Thiara & Harrison, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> The 26 women who decided they did not want to continue with support are not included in the evidence or figures in this report because we do not have sufficient data recorded for them in On Track.

**Table 1: Reasons that women did not go on to access support from NWTA**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of women</b>	<b>% of total referrals not accepted (out of 92)</b>
Practitioners unable to contact woman	42	45.7%
Already being supported by another domestic abuse service	20	21.7%
Not eligible for support	9	9.8%
No response from referral agency	5	5.4%
Needs better met elsewhere - referred to another service	2	2.2%
Already active in service	1	1.1%
Other reason	13	14.1%

The frequency and severity of domestic abuse often escalates over time, and the most dangerous time for a survivor is often when she decides to leave or after she has left the abuser (Femicide Census, 2020). Domestic abuse creates barriers that can make it difficult for survivors to seek help or to end a relationship. Perpetrators often isolate survivors from their support networks such as family and friends, making it very difficult to leave. Perpetrators may also use existing inequalities to underpin abuse, exacerbating structural barriers around race, sexuality and immigration status for example and adding to this sense of isolation. Concerns around her own or her children's safety may cause a woman to remain with a perpetrator or delay leaving. Women may not have access to money or resources needed to leave and some women may rely on the perpetrator for care due to a disability. As a result of these barriers, many

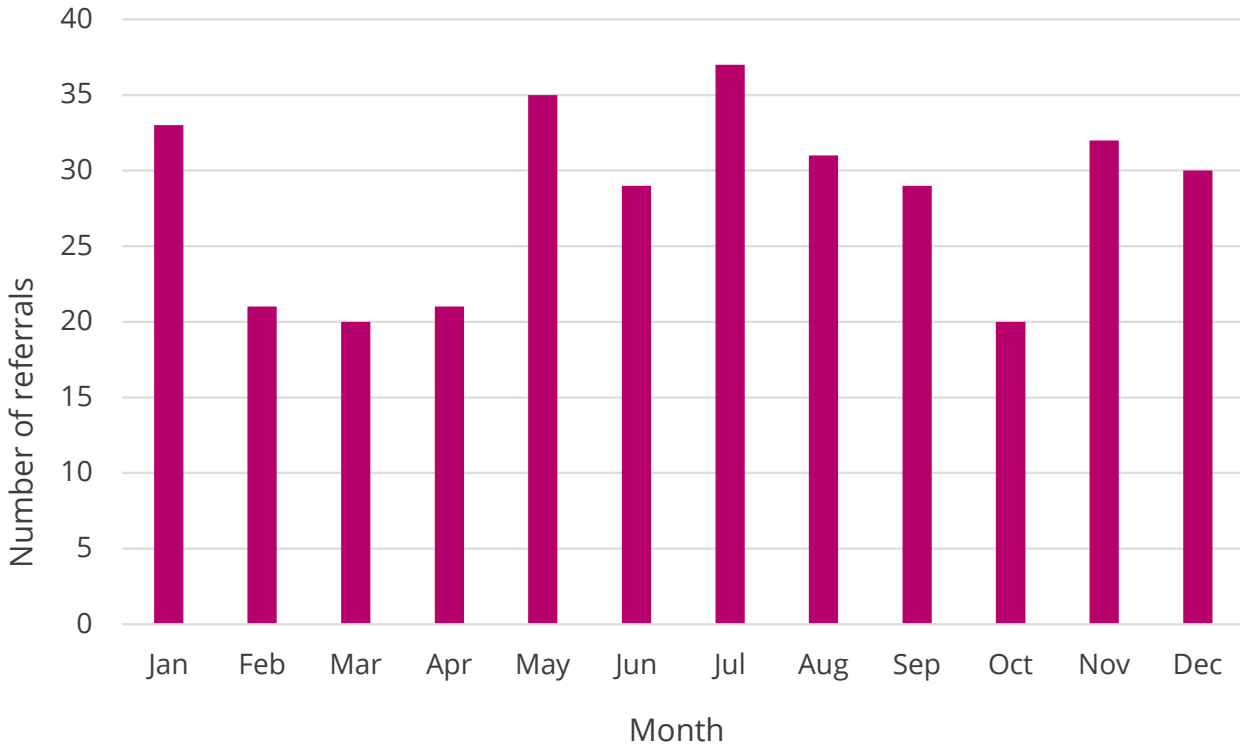
women experiencing domestic abuse reach out for support multiple times before they flee.

Some women had approached a local domestic abuse service at the same time as they were referred to NWTA. In some cases, services such as refuge or outreach were able to provide support and as a result these women (21.7%) chose not to proceed with support from the NWTA project. Nine women were ineligible for support, for example because the woman was not experiencing domestic abuse.

### **Support provided to referrers**

If a referral is not accepted, the practitioners provide initial support to the service who sent the referral such as advice and signposting to other support services.

**Graph 1: Referrals by month**



**Referral sources**

Women’s Aid member services made 135 referrals (39.9%) to the NWTa project. These referrals were made by 40 different member services. In 2023, 11 new member services made referrals (services that referred in 2023 but not in 2022). One hundred and twenty-three referrals (36.4%) were made by Women’s Aid’s Direct Services team. Of these, 116 referrals were made via Women’s Aid’s webchat service and 7 were made via Women’s Aid’s email service. Other domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services made 63 referrals (18.6%) and the remaining referrals (2.7%) were made by agreed partner organisations including the British Red Cross, the Traveller Movement, and Victim Support.

**How many women did we support in 2023?**

Practitioners engaged with 231 women and 204 women completed their support from the NWTa project between the 1st of January 2023 and the 31st of December 2023, with 2 of these women exiting the service twice or more (i.e., 206 exits overall)<sup>11</sup>. The analysis of quantitative data and the case studies in this report relate to these 204 women.

**11** Some of the 204 women began being supported by the NWTa project before 1st January 2023 but all of the 204 women had finished being supported by 31st December 2023. For some of the 246 women who were referred in 2023 and went on to receive support, their support continued in 2024 and they are therefore not included in the main data analysis for this report.



## Women experienced many types of abuse, mostly by male intimate partners

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At least 87.0% of perpetrators were male<sup>12</sup>, and in at least 78.0% of cases the perpetrator was a current or former intimate partner<sup>13</sup>. For 12.4% of women, more than one perpetrator was recorded. As explored later in this report, 6.6% of women experienced abuse from an additional perpetrator while waiting for safe accommodation. The average length of time that women experienced domestic abuse for was 70.3 months (nearly 6 years).

Women experienced a wide range of different types of abuse, including:

- ▶ 96.9% experienced emotional abuse.
- ▶ 87.1% experienced controlling behaviours.
- ▶ 61.4% experienced physical abuse.
- ▶ 55.2% experienced financial abuse.
- ▶ 52.8% experienced surveillance, harassment or stalking.
- ▶ 25.8% experienced threats to be killed.
- ▶ 20.3% experienced sexual abuse.
- ▶ 17.4% experienced an attempted strangulation or suffocation.
- ▶ 10.8% acquired an injury by the perpetrator(s) requiring a visit to A&E or hospitalisation.
- ▶ 7.2% acquired an injury by the perpetrator(s) which required a GP visit.
- ▶ 2.0% either lost an unborn child due to the abuse or reported severe harm to the unborn baby.
- ▶ 29.9% reported having suicidal thoughts or feeling severely depressed as a result of the abuse, and 9 women (5.4%) reported self-harm as a result of the abuse<sup>14</sup>.

## Increase in types of abuse experienced

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The percentage of women who experienced several types of abuse increased significantly compared with our data from the previous year. The percentage of women who experienced emotional abuse increased by 8.5%, experiences of controlling behaviour increased by 9.5% and surveillance, harassment and stalking increased by 5.9%.

The proportion of women who had suicidal thoughts or felt severely depressed as a result of domestic abuse increased by 10.4% compared with 2022. Our *Domestic Abuse Report* found that services are reporting that more survivors are needing support with complex mental health needs (Women's Aid's, 2024). Research has consistently shown that women who have experienced domestic abuse are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Thiara and Harrison, 2021; The Guardian, 2024). McManus et al (2022) found that women who had experienced intimate partner abuse were three times more likely to have made a suicide attempt. There are often extremely long waiting lists to access mental health support including from statutory services (Women's Aid, 2024). In partnership with healthcare professionals, specialist domestic abuse services are a vital part of the response to survivors' mental health needs. However, these services are often under-funded and are rarely able to employ a mental health worker (Women's Aid, 2021a).

<sup>12</sup> Data on perpetrator sex was not always captured (i.e., the survivor did not always share this information).

<sup>13</sup> Data on the relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator was not always captured (i.e., the survivor did not always share this information).

<sup>14</sup> This data is based on 167 women whose experiences of abuse were recorded.

## Women faced barriers to accessing support imposed by structural inequalities

As detailed in previous Nowhere to Turn reports (2017-2023)<sup>15</sup>, the women most marginalised by society tend to face the greatest barriers in their search for refuge provision<sup>16</sup>. Intersecting structural inequalities such as inadequate responses from statutory services and

immigration rules impact on women's ability to access safe accommodation and support.

**Table 2** below outlines some of the characteristics and circumstances of women supported by the NWTAs specialist practitioners in 2023.

**Table 2: Characteristics of women supported by the NWTAs specialist practitioners (based on reason for referral)\***

Characteristics and circumstances	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (total 204)
Women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) <sup>17,18</sup>	92	45.1%
Women with mental health support needs	67	32.8%
Women with substance use support needs	34	16.7%
Women with a disability <sup>19</sup>	26	12.7%
Women with four or more dependent children	18	8.8%
Women who were tied to their local area <sup>20</sup>	16	7.8%
Women with language or cultural support needs <sup>21</sup>	14	6.9%
Women with older male child(ren) (14 or older)	9	4.4%
Women previously evicted from refuge	7	3.4%
Women with an offending history	6	2.9%

\*Many women had more than one of the listed characteristics or circumstances.

**15** Women's Aid's *Nowhere to Turn* report series can be accessed at [www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-and-reports](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-and-reports)

**16** See *Nowhere to Turn, 2018* for a detailed explanation of the barriers women face when accessing refuge. Available online at [www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NWTA-2018-FINAL.pdf](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NWTA-2018-FINAL.pdf)

**17** No Recourse to Public Funds means no entitlement to the majority of welfare benefits, for example because of visa restrictions. Women in the UK on a spousal visa, for instance, have NRPF.

**18** This is based on the 'reason for referral.' As discussed in *Nowhere to Turn* (2022), sometimes women who are referred on the basis of NRPF do turn out to be entitled to benefits.

