

# Leeds Women's Aid

## Mapping of Local Support for Women in Leeds

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**labyrinth  
project**

This report was produced under the Labyrinth Project and delivered by Leeds Women's Aid.

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## The Labyrinth Project

Women often have a range of issues in their lives including Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG), financial, employment and legal issues, but it can be hard for them to access the support they need across multiple agencies. There is a lack of joined-up, holistic, women-centred services despite many groups and organisations doing good work with and for women. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the impact of these issues. With partners across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Labyrinth Project aims to support women's spaces and services to help them, and the women they support, to emerge stronger from the damage that the pandemic is having on women's lives.

Funded by a grant from the Department for Digital, Culture, Music and Sport, the Labyrinth Project is contributing to system change for women by building capacity and forging stronger networks of support and shared learning locally and nationally. It focuses on education and training, awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. The Project will also improve access to help with finances, debt and legal rights.

The Labyrinth Project is formed of the three strands below:

- Local Capacity Building – strengthening the women's sector at a local level by mapping the support currently available, building networks and increasing the influence of the women's sector on local strategy and decision making.
- The Empowering Women Fund grants scheme - supporting organisations that are led by and for women to build their capacity and develop innovative ways of empowering women in their local area.
- National Women's Centre for Excellence – building a collection of knowledge, evidence, resources and tools based on experience by and for organisations within and supporting the women's sector.

### Leeds Women's Aid

<https://leedswomensaid.co.uk/>

Leeds Women's Aid (LWA) is the largest women's charity in Leeds, and has been providing support to women and children affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse (DV & A) for almost 50 years and opened the first refuge in the UK outside of London. We are also a leader and a voice for women centred support and recognise it is powerful and improves the lives of women, men and children.

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# 1. Introduction

## Purpose of the mapping

As part of the delivery of the Labyrinth Project, Leeds Women's Aid has undertaken a mapping report around the services and support available for women who experience complex needs.

This has been done for the following reasons:

- To gather intelligence on the range of services available for women who experience multiple disadvantage and intersecting complex needs.
- To identify specific services in the areas of VAWG, employment, financial and legal support
- To identify gaps in provision and barriers to access including for particular groups of women
- To explore the extent to which services are 'joined up' across the area and across different issues

## What the mapping covers

Leeds Women's Aid is part of an established strategic alliance, Women's Lives Leeds, which consists of 12 women's organisations from across the city. They have a variety of support specialisms including VAWG, Sexual Violence, Domestic Abuse, Sex work, Mental Health and Counselling, Training and Education for black and minoritized women, general support for Black and minoritized women, criminal justice, and young women. In addition to individual services they collectively deliver a complex needs service for women. This service originated out of a mapping exercise from 2015 which highlighted the need for more support for women with complex needs in Leeds and that a comparatively small cohort of women, took a disproportionate amount of resources for individual organisations.

Leeds Women's Aid have chosen to focus on the specific cohort of women who experience complex needs, for the Labyrinth Project. This is because two large projects in the city which were working with women who experience complex needs are at the end of their funding cycles. WYFI (West Yorkshire Finding Independence) project has definitely finished and Women's Lives Leeds were at the launch of Labyrinth project, waiting to hear if it would be recommissioned. It is in this light that LWA would like to