**19** Some women were referred on the basis of disability because their child had a disability that needed to be taken into account to find suitable accommodation.

**20** This means women who want to stay in the local area due to circumstances such as work commitments, children's schools, medical care, or support networks.

**21** This includes women that require an interpreter and/ or would prefer or be supported in a specialist 'by and for' refuge service.

The six most common characteristics of women supported in 2023 were Black and minoritised women, women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), women with mental health support needs, women with substance use support needs, women with disabilities, and women with four or more dependent children. Many women had more than one of these characteristics and experienced multiple barriers to accessing support, making it more likely that no appropriate refuge spaces would be available to them.

Of the women supported in 2023, 42.2% (86) were from Black and minoritised backgrounds. These women were a diverse group with a range of ethnicities<sup>22</sup>. Some were migrant women, some had no recourse to public funds, and some spoke a language other than English as their main language. Four women were from Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) communities.

Black and minoritised women face a range of additional structural inequalities that impact their experiences of abuse and their access to support services. Imkaan's research highlights that many women from Black and minoritised backgrounds prefer to access support from specialist 'by and for' services (Imkaan, 2018). Staff from these services understand the intersection between misogyny and racial inequality, and women can receive peer support from other Black and minoritised women, creating a sense of belonging. Additionally, these services often employ staff who are able to support survivors in their own language<sup>23</sup>.

However, almost half (49%) of the domestic abuse services surveyed in our recent *Domestic Abuse Report* told us that they were running an area of their service without any dedicated funding, with 'by and for' services supporting Black and minoritised women facing even

starker funding challenges (Women's Aid, 2024). These services continue to be disproportionately affected by funding cuts and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping report found that 'by and for' domestic abuse services were six times less likely to receive statutory funding than non-'by and for' services (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022). Our research found that some services felt that 'by and for' services are being ignored by the statutory duty and are usually the first to be unfunded by commissioners (Women's Aid, 2024).

The proportion of women with each characteristic remained largely consistent with previous years. However, the percentage of women with NRPF increased by 8.5% compared with 2022. Some of the domestic abuse services that responded to Women's Aid's annual survey also reported an increase in the number of women being referred who had NRPF (Women's Aid, 2024). Women with NRPF face very high barriers to accessing support services, making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Fear of deportation or destitution can deter women with insecure immigration status from seeking support (Femicide Census, 2020) and abuse from the perpetrator(s) is reinforced by structural barriers within the immigration and asylum system (Thiara and Harrison, 2021). In 2023, data published by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner revealed that over a three-year period, every police force in England and Wales had shared the data of a domestic abuse victim with immigration enforcement (EVAW, 2024).

For some women, although the referring agency thought the woman had NRPF, the NWTAs specialist practitioners supported these women with clarifying their immigration status and determined that they were entitled to public funds.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 3 for further information on women's ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>23</sup> Interpreters are not always a preference for both survivors and service providers as it can impact on Black and minoritised women's engagement with support when having to share difficult and traumatic experiences.

## NASREEN'S STORY

Nasreen's<sup>24</sup> husband exploited her fears around her entitlement to public funds, telling her that she had no rights in order to deter her from leaving him. NWTa supported Nasreen to clarify her immigration status, contacting the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who confirmed that Nasreen was on a joint Universal Credit claim with her husband. The DWP took the practitioner and Nasreen through the steps to submit a claim independently and NWTa successfully referred her into a refuge.

Although 12.7% (26) of women were referred to NWTa due to barriers around a disability, the demographic data tells us that 28.4% (58) of women had one or more disability. This includes women with mental health disabilities, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, long-term health conditions, and hearing disabilities<sup>25</sup>. There are significant barriers for disabled women to access refuge accommodation.

The NWTa practitioners search for refuge vacancies that are able to support women's needs using Routes to Support (RtS), the UK-wide violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies. Practitioners searched for refuge vacancies multiple times for a high proportion of the women supported in 2023:

- ▶ For 69 women, no refuge vacancies were available at least once.
- ▶ For 53 women, no refuge vacancies were available at least twice.
- ▶ For 11 women, no refuge vacancies were available at least 10 times.
- ▶ For 7 women, no refuge vacancies were available at least 20 times.
- ▶ For one woman, practitioners searched for a refuge vacancy more than 30 times and no spaces were available.

Fifty-five women were refused at least once from a vacancy that had been listed on RtS. Of these, 19 women (34.5%) were accommodated in refuge by the end of their support from NWTa and 36 (65.5%) were not accommodated in refuge.

**Table 3** on the next page shows that there were many reasons that women were refused a refuge vacancy, reflecting the range of barriers that women supported by the NWTa project experienced. Over 20% of women refused from a vacancy were turned down because they had NRPF, and just under 10% of women were refused a vacancy as the refuge was unable to support their mental health needs. In 2022-23, just 1% of refuge vacancies listed on Routes to Support were in refuge accommodation with full wheelchair access and only 1.4% of vacancies could accommodate a woman with limited mobility (Women's Aid, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>25</sup> A breakdown of women's disabilities can be found in Appendix 6.

**Table 3: Reasons that women were refused a refuge vacancy listed on Routes to Support\***

Reasons women were refused from a refuge vacancy listed on RtS	Number of women refused a vacancy for this reason	Percentage of women (out of 55)
Space no longer available	16	29.1%
Unable to accommodate woman with NRPF	12	21.8%
Unable to support needs around mental health	5	9.1%
Unable to support needs around language	3	5.5%
Unable to support needs around substance use	2	3.6%
Unable to support needs around disability	2	3.6%
Unable to support needs around offending	2	3.6%
Refuge uncertain of benefit status	2	3.6%
Refuge said that domestic abuse is not recent enough	2	3.6%
Unable to accommodate a woman with more than 3 children	2	3.6%
Refuge unable to accept pets or only able to accept one pet	2	3.6%
Unable to accommodate woman previously evicted from refuge	1	1.8%
Refuge would not under-occupy space <sup>26</sup>	1	1.8%
Refuge space was not ready to move into	3	5.5%
Other reason	7	12.7%

\*Some refuges gave more than one reason for not accepting the referral.

**26** A refuge may be unable to accept a referral if the referral is for fewer children than the space can accommodate, e.g. if the refuge space is for a woman and 3 children and the woman being referred is seeking a space for herself and 2 children.

## PART 2

# The role of the NwTA project within the domestic abuse sector

Part 1 of this report highlighted the structural inequalities experienced by women referred to the NwTA project and the barriers this systemic inequality imposes. In Part 2 we explore the role of the NwTA project in supporting women to navigate and challenge these barriers in order to secure safe accommodation. We explore how structural barriers have impacted women's journeys and wellbeing when fleeing abuse (part 2a), and the role of the NwTA specialist practitioners in supporting the needs of the 204 women supported in 2023 (part 2b).

## PART 2A

### Survivors' journeys into places of safety

**Table 4** below shows that many women stayed in a range of unsuitable places and spaces while waiting for safe accommodation, including sofa-surfing, hostels, mixed-sex accommodation and sleeping rough.

**Table 4: Where did women stay while waiting for a refuge space\***

	Number of women	Percentage of women (total 204)
Spent time sofa surfing	35	17.2%
Spent time in emergency accommodation (same local authority)	30	14.7%
Spent time in emergency accommodation (different local authority)	17	8.3%
Paid to stay in a hostel, B&B or hotel	10	4.9%
Spent time in mixed sex accommodation	7	3.4%
Spent time sleeping rough	6	2.9%
Spent time as a hospital in-patient	4	2.0%

\*Some women spent time in more than one of these places while waiting for a refuge space.

## Many women were placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation

**Table 4** shows that almost a quarter of the women supported by the NWTa project stayed in emergency accommodation in the same (14.7%) or a different (8.3%) local authority (23.0% in total) while waiting for a refuge space. Non-refuge emergency accommodation often lacks the safety and expert support from domestic abuse practitioners that women require when they are fleeing abuse.

### ALICE'S STORY

After fleeing domestic abuse, Alice<sup>27</sup> was placed in temporary accommodation that did not provide support for her mental health and substance use needs. When Alice was unable to cope in the accommodation and was evicted, the council withdrew their duty to accommodate her. Alice went into hospital to participate in a detox programme and was subsequently placed in a hostel. Without adequate support in place, Alice felt unable to stop drinking alcohol and said she was 'a nervous wreck'. Alice was scared to leave her room to use the shared facilities and reported other residents asking her for money and food. Alice felt unsafe around the male security guards and sometimes left the hostel to stay in a hotel in order to seek respite.

Despite Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021<sup>28</sup> stating that hotels and mixed-need hostels are unsuitable as forms of safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse, Alice and other women supported by NWTa in 2023 continue to be placed in such accommodation. Alice's experience highlights how temporary accommodation that lacks specialist support can be re-traumatising and fails to support survivors in their recovery from abuse.

Survivors staying in temporary accommodation often reported fears around the perpetrator(s) finding out their location. One woman's fears of being located were realised when the perpetrator called to tell her he knew where she was staying and threatened to attack her with acid. The woman and her three children were subsequently accommodated in refuge.

Women supported by the NWTa project in 2023 also reported staying in temporary accommodation with poor living conditions including pest infestations and broken central heating<sup>29</sup>.

The stories of women's experiences captured in a recent report from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) also highlighted the need for safe accommodation which is dedicated for survivors of domestic abuse in order for women to feel and be safe (ONS, 2024). Survivors in the ONS report emphasised the need for practical and emotional support including security measures such as CCTV and 24-hour staffing; and caring, nonjudgemental support from domestic abuse practitioners.

The ONS report also highlighted that some survivors felt excluded from the process of being allocated temporary accommodation, which was disempowering (ONS, 2024). Survivors sometimes received little or no information about the location or type of accommodation they would be moved to. This is reflected in Naisha's experience, described on the next page.

<sup>27</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>28</sup> Introduced through Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – see the Statutory Guidance: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-support-within-safe-accommodation/delivery-of-support-to-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-domestic-abuse-safe-accommodation-services)

<sup>29</sup> See Amina and Ahsan's case study later in this report.

## NAISHA'S STORY

A Women's Aid member service referred a young woman to NWTa who had experienced domestic abuse from her parents and brother. Naisha<sup>30</sup> had autism, ADHD and dyslexia and was seeking asylum after leaving university. Naisha was destitute and had been accommodated in Home Office asylum accommodation. However, Naisha felt retraumatised by her experience on arrival and left. The accommodation staff did not allow Naisha's friend from her local church, her main source of support, to accompany her during her induction. Staff raised their voices and Naisha described being told the accommodation rules in a harsh and quick manner. The local domestic abuse service raised their concerns with the accommodation provider around their lack of disability awareness and trauma informed response.

Arranged by the local church, Naisha then sofa-surfed at an elderly couple's home. When she was no longer able to stay, Naisha slept at the church. The local domestic abuse service submitted safeguarding referrals which were repeatedly rejected. Naisha was told to be ready for an 8:30pm collection to be taken to alternative asylum accommodation but nobody turned up to collect her. The service responsible for arranging Naisha's accommodation did not answer the phone and were unable to tell Naisha where she would be accommodated; this could be anywhere in the country and she would not find out until she was picked up.

Alongside the local domestic abuse service and the British Red Cross, NWTa advocated for Naisha to access local suitable accommodation to allow her to continue accessing her support networks. Naisha was eventually accommodated at the Home Office accommodation she originally accessed; however, she had a more positive induction experience and was able to stay.

## Some women sofa-surfed while waiting for a refuge space

**Table 4** (page 14) shows that 17.2% of women sofa-surfed while waiting for a refuge space. Our *Nowhere to Turn, 2019* report explored how sofa-surfing with relatives or friends is often problematic for women fleeing domestic abuse (Women's Aid, 2019). Women experienced overcrowding, broken friendships and further abuse. Some of the women supported in 2023 who sofa-surfed reported that their friends and relatives were afraid for their own safety,

fearing that the perpetrator would come to their address. One woman with NRPf and her young child were refused support by social services and sofa-surfed at a friend's house. When her friend's husband became concerned that the perpetrator would turn up at the house, he asked the woman and her child to leave. The woman was then supported by the NWTa team to access refuge accommodation.

## Some women slept rough while waiting for a refuge space

Six women who received support had slept rough including two women who slept rough with their children. Two women slept in their car, one woman slept on the bus and in a park and one

woman slept in a church. Two of the women who slept rough had a disability (one had a mental health disability and one had both a learning disability and a mental health disability).

**30** This is a pseudonym.



## IMANI'S STORY

Imani<sup>31</sup> experienced further abuse from the perpetrator while waiting for safe accommodation, including a physical assault which required a hospital visit. Imani slept rough at a police station and on a bus, and stayed at a stranger's house. When Imani asked the police for help, they said they were unable to do anything as she had no recourse to public funds. Imani only had £5 left when she was referred to NWTa and had very limited mobile phone credit to make calls. The NWTa project supported Imani to understand her options and applied for a Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC)<sup>32</sup>, which was successful. Imani initially stayed in a hostel before accessing refuge after extensive support from the NWTa practitioners including safety planning, referring to immigration support, working with local domestic abuse services to ensure Imani received support on the ground, and making referrals to refuges.

## Some women stayed in mixed sex accommodation while waiting for a refuge space

In line with government homelessness code of guidance for local authorities, housing authorities are asked to consider whether mixed sex accommodation is appropriate and seek to provide single sex accommodation where this is required and available (Gov UK, 2018). However, seven women stayed in mixed sex accommodation. As highlighted in Alice's case (see page 15), following abuse by male perpetrators, many women feel unsafe in mixed sex accommodation (Women's Aid, 2021b).

A survivor interviewed in our *Nowhere to Turn* (2023a) report described how, after she had been placed in emergency accommodation, she "found [her]self in a room full of heroin addicts and had men walking into [her] room" in the night (Women's Aid, 2023a). Another woman reported feeling unsafe after being placed in emergency accommodation with men staying on either side of her room and having to share facilities with men.

## Women with mental health support needs struggled to access adequate support

Part 1 of this report (see **Table 2**) showed that 32.8% of women supported in 2023 had mental health support needs. Women's experiences of searching for safe accommodation can exacerbate their mental health support needs. For our 2023 *Nowhere to Turn* report, we interviewed a survivor who described how inadequate support provided by statutory services and other support services

left Jane<sup>33</sup> feeling alone and re-traumatised by the process of trying to find safety (Women's Aid, 2023a). The only service that Jane felt supported by was the NWTa project. Kaya's story, on the next page, also highlights how survivors with mental health support needs are sometimes failed by statutory services in their journey to finding safe accommodation.

**31** This is a pseudonym.

**32** Since February 2024, the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession has been re-named the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and new guidance has been published by the Home Office.

**33** This is a pseudonym.

## KAYA'S STORY

The NWTa project supported a woman fleeing domestic abuse who is a survivor of war crimes. Kaya<sup>34</sup> had been held in captivity as a child and witnessed the murder of her family. She was diagnosed with PTSD, psychosis and schizophrenia. The perpetrator made jokes about Kaya's experiences and was physically and emotionally abusive. When the police were called out to respond to an incident, they paid for Kaya to stay in a hotel for just one night. The local domestic abuse service was unable to identify a refuge that was able to support her mental health needs. The council withdrew their responsibility to accommodate Kaya, deciding that she was not at risk of homelessness, and Kaya subsequently attempted suicide.

NWTA arranged for a community care solicitor to challenge the council's gatekeeping of homelessness assistance and unlawful delay in processing Kaya's homelessness application, and the council provided temporary accommodation. The practitioners supported Kaya to understand her options and worked with local services to explore longer-term housing solutions. NWTA provided emotional support, worked with Kaya's GP to ensure her mental health needs were met and arranged ongoing support from a local domestic abuse service.

## Women experienced further abuse and financial hardship while waiting for a refuge space

As in previous years, the time spent waiting for safe accommodation was highly dangerous for the women supported in 2023. This correlates with research showing that the most unsafe time for a survivor tends to be when she has recently left the abuser or decided to do so (Femicide Census, 2020). The NWTa practitioners support women at this crucial time until safe accommodation is found. The practitioners utilise their knowledge of and make referrals to local services including 'by and for' expert services, work around a survivor's financial difficulties such as lack of money to pay for phone calls, and work flexibly to contact survivors when they are safely able to talk.

**Table 5**, on the next page, shows that 22.2% of the women who were supported by the project this year experienced additional abuse from the

perpetrator(s) whilst waiting for a refuge space, and 6.6% of women experienced abuse from (an) additional perpetrator(s), for example whilst sofa-surfing. One woman with mental health support needs and NRPF sofa-surfed with a male acquaintance and became pregnant. The man then left the woman on the street.

While waiting for a refuge space, 15.2% of the women supported by the NWTa project this year reported they were scared to go outside (i.e., temporarily leave the place where they were staying). Our previous research found that many women who are placed in emergency accommodation in the same local authority as the perpetrator are often afraid to go outside (Women's Aid, 2022a). Fourteen women (7.1%) told the NWTa practitioners that they had called the police out to respond to an incident while

<sup>34</sup> This is a pseudonym.

waiting for a refuge space and three women were physically injured as a result of an assault by the perpetrator(s) while waiting for refuge. Our Investing to Save report highlighted the significant cost savings to public services, such as police and the NHS, when survivors are able to access timely specialist support such as refuge (Women's Aid, 2023b).

As outlined earlier in this report, over half of women supported by the NWTa project in 2023 experienced financial abuse, and our Domestic Abuse Report found that over 57% of domestic abuse services reported an increase in survivors experiencing economic abuse (Women's Aid, 2024). While waiting for a refuge space, 31 women (15.7%) did not have enough money to pay for

essentials such as food for themselves and their children, phone credit, or transportation. These essentials are often required to plan and flee abuse, as explored in our *Experiences of financial hardship* report (Women's Aid, 2022a). After fleeing, some women relied on food banks while in temporary accommodation, sometimes for several months. Our evaluation of the Emergency Fund to support survivors with one-off payments showed that the most common reason that survivors were referred to the fund was that they were unable to replace or purchase essential goods for themselves or their child/ren (Women's Aid, 2023d).

**Table 5: Survivors' experiences while waiting for a refuge space\***

	Number of women	Percentage out of total number of women (out of 254)
Experienced further abuse from the perpetrator(s)	44	22.2%
Experienced abuse from an additional perpetrator	13	6.6%
Did not have enough money to pay for essentials	31	15.7%
Was scared to go outside	30	15.2%
Called the police out to respond to an incident	14	7.1%
Spent time as an inpatient/overnight in hospital	4	2.0%
Was physically injured as a result of an assault by the perpetrator(s)	3	1.5%
Spent time sectioned under the Mental Health Act	0	0%
Spent time in police custody	0	0%

\*Some survivors experienced more than one category.

## Survivors are often failed by statutory services

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Domestic abuse services are part of a wider structure of services which are crucial to supporting women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. This includes statutory services which are vital for housing, justice and safety and include local authority housing teams, police, social care, healthcare and legal services. Since September 2023, multiple local councils have issued a section 114, declaring themselves bankrupt and there have been warnings that other councils could do the same (End Violence Against Women, 2024). The majority (61.5%) of domestic abuse services that responded to our annual survey reported increased delays in accessing statutory services due to the rising cost-of-living (Women's Aid, 2024).

The NWTa practitioner who we interviewed for our Nowhere to Turn 2023 report highlighted the poor experiences that some of the women they supported had with statutory agencies. Their experiences indicate that these agencies, including housing and social services, require training to equip them to adequately support survivors and meet their duty. It is important for local domestic abuse services to maintain positive relationships with local statutory services, which can sometimes

limit the scrutiny and pressure they are able to apply when advocating for survivors. As part of a national organisation, Women's Aid's NWTa practitioners are able to utilise their extensive experience to support women and local services to ensure statutory services are meeting their duties.

The NWTa project collaborated with a Women's Aid member service to support a survivor with NRPF who had been placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation and left without adequate support for her and her children. After months of challenging statutory services to meet their duty to the family, they were successfully accommodated in refuge. The member service gave the following feedback on their experience of working with NWTa:

**'The [NWTa practitioner] was very professional and knowledgeable... [W]orking together, we [were] able to get our client the support she deserved and into appropriate accommodation. Seeing the difference to the client and knowing we both did that is something I will remember in my career forever.'**

## Housing teams

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Under the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the consequent amendment to the priority need for accommodation under the Housing Act 1996<sup>35</sup>, local authorities must consider survivors made homeless due to domestic abuse an automatic priority when they submit a homelessness application. Despite this, our data from 2023 continues to highlight that many survivors are denied priority for homelessness assistance. At least 20 (36.4%) of the 55 women who contacted

a local housing team were prevented from making a valid homelessness application. This is an increase of 5.1% compared with 2022. Women's experiences included unlawful delays in processing applications, housing teams ignoring guidance that local connection rules<sup>36</sup> do not apply in domestic abuse cases<sup>37</sup>, and housing teams informing survivors that they were not eligible for support.

<sup>35</sup> Housing Act 1996, S. 189. Available online: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/189](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/189)

<sup>36</sup> These rules require most people to apply for housing through their local housing team, with domestic abuse survivors exempt from them.

<sup>37</sup> Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, available online: [www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-21-domestic-abuse](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-21-domestic-abuse)

Respondents to our annual survey reported social housing “bottlenecks” and blockages due to the current housing crisis, particularly for women with three or more children and other barriers (Women’s Aid, 2024). The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group’s annual progress report showed that more than 10,000 women fleeing domestic abuse in England were refused safe housing in 2023 (End Violence Against Women, 2024).

Our *Nowhere to Turn 2023* report highlighted the experiences of one of the NWTAs support workers, who felt that some councils showed reluctance to house women who had experienced domestic abuse (Women’s Aid, 2023a). The practitioner noted that they sometimes receive ‘ridiculous’ and ‘lazy’ responses such as it being too late in the day or putting women on hold for hours at a time. Some councils said they required women to present at the office which was not possible for all women including disabled women or women who were scared to go outside due to their experiences of domestic abuse<sup>38</sup>. The practitioner had also experienced housing teams failing to call women after arranging to do this, as well as arranging to provide support within very delayed timeframes, during which further abuse could occur.

As in previous years and detailed in Alice’s and Amina’s stories earlier in this report, some of the women supported in 2023 were offered inappropriate accommodation. This included accommodation that had insufficient facilities, were far from local amenities, had insufficient space and were unsafe and/or unsanitary, and mixed sex accommodation.

When advocating on behalf of women, the NWTAs practitioners highlight the risks, remind housing departments of their legal duties and explain the nature and impacts of domestic abuse on women and children. The practitioners support

women to access advice around their housing rights and options, empowering them to make informed choices. The NWTAs practitioners work collaboratively with local domestic abuse services and other specialist services, including providing information to professionals on supporting women through the housing process.

## **JUNE’S STORY**

Upon contacting her local council to request homelessness assistance, June<sup>39</sup> was given an appointment for a weeks’ time despite informing the council that her abusive ex-partner was likely to return to their property at any time. June had to contact the council several times when the perpetrator returned before she was offered temporary accommodation.

The accommodation was unsuitable for June’s needs around her disability. When June explained this to the council, they said that they could end their duty to accommodate her if she left. The NWTAs practitioner challenged the council and requested alternative accommodation. The council initially failed to provide this, and June paid for a hotel for two nights. After agreeing to move June to a hotel, she waited for hours in the rain and experienced panic attacks before finally travelling to the hotel late in the evening. With support and advocacy from the NWTAs project, June was finally accommodated in private rental.

<sup>38</sup> In 2023, 7.8% of women had a physical disability and 15.2% had been scared to go outside.

<sup>39</sup> This is a pseudonym.

## Social Services

Many women who have experienced domestic abuse deal with social services departments. Under the Children's Act 1989, Part III, Section 17<sup>40</sup>, children's services have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are in need, and to promote the upbringing of these children by their families. The NWTAs caseworker who we interviewed for our 2023 report explained that the practitioners are able to request social services to make an assessment under Section 17. If the child is found to be a 'child in need', social services have a legal duty to fund the woman and her children to stay in suitable accommodation. Additionally, social care teams

have the duty to provide assistance to adults requiring care and support due to a disability, illness or mental health condition, under the Care Act 2014, Part 1<sup>41</sup>.

Of the women supported by the NWTAs project in 2023, 43 (21.1%) contacted social services while searching for a refuge space. The responsible teams failed to meet their obligation to safeguard women and children in at least 7 of those cases. In several cases, advocacy from the NWTAs team was required to hold them to account and remind them of this duty.

### AMELIA'S STORY

After fleeing her family home to stay with a friend, Amelia<sup>42</sup> was concerned for her three children who remained with the perpetrator, including her 5-month-old baby who she was breastfeeding. The perpetrator used Amelia's immigration status as part of the abuse by not including her in their children's leave to remain applications. NWTAs referred Amelia to an immigration advice service who supported her to make an application to have the NRPF condition removed from her visa.

After being turned away by children's services and housing when fleeing abuse previously, Amelia did not feel confident to approach them. Her concerns were compounded when they again refused to fund refuge for Amelia and her children. When the perpetrator threatened Amelia's friend, she asked Amelia to leave and she slept in her car.

The children informed Amelia that their father, who regularly drank alcohol and used drugs, was being abusive towards them. Children's services said they had been encouraged to support the perpetrator with his parenting, something that the NWTAs practitioners have noted is happening more frequently. The practitioner flagged their concerns with children's services and advocated for them to fund accommodation. Meanwhile, the perpetrator was using post-separation coercive control by threatening to apply for sole custody of the children and not allowing Amelia to see them. When Amelia tried to see her children, the perpetrator called the police who removed Amelia from the property, leaving her with scratches and bruises.

**Continued over page ▶**

<sup>40</sup> Children's Act 1989, Part III, Section 17 (HM Government 2014b). Available online: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/17](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/17)

<sup>41</sup> The Care Act 2014, Part I. (HM Government 2014b). Available online [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted)

<sup>42</sup> This is a pseudonym.

### ◀ Continued from previous page

After the NWTa practitioner met with the children's school, GP and family support worker, the case was escalated to a higher tier of support and children's services agreed to conduct a Section 17 assessment. However, despite the urgency, they indicated the assessment would take place months later. NWTa contacted a law firm who agreed to challenge children's services.

A court agreement was put in place for Amelia to have her children during the week. However, with no suitable accommodation, the children returned to the perpetrator at night. Amelia was successfully granted access to public funds. However, when she approached housing for support, they said she was not a priority. NWTa challenged this and the council provided temporary accommodation.

By the end of her support from the NWTa project, Amelia had child contact arrangements in place and was staying in temporary accommodation while she waited to be housed with her children. Amelia was also signposted to her local domestic abuse service for ongoing support.

## The Police

Fifty-five women (27.0%) who were supported by NWTa told us that they were or had been in touch with the police, including 14 who called the police out to respond to an incident while waiting for safe accommodation. In 2023, NWTa practitioners recorded several incidents of police downplaying abuse. These included advising the perpetrator to 'clear his head' by talking things over with the survivor, not arresting perpetrators for breaking non-molestation orders, and failure to act following incidents of threats to kill and stalking.

A survivor interviewed for our 2023 report described her experience of police not answering her telephone calls and repeatedly failing to call her at pre-arranged times. The survivor felt that police were not progressing with her case and a police officer jeopardised her safety by copying local housing officers into an email in which she stated without evidence that the survivor was safe in her original home, which in turn led the housing officer to close her case.

## Negative captures

The NWTa project and wider Women's Aid Direct Services team, including Live Chat and email support service, collect data on negative responses that survivors have experienced from statutory agencies and other agencies. Between 1st January 2023 – 31st December 2023, 87 separate incidents in which a statutory agency had responded inappropriately to a survivor seeking help were recorded.

**Table 6** on the next page demonstrates that local authority housing teams were responsible

for 37.9% of negative captures; police were responsible for 33.3%; and social services (local authority safeguarding) for 13.8%. These relate to boroughs across every region of the country and include Wales and Scotland.

Examples of inappropriate responses include professionals demonstrating a lack of knowledge about domestic abuse; breaching confidentiality and therefore putting survivors at further risk of abuse; giving inaccurate information and encouraging women not to seek support.

Five of the seven negative capture records on legal services were around judges. A survivor reported one judge telling her that she needed to accept the way the perpetrator was treating and speaking to her because 'that is how men in the army talk to women'. This judge awarded the perpetrator more child contact time than the survivor despite the child not wanting to see the

perpetrator and the perpetrator not allowing the survivor to see her child when she refused to have sex with him. Another negative capture recorded a judge ignoring a Cafcass report highlighting safeguarding concerns regarding child sexual abuse and possible radicalisation from perpetrator.

**Table 6: Negative captures by responsible agency**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Number of negative captures recorded</b>	<b>Percentage of total (75)</b>
Local Authority Housing Team	33	37.9%
Police	29	33.3%
Local Authority Safeguarding	12	13.8%
Legal Services <sup>43</sup>	7	8.0%
Housing Association	4	4.6%
NHS	2	2.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<sup>43</sup> This includes judges, solicitors and Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).



## PART 2B

# The support offered by the No Woman Turned Away project

Part 2b of this report explores the support delivered by the NWTa practitioners to overcome the barriers experienced by women and their children searching for safe accommodation.

### Support length and type

The NWTa practitioners delivered over 973 hours of support to the 204 women who engaged and finished support between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2023<sup>44</sup>. An average of 4 hours and 46 minutes of support was provided per woman, over an average time span of 6.9 weeks.

### More time was required to support women in 2023

In 2023, the number of hours of support per woman increased by 9.8%<sup>45</sup> and the average case length increased by 2.4 weeks. This suggests that more time was required to adequately support women in 2023. This may partly be a result of the increase in the proportion of women supported who had NRPF and therefore faced significant barriers to accessing support including suitable accommodation.

The NWTa practitioners noted that many women they supported in 2023 were not concurrently accessing support from a local domestic abuse service. This was frequently a result of long waiting lists for local support, for example from an outreach worker. As outlined in our recent *Domestic Abuse Report*, domestic abuse services continued to struggle with adequate funding and meeting demand, with almost half (49%) of the organisations surveyed running an area of their domestic abuse service without dedicated funding (Women’s Aid, 2024). Without this support in place

on the ground, it is more challenging for the NWTa practitioners to support women to access safe accommodation, and more time is required before a case can be closed.

**Table 7** shows that the largest part of NWTa practitioners’ time was spent being in contact with survivors (39.0%), either via phone (31.2%) or via email or text (7.8%). This contact is key to making survivors feel supported and understood (Women’s Aid, 2023a).

**Table 7: How much of specialist practitioners’ time is spent providing different types of support?<sup>46</sup>**

Type of support	Percentage of specialist practitioners’ time
Phone contact with survivor	31.2%
Liaison with other professionals	30.9%
Paperwork	10.3%
Attempting contact / chasing up	9.1%
Email / mail / text contact with survivor	7.8%
Advocacy on survivor’s behalf	5.8%
Other	5.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>44</sup> This does not include women who would have been supported during the same time frame but did not finish being supported by the 31st December 2023.

<sup>45</sup> In 2022, a total of 1098 hours of support were delivered to 254 women. The average number of hours of support per woman was 4 hours and 18 minutes. See Women’s Aid (2023a) for further information.

<sup>46</sup> This is based on practitioners’ records and calculated by the hours spent providing this support.

A large amount of the NWTa practitioners' time (30.9%) was spent liaising with other professionals. This involved working with refuge staff to identify a suitable refuge space that could meet the survivor's needs, linking the survivor with local domestic abuse support, and liaising with statutory services including housing officers and social workers.

The proportion of time spent liaising with other professionals increased by 14.0% compared with 2022. NWTa practitioners play a pivotal role as

they strive to ensure a joined-up response from a range of statutory and non-statutory services. This can include housing, children's services, the NHS, police, solicitors, and local domestic abuse services. The practitioners use their expertise and experience to ensure women are aware of their rights and ensure that services are meeting their duties to support women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. This vital role is often challenging and time-consuming.

### What did women receive support with?

All of the women who accessed support from the NWTa project in 2023 received support around accessing safe accommodation. Another key role of the NWTa project is signposting and referral to other support services and the vast majority of women were supported in this way to ensure their needs were met by appropriate professionals. The vast majority of women were also given emotional support, for example during phone calls with the practitioners. Our research (Women's Aid, 2022c) and other research (Thiara and Harrison, 2021) shows that an empathetic and understanding response from a professional including taking time to listen is highly valued by survivors. For the women supported by the NWTa project, the emotional support provided by the practitioners was vital after having left their home and support networks to access safety.

**Table 8** outlines the wide range of other types of support provided by the NWTa specialist practitioners.

Twenty-two women received support around immigration. For 21 women, this involved support with applying for the Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession<sup>47</sup>, which is required for women with NRPF to secure public funds for a refuge stay. This included NWTa specialist practitioners supporting women directly with the process and referring women to organisations that could assist with the application. The NWTa team also worked with a legal specialist registered with the Office of the Immigration Services

**Table 8: What do women receive support with?\***

Area of support	Number of women supported (out of 204)	Proportion of women supported (out of 204)
Safety planning	34	16.7%
Mental health	27	13.2%
Immigration	22	10.8%
Practical support	19	9.3%
Finances	16	7.8%
Risk assessment	15	7.4%
Safeguarding	10	4.9%
Children	9	4.4%
Parenting	9	4.4%
Drugs and alcohol	3	1.5%
Physical health	3	1.5%
Family law	2	1.0%
Offending	2	1.0%
Other	57	27.9%

\*Women often received more than one type of support.

<sup>47</sup> Since February 2024, the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession has been re-named the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and new guidance has been published by the Home Office.

Commissioner (OISC) to provide specialist advice and support around immigration.

As detailed later in this report, the NWTa practitioners supported women with children by advocating for women with statutory agencies such as children's services and referring and signposting to local services.

The NWTa team provided support around finances including information on accessing housing benefit and food banks. Women were also supported with drug and alcohol needs, amongst other areas.

The support areas listed in **Table 8** highlight the wide range of specialist knowledge and skills utilised by the NWTa team, enabling them to support women facing a range of barriers to accessing safe accommodation. The NWTa practitioners all have extensive frontline domestic abuse experience and a range of vital skills including cultural awareness and language skills. The team are also able to dedicate time to providing one-to-one support for each woman, which was essential to securing successful outcomes.

The NWTa team provide:

- ▶ Tailored responses to survivors' needs
- ▶ Advocacy support to challenge local statutory agencies and other services
- ▶ Criminal justice system expertise
- ▶ Support to survivors in a range of languages, in addition to the use of interpreters
- ▶ Specialist knowledge of statutory service obligations
- ▶ An understanding of professional referral pathways
- ▶ Access to established relationships with Women's Aid's national network of member services
- ▶ Access to established partnerships with specialist organisations
- ▶ Access to expertise available through Women's Aid Federation of England (WA), including advice around immigration from an OISC-registered member of staff

## Outcomes: How many women were accommodated in a refuge or other safe place?

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**Table 9** shows that, by the end of support from the NWTa project, a total of 95 women (49.5%) had a new housing outcome including being accommodated in refuge, emergency accommodation or private rental. Forty-three women (22.4%) were accommodated in a suitable refuge. The same number of women were accommodated in emergency accommodation, and nine women (4.7%) were accommodated in a private rental home. The findings are comparable with previous years. However, it is important to note that, despite the duty placed on local authorities to fund domestic abuse support in safe accommodation for survivors<sup>48</sup>, the proportion of

women accommodated in refuge declined by 2.8% compared with 2022. Further funding is needed for refuge services that are able to meet the needs of women facing additional barriers and structural inequalities to support.

At the time their cases were closed, 11 women (5.7%) remained in a home that they did not share with the perpetrator(s) (however a risk of further harm often remained), 10 women (5.2%) were staying in a home that they shared with the perpetrator(s), 10 women (5.2%) stayed with friends and family, and two women (1.0%) returned to the perpetrator(s)<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> The Domestic Abuse Act. (2021), c. 17.

<sup>49</sup> These cases were always closed in agreement with the women being supported.

**Table 9: Outcome at the end of support from the NWT specialist practitioners\***

	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 192)
Accommodated in suitable refuge space	43	22.4%
Accommodated in emergency accommodation	43	22.4%
Outcome unknown/lost contact	32	16.7%
Stayed put – not living with perpetrator at time of referral	11	5.7%
Stayed put – living with perpetrator	10	5.2%
Staying with friends and family	10	5.2%
Stayed put – living with friends and family	7	3.6%
Accommodated in private rental (out of area of residence)	6	3.1%
Accommodated in private rental (in area of residence )	3	1.6%
Returned to perpetrator	2	1.0%
Returned to country of origin	2	1.0%
Less suitable refuge with plan to transfer	1	0.5%
Sectioned or in hospital	1	0.5%
Other	21	10.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*The data is based on 192 women where the outcome at the end of support from the NWT project was recorded.

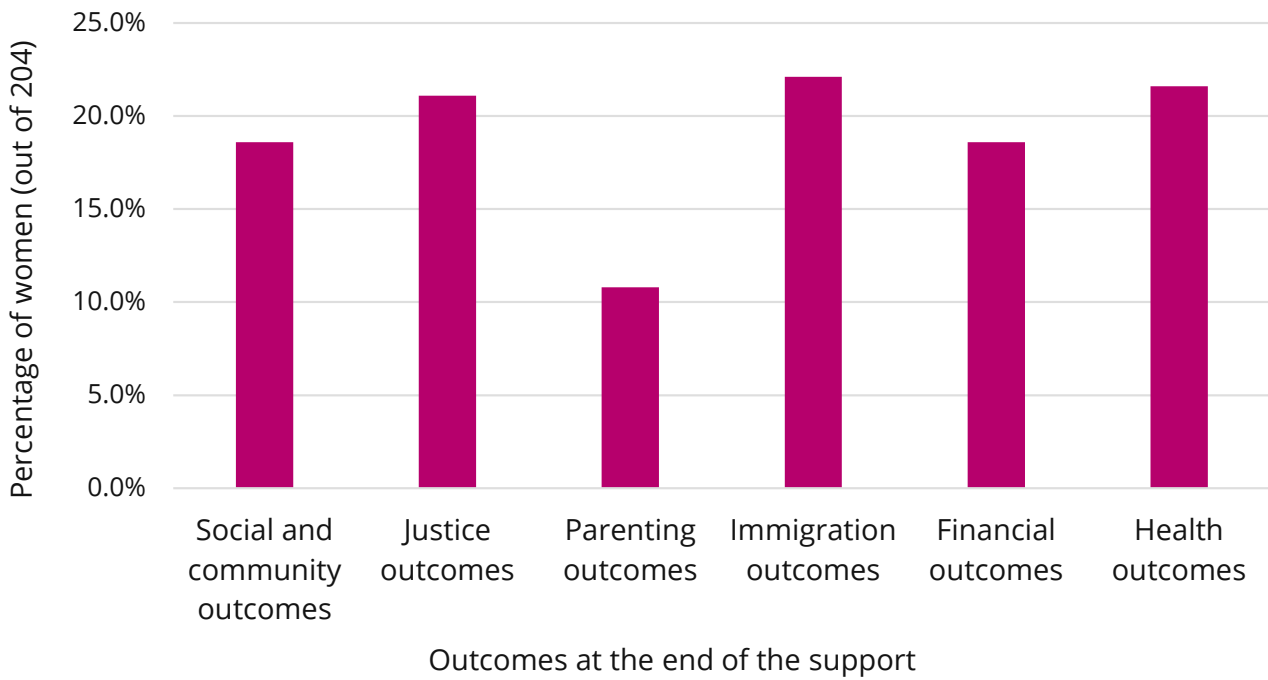
## Women were supported to achieve a range of additional outcomes

The breadth of specialist support provided by the NWT project resulted in a range of other outcomes for the women supported.

As shown in **Graph 2**, by the end of their support from the NWT project, the specialist practitioners noted positive outcomes for women in the following areas:

- ▶ 38 women (18.6%) had an outcome around their social and community life
- ▶ 43 women (21.1%) had a justice outcome
- ▶ 22 women (10.8%) had a parenting outcome
- ▶ 45 women (22.1%) had an immigration outcome
- ▶ 38 women (18.6%) had a financial outcome
- ▶ 44 women (21.6%) had a health outcome

**Graph 2: Additional outcomes at the end of support from NWTa**



### Women were referred and signposted to specialist support services

Utilising their knowledge of networks of domestic abuse and wider support services, the NWTa practitioners referred and signposted women to a variety of specialist services. Seventy-one women (34.8%) received support from another domestic abuse organisation after exiting the project, including services such as refuge and outreach. Additionally, 71 women (34.8%) went on to receive support from another type of service after their case with NWTa was closed. This included

immigration specialists and statutory agencies. As outlined earlier in this report, 21 women were supported to apply for the DDV Concession<sup>50</sup> whilst working with the NWTa project. This included the NWTa practitioners supporting women directly with the process, offering advice from Women’s Aid’s OISC-registered legal specialist, and referring women to organisations that assisted women to make an application.

### Most women’s safety improved with support from NWTa

A key outcome of support from the NWTa practitioners was an increased feeling of safety. As shown in **Graph 3** (on the next page), the NWTa practitioners estimated that the majority of women (64.7%) were safer following support by the project. For over half (51.2%) of women, the practitioners noted a significant improvement in women’s safety and for 13.5% of women, some

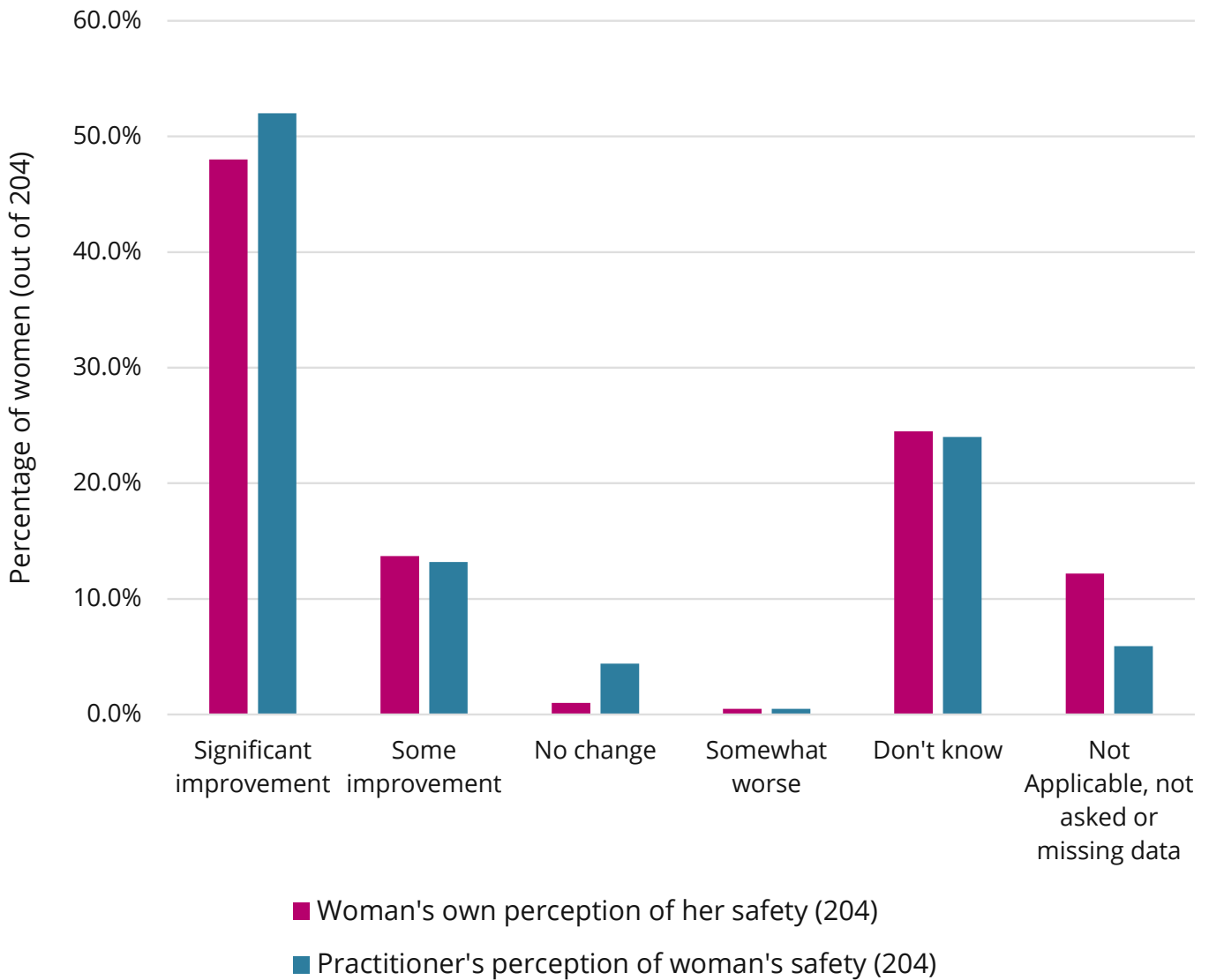
improvement in safety was noted. For around one-quarter of women (24.6%), the practitioners felt unable to make an estimation and for 5.3% of women, this was noted as not being applicable. This is often because the NWTa project lost contact with the woman, or because the woman did not engage with the project beyond initial contact.

<sup>50</sup> Since February 2024, the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession has been re-named the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and new guidance has been published by the Home Office.

Where they were able to, the NWTa practitioners collected information on women’s own perceptions of their safety. The majority (61.3%) of women felt that there had been an improvement in their safety, with 47.3% noting a significant improvement and 14.0% noting some improvement. Just one survivor felt that their safety had decreased by

the end of their support from NWTa. For this woman, a refuge vacancy search was conducted nine times and no suitable spaces were available. The specialist practitioner offered further support with identifying safe accommodation; however, the woman no longer wanted support from the NWTa project at that time.

Graph 3: Perception of safety



## Inequalities in refuge provision

As reported in previous *Nowhere to Turn* reports, inequalities in refuge provision and access are influenced by barriers imposed on women with specific characteristics and circumstances.

**Table 10** shows the proportion of women with different characteristics who were accommodated in a suitable refuge by the end of their support from NWTAs.

Women with a male child aged 14 or above, those with ties to their local area<sup>51</sup>, and women with one or more disabilities had the lowest percentage of women who accessed refuge by the end of support from NWTAs.

**Table 10: Proportion of women with different characteristics and circumstances who were accommodated in a suitable refuge\***

Characteristic/circumstance	Number of women with this characteristic/circumstance who were accommodated in a refuge
Women with language and cultural support needs	7 out of 14 (50.0%)
Women with an offending history	2 out of 6 (33.3%)
Women from Black and minoritised backgrounds <sup>52</sup>	28 out of 86 (32.6%)
Women with no recourse to public funds	27 out of 92 (29.3%)
Women previously evicted from refuge	2 out of 7 (28.6%)
Women with three or more children	5 out of 18 (27.8%)
Women with drug and alcohol support needs	5 out of 34 (14.7%)
Women with mental health support needs	8 out of 67 (11.9%)
Women with one or more disability <sup>53</sup>	5 out of 58 (8.6%)
Women with 'other' referral reason	2 out of 26 (7.7%)
Women who were tied to their local area	1 out of 16 (6.3%)
Women with a male child over 14	0 out of 9 (0.0%)

\* The data is based on 192 women where the outcome at the end of support from the NWTAs project was recorded.

**51** This means that women wanted to stay in the local area due to circumstances such as work commitments, children's schools, medical care, or support networks.

**52** Although this is not part of the referral criteria, we have included women from Black and minoritised backgrounds as we know about the structural barriers these women are more likely to face.

**53** This is based on the 58 women recorded as having a disability in the demographic data, rather than the referral reason.

## Disabled women experienced very high barriers to seeking safety and support

Of the 58 women with a disability, only five women (8.6%) were accommodated in refuge by the end of their support from the NWTa project. Of these five women, two women had a mental health disability, one had a physical disability, and two had both a mental health disability and a physical disability.

We compared the end outcomes for women with at least one disability and women without a recorded disability. Our data shows that the percentage of disabled women accommodated in refuge was 19.1% lower than the percentage

of women with no disability. On the contrary, the percentage of women with a disability accommodated in emergency accommodation was 18.4% higher than for women with no recorded disability.

Of the four types of disability<sup>54</sup> recorded by the NWTa practitioners, at 18.8% (3 out of 16), the percentage of women with a physical disability who were accommodated in refuge was higher than the percentage of women with other types of disability. None of the five women with a learning disability and only four out of fifty (8.0%)

**Table 11: Outcomes at the end of support for women with a disability**

End outcome	Number of women	Percentage of women (out of 58)
Emergency accommodation	21	36.2%
Outcome unknown/lost contact	8	13.8%
Accommodated in suitable refuge space	5	8.6%
Stayed put – not living with perpetrator at time of referral	5	8.6%
Returned to country of origin	2	3.4%
Stayed put – living with perpetrator	2	3.4%
Staying with friends and family	2	3.4%
Accommodated in private rental	2	3.4%
Returned to perpetrator	1	1.7%
Sectioned or in hospital	1	1.7%
Stayed put – living with friends and family	1	1.7%
Other	5	8.6%
Missing data	3	5.2%
Total	58	100%

<sup>54</sup> NWTa practitioners recorded five types of disability: physical disability, mental health disability, learning disability, vision disability and hearing disability. However, no women with a hearing disability accessed and finished support from the NWTa project in 2023.



women with a mental health disability were accommodated in refuge. The most common outcome for women with a mental health disability and a learning disability was to be accommodated in emergency accommodation.

Only one out of 19 (5.3%) Black and minoritised women with a disability were accommodated in refuge. Again, the most common outcome for this group of women was to be accommodated in emergency accommodation (42.1%).

## JOANNA'S STORY

Joanna<sup>55</sup> has multiple physical disabilities which had been exacerbated by injuries from the perpetrator. Joanna experiences extreme fatigue and uses a wheelchair. After fleeing domestic abuse, no refuge vacancies were able to support her disability needs and Joanna was allocated unsuitable temporary accommodation in hotels. The hotels had no cooking facilities and Joanna was expected to move to a different hotel every few days, which took a huge toll on her health. Social care expected Joanna to pack her belongings and move at short notice without support or transport. After being left with no option other than taking the bus in the cold and rain, Joanna was unable to get out of bed.

On several occasions, carers did not visit when they were due to, and Joanna went all day without food. On one occasion, ambulance workers were called and subsequently made a report to emergency social care, raising concerns that the hotel was unsuitable. NWTa repeatedly advocated with social care to meet their duty to Joanna, before seeking support from a solicitor to challenge the local authority for failing to provide suitable housing and care. Joanna was eventually moved to a bungalow while she waited for longer-term housing.

Our 2022 *Financial Hardship* report (Women's Aid, 2022a) and a recent ONS report (Office for National Statistics, 2024) explored the experiences of survivors who, like Joanna, had been placed in inadequate temporary accommodation including accommodation with no cooking facilities. Survivors found it very difficult to feed themselves and their families and often missed meals. Joanna's case highlights that, for women with one or multiple disabilities, unsuitable temporary accommodation can have particularly harmful impacts on their health and wellbeing.

## The most vulnerable survivors faced the greatest barriers to accessing refuge

Women who faced multiple barriers and systemic inequalities found it particularly difficult to find a suitable refuge space. Only 14 out of 193 (7.3%) women with two or more barriers were accommodated in refuge and only 3 out of 69 (4.3%) women with three or more barriers were accommodated in a suitable refuge. Neither of the two women with four barriers were accommodated in refuge.

## The NWTa project's role in meeting the needs of women with language and cultural support needs

As in previous reports, **Table 10** (page 31) shows that survivors with language or cultural support needs were most likely to be accommodated in refuge. As highlighted earlier in this report, the NWTa practitioners speak multiple languages, enabling them to support many women in their preferred language. If the practitioner does not speak the woman's preferred language, an independent interpreting service is used. This removes the barrier that women often face when being supported by other services who may not have a multi-lingual team and/or use an independent interpreting service. As noted

by the Centre for Women's Justice and Imkaan (2023) in their report on the deaths of Black and minoritised women in the context of domestic abuse, the use of good quality interpreting services is critical to women's access to safety and protection. The practitioner interviewed in our 2023 report also highlighted the benefit of having a culturally diverse team when supporting Black and minoritised women fleeing specific forms of abuse such as honour-based abuse or FGM (Women's Aid, 2023a).

### **HAMIDEH'S STORY**

Women's Aid's Live Chat service referred Hamideh<sup>56</sup> to the NWTa project on a Monday morning. She was on a spousal visa and was unsure of her rights. Hamideh's local domestic abuse service did not have access to an interpreter and had therefore been unable to support her. NWTa utilised an independent interpreting service to support Hamideh to access immigration advice and liaised with a refuge who agreed to support Hamideh to apply for a Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession<sup>57</sup>. The NWTa practitioner utilised Women's Aid's Rail to Refuge scheme to source a free ticket for Hamideh to travel and, by the Wednesday, Hamideh was successfully accommodated in refuge.

### **PALESA'S STORY**

Palesa's<sup>58</sup> husband used her insecure immigration status as part of coercive control. When Palesa fled her abuser, the first refuge she approached was unable to support her language needs. Palesa travelled to another region of the country to be close to her church and community. Palesa had been sofa surfing for 12 days when the NWTa project supported her to access a refuge in her new local area.

Hamideh's and Palesa's experiences highlight that having access to an independent interpreting service, along with immigration advice and access to a network of local domestic abuse services, is vital to support women with language needs and insecure immigration status.

As outlined earlier in this report, our findings from 2023 highlight that, despite the introduction of the statutory duty within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, substantial gaps in provision remain, particularly for women facing additional barriers to accessing support.

**56** This is a pseudonym.

**57** Since February 2024, the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession has been re-named the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and new guidance has been published by the Home Office.

**58** This is a pseudonym.

## The NWTa project supports survivors to meet their children's needs

Children experiencing domestic abuse can suffer both short- and long-term impacts on their physical and emotional wellbeing (Women's Aid, 2022a). Ninety-eight women supported by the NWTa project in 2023 were fleeing abuse with a total of 194 children. The specialist practitioners

supported women to access suitable safe accommodation and support which met the needs of their children as well as the women themselves. Additionally, the NWTa practitioners noted a positive outcome around parenting for 22 women.

### Statutory services are failing to recognise children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right

Despite the Domestic Abuse Act 2021<sup>59</sup> enacting change to the legal definition of domestic abuse to recognise children as victims of domestic abuse

in their own right, for several women supported in 2023, statutory services failed to recognise and support children's needs.

### AMINA AND AHSAN'S STORY

Amina<sup>60</sup> had NRPF and was fleeing domestic abuse with her 10-year-old child, Ahsan<sup>61</sup>. Amina was at risk of destitution and was sofa-surfing with Ahsan in crowded accommodation. Despite there being a non-molestation order in place and evidence provided by the local domestic abuse service that Ahsan had also experienced abuse, children's services said that if Amina became homeless then Ahsan would be placed with the perpetrator, failing to recognise Ahsan as a victim of domestic abuse in his own right. NWTa advocated that this was an unsafe decision.

Due to children's services unwillingness to fund accommodation for Amina and her child, NWTa applied for Southall Black Sisters last-resort No Recourse Fund while they challenged children's services via a community care solicitor. However, NWTa was unable to source accommodation within the weekly funding limit for non-refuge accommodation.

The borough that Amina fled to refused to fund temporary accommodation, arguing that this was the responsibility of the borough that Amina fled from. NWTa approached five law firms and the fifth firm agreed to support Amina's case to pursue accommodation support from the council via Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

The council then provided temporary accommodation. However, Amina and Ahsan were sharing a bed, had to use shared facilities, and the accommodation had mice, bedbugs and damp. This was negatively impacting Ahsan's emotional wellbeing. When NWTa raised their concerns with the council, they said no alternative accommodation was available. NWTa again worked with a solicitor to challenge the council. This was successful and the family were moved to a two-bedroom house. Amina and Ahsan moved at least five times between fleeing abuse and accessing suitable temporary accommodation and Ahsan had to move school three times.

<sup>59</sup> The Domestic Abuse Act. (2021), c. 17.

<sup>60</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>61</sup> This is a pseudonym.

### Children had to stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation

As experienced by Amina and Ahsan, the recent Office for National Statistics (2024) report similarly found that local authority-provided accommodation sometimes lacked basic amenities and offered poor living conditions. This included pest infestations and failure to provide

children their own beds, having a detrimental impact on women and children's sense of safety and recovery. The impacts of unsuitable temporary accommodation are also explored in Nora's story, below.

### NORA'S AND HER CHILDREN'S STORY

Nora<sup>62</sup> was referred to the NWTa project by Women's Aid Live Chat and was supported over a 14-month period. Nora's older children were undertaking their exams, and two of her children had mobility needs. The family were placed in temporary accommodation out of the borough. It took almost two hours to travel to school and the hospital where the children were required to attend regular appointments.

The 45-minute uphill walk to the bus stop and long commute was impacting the children's physical and mental health and the older children were struggling to find time to revise for their exams. Nora's daughter decided to postpone her planned surgery as she feared she would not be able to recover and attend college due to the property's location. Nora described her children's throats and noses being 'raw' from the mould in the temporary accommodation, as her children suffer from mould allergies.

Nora considered returning to the perpetrator due to the impact that the temporary accommodation was having on her children. The NWTa practitioner advocated for the family to be housed closer to the school and hospital, noting 'It's one horrible situation to another and [Nora] feels like she is being punished for leaving the abusive household'.

NWTa completed a child safeguarding referral and referred to Shelter for Nora to access specialist housing advice and support. When the housing advisor was not responsive to concerns raised over several months, NWTa arranged for housing to be legally challenged by a solicitor and provided evidence to support Nora's case. NWTa also arranged for the family to access support from a local domestic abuse service.

### Women with 'large families' and older children experienced very high barriers to accessing refuge

Nora's story also highlighted the barriers that women with a 'large family' can face when trying to access refuge. Just five out of 18 women (27.8%) with more than three children were accommodated in refuge. Two women were refused a vacancy that had been listed on Routes to Support because the refuge was unable to

accommodate more than three children. Women with adult children or older male children also experienced barriers in accessing refuge.

In addition to sofa-surfing, two women slept rough with their children (one woman had one child and the other woman had five children).

<sup>62</sup> This is a pseudonym.

### Some children were separated from their mothers

As highlighted in Karolyne's story, some of the women supported in 2023 were forced to flee abuse without their children. For other women, social services had placed the children with the perpetrator.

Of the children that women wanted to take with them:

- ▶ For 18 women, all of her children were accommodated with her.
- ▶ For two women, none of her children were accommodated with her.
- ▶ For one woman, some of her children were accommodated with her.
- ▶ For four women, at the end of support from NWTa, some or all of their children had been accommodated with the perpetrator.

### JOANNA AND TILLY'S STORY

Joanna<sup>63</sup>, whose case we explored earlier in this report<sup>64</sup>, has multiple physical mobility needs and had been placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation. Joanna's daughter, Tilly, attended a boarding school in term-time, returning to her mother one weekend a month and in the school holidays. During Joanna's stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation, Tilly was due to return to her for the holidays and Joanna requested suitable accommodation for her and Tilly. However, social care said that they would instead ask Joanna's sister, who lived far away, if she could accommodate Tilly. This would have meant Tilly being kept apart from her mother. The NWTa practitioner advocated for Social Care to arrange suitable accommodation for Joanna and Tilly and they were able to stay together during the school holidays.

<sup>63</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>64</sup> See more details of Joanna's experience on page 33.

<sup>65</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>66</sup> Since February 2024, the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession has been re-named the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and new guidance has been published by the Home Office.

### KAROLYNE'S STORY

Karolyne<sup>65</sup> had NRPF and children's services said that she should leave the children with the perpetrator as he had a house, refusing to fund accommodation for her and the children. At court, the judge ruled that Karolyne must live upstairs while the perpetrator lives downstairs and ordered child contact to be split 50/50.

When the perpetrator made false allegations against Karolyne, she was arrested and subsequently accommodated in a B&B, which was unsuitable for the children to stay in. Children's services again refused to fund appropriate accommodation despite Karolyne always having been the children's primary carer. When the social worker argued that the perpetrator did not pose a risk to the children, the NWTa practitioner explained that the father was perpetrating high-risk coercive control, immigration abuse and financial abuse.

When Karolyne was later accommodated in a refuge funded by Project 17 and subsequently by Southall Black Sisters, she went for 10 days without any contact from the social worker with an update on the children. The social worker then agreed for Karolyne to see the children in the front garden of the family home, despite her being afraid that the perpetrator may attack her during the visit.

Karolyne was supported to access a DDVC<sup>66</sup> and moved into local authority temporary accommodation. Karolyne's new social worker was supporting her to have regular contact with her children while she works with a family solicitor to challenge the court's decision. Karolyne was also accessing ongoing support from her local domestic abuse service.

Joanna and Karolyne's cases evidence examples of children's services and social care failing to support women and their children to be safely accommodated together after experiencing domestic abuse.

Women's Aid's research found that for 38.3% of the survivors surveyed, child contact arrangements had been used to perpetrate abuse and 34.1% of survivors told us they were concerned about the safety of child contact during this time (Women's Aid's, 2020). As experienced by Karolyne, the Harm report by the Ministry of Justice highlighted that a 'pro-contact culture' amongst the courts and professionals involved in child arrangement proceedings resulted in children having contact with perpetrators regardless of their particular circumstances (Ministry of Justice, 2020).

### **Some children had to move school many times during their search for safe accommodation**

Four women had ties to a specific local area as they did not want to take their children out of school, which presented a barrier to accessing refuge. As Ahsan's case highlighted, children can sometimes be required to move school several times during their journey to safe accommodation. For some of the survivors interviewed as part of a recent ONS report, their children had to move schools part way through the term with little notice, which sometimes resulted in them having to wait before they were able to enrol (Office for National Statistics, 2024). For one survivor, it took up to three months for her child to be enrolled. Survivors who had children with special educational needs described the exhaustion and frustration of trying to navigate the system to secure the support their children needed.

Women with children who were supported in refuge largely described having access to adequate practical support in enrolling their children in a new school and supporting them to attend. As with Amira and Ahsan, survivors in the ONS report who had accessed hotels or other non-refuge accommodation did not have access to this type of support (Office for National Statistics, 2024).

### **Summary**

The experiences of women and their children supported by the NWTa project highlight the huge impact of domestic abuse on children and the challenges they face in accessing safe accommodation and support. These challenges are exacerbated by the failure of statutory services to meet their duty including recognising children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. We have also seen how immigration rules create additional barriers for women and their children to be safely and suitably accommodated together. The NWTa practitioners utilise their knowledge and experience of dealing with statutory services to advocate for women and their children, and utilise the networks of local specialist services to strive to ensure women and children's needs are met.

## Recommendations

The evidence discussed in this report points to the need for improvements to policy and practice to support adult and child survivors to access safe accommodation and recover from abuse.

### **Recommendation for the No Woman Turned Away project: to ensure the project continues to evidence evolving barriers faced by survivors of domestic abuse**

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1. Women's Aid to undertake activities to further develop the NWTa project, including adapting data collection tools to evidence changing barriers to support for women accessing the service.

### **Recommendations for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: to embed learning from the NWTa project in practice**

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1. Continue to work with Women's Aid to develop and resource the NWTa project to meet survivors' needs.
2. Create a formal oversight mechanism to ensure that local authorities are meeting their duty to give automatic priority need for homelessness assistance to survivors of domestic abuse.
3. Through the National Expert Steering Group on Safe Accommodation, develop robust national oversight of commissioning practices to ensure local commissioning of specialist domestic abuse services – including 'by and for' services for Black and minoritised women – is consistent, informed by best practice, and tailored to local demographics, to ensure funds have maximum impact.

### **Recommendations for statutory agencies: to improve awareness and understanding of domestic abuse in statutory services**

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1. Fund training, developed and delivered by specialist domestic abuse organisations, for those working in all statutory services<sup>67</sup>. Training should align to the legal definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and respond to the full breadth of survivors' needs. The impact of this training should be evaluated to ensure statutory services are meeting their duties<sup>68</sup> to survivors of domestic abuse, including children.
2. Commissioners should undertake mandatory, regular and specialist training, developed and delivered by specialist organisations like Women's Aid, in how to commission survivor-centred specialist support in line with statutory guidance for the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Home Office's National Statement of Expectations for VAWG Services (2022).

<sup>67</sup> This should include local housing teams, local authority safeguarding and police.

<sup>68</sup> Duties including, but not limited to, Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the Housing Act 1996 and section 78 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Equality Act 2010.

## Recommendations for the Treasury: to reduce barriers to accessing local domestic abuse services in line with the findings of this report

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1. Commit to a minimum annual funding settlement of £427 million for specialist domestic abuse services in England, of which a minimum of £189 million is ring-fenced for refuge services<sup>69</sup>. In addition, this should include ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' refuge services for Black and minoritised women, d/Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors, and refuge services for those with No Recourse to Public Funds.
2. Distribute funding in accordance with a national needs assessment, including a review of provision for survivors facing the barriers identified in this report. The financial settlement must be regularly reviewed and updated in line with population and inflation changes.

## Recommendation for the Home Office: to reduce barriers to support from local domestic abuse support services

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1. Equip local domestic abuse services to better support migrant women by funding training for frontline staff at local domestic abuse services on identifying the rights of migrant women. This should include supporting women to identify if they have access to public funds.

## Recommendations for the Home Office: to reduce barriers around immigration faced by survivors of domestic abuse in line with evidence in this report

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1. Implement a firewall between Immigration Enforcement and statutory services, to ensure women experiencing abuse are treated as victims first and foremost.
2. Abolish the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition for survivors of domestic abuse to address the additional barriers this creates in accessing life-saving support.
3. Extend eligibility for the existing Domestic Violence (DV) Rule to ensure not only survivors on spousal visas can access a refuge space, financial support and housing.
4. Embed awareness of the housing barriers faced by survivors of domestic abuse in line with evidence in this report.

## Recommendation for the Ministry of Justice: to improve awareness and understanding of domestic abuse in family courts.

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1. Fund training, developed and delivered by specialist domestic abuse organisations, for judges, magistrates and all professionals working in the family courts.

<sup>69</sup> For a full breakdown of costs please see: Women's Aid (2023b) *Investing to save: The economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support*. Bristol: Women's Aid. Available online: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Investing-to-save-report-ResPublica-and-Womens-Aid.pdf>



## Conclusion

The No Woman Turned Away project continues to play a critical role within the national network of specialist domestic abuse services in England. This report supports our understanding of the systems that influence survivor's access to safe accommodation including inadequate funding for specialist domestic abuse services, the failure of statutory services to meet their duty to support survivors and the barriers imposed by immigration policies. The NWTa project delivers vital support to women and their children to navigate these systems to overcome a range of barriers to support.

Many women experienced further abuse and hardship while waiting for refuge. Only a small percentage of women with particular barriers and women experiencing multiple barriers were accommodated in refuge by the end of their support from NWTa. Many women were accommodated in unsafe and poor-quality temporary accommodation and some women stayed with friends and family or remained with the perpetrator.

We heard about the huge impact that domestic abuse and subsequent inadequate support had on the children of the women supported in 2023, including having no option but to remain with the perpetrator, disruption to children's education, and impacts on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The data and case studies from 2023 demonstrate the pivotal role that the NWTa practitioners have in promoting a joined-up response between services including statutory and non-statutory services and advocating for survivor's needs to be met. The NWTa project worked collaboratively with local domestic abuse services to challenge statutory services and provide a range of support. NWTa practitioners utilised their extensive experience and expertise and afforded women the individualised support they need to access safe accommodation along with a range of other positive outcomes.

Sustainable and sufficient funding is required to ensure that local authorities fund refuge services that have the expertise to meet the support needs of all women and children, including services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women and other groups facing additional barriers to support. The continued funding of the NWTa project and other services which are equipped to deliver specialist support, advocate for survivors and hold statutory services to account, is vital. The report also evidences a clear need for training for professionals working with survivors of domestic abuse.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Sex

	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 204)
Female	198	97.0%
Non binary	1	0.5%
Not answered	5	2.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Appendix 2: Transgender

	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 204)
No	174	85.3%
Yes	1	0.5%
Don't Know	15	7.4%
Not Asked	13	6.4%
Missing Data	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Appendix 3: Ethnicity

	Number of women	Percentage of total number of women (out of 204)
<b>Asian / Asian British</b>		
Pakistani	18	8.8%
Any other Asian background	9	4.4%
Bangladeshi	6	2.9%
Indian	2	1.0%
Chinese	1	0.5%
<b>Black / African / Caribbean / Black British</b>		
African	16	7.8%
Caribbean	6	2.9%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	1	0.5%
<b>Mixed / Multiple Ethnic background</b>		
Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	5	2.4%
White and Black Caribbean	2	1.0%
<b>Other ethnic group</b>		
Arab	5	2.5%
Not Asked	14	6.9%
Any other ethnic group	12	5.9%
Don't Know	10	4.9%
Declined	1	0.5%
<b>White</b>		
British	70	34.3%
Any other White background	14	6.9%
Eastern European	8	3.9%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	3	1.5%
Any other White background	4	1.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Appendix 4: Age

	Number of women	Percentage of total women (out of 204)
16 - 20	2	1.0%
21 - 25	19	9.3%
26 - 30	19	9.3%
31 - 35	39	19.1%
36 - 40	33	16.2%
41 - 45	24	11.8%
46 - 50	9	4.4%
51 - 55	9	4.4%
56 - 60	2	1.0%
61 - 65	1	0.5%
Missing Data	47	23.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Appendix 5: Disability

	Number of women	Percentage of total women (out of 204)
None	112	54.9%
Yes	58	28.4%
Declined	0	0.0%
Don't Know	17	8.3%
Not Asked	16	7.8%
Missing Data	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Appendix 6: Type of disability**

	Number of women	Percentage of total women (out of 204)
Mental Health	49	24.0%
Physical	16	7.8%
Long Term Health Condition	8	3.9%
Learning	5	2.5%
Visual	1	0.5%
Hearing	0	0.0%
Speech Impairment	0	0.0%
<b>Total number of women with a disability</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>28.4%</b>
<b>Number of women with more than one disability</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9.8%</b>

**Appendix 7: Table version of Graph 1, showing referrals by month**

Month	Number of referrals	% of referrals
January	33	9.8%
February	21	6.2%
March	20	5.9%
April	21	6.2%
May	35	10.4%
June	29	8.6%
July	37	11.0%
August	31	9.2%
September	29	8.6%
October	20	5.9%
November	32	9.5%
December	30	8.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Appendix 8: Data from the infographic

	Number of women	Percentage of total women (out of 204)
How many women engaged and finished support between 1st January 2023 and the 31st December 2023	204	100%
How many women were from Black and minoritised backgrounds	86	42.2%
How many women had NRPF	92	45.1%
How many women had disabilities	58	28.4%
How many women experienced further abuse from the perpetrator(s) whilst waiting for refuge	44	22.2% (based on 198 women where this data was recorded)
Did not have enough money to pay for essentials	31	15.7% (based on 198 women where this data was recorded)
Spent time sofa-surfing	35	17.2%
Spent time sleeping rough	6	2.9%
How many women were accommodated in a refuge	43	22.4% (based on 192 women where the end outcome was recorded)
How many accommodated in emergency accommodation	43	22.4% (based on 192 women where the end outcome was recorded)
How many hours of support were offered by the project	Over 973 hours to the 204 women who engaged and finished support between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2023	
Key areas of support offered	Housing, Referral and Signposting, Emotional Support, Safeguarding, Safety Planning, Mental Health, Finances, Immigration, Practical Support	



For more information on the NWTa project, please visit the Women's Aid website: [www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/i-work-with-survivors/no-woman-turned-away](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/i-work-with-survivors/no-woman-turned-away).

Copies of all editions of the Nowhere to Turn report series can be downloaded for free online: [www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-and-reports](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-and-reports).

For information on training delivered by Women's Aid, please see our website: [www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/training](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/training) or email [training@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:training@womensaid.org.uk).

*Nowhere To Turn, 2024: Findings from the eighth year of the No Woman Turned Away project*

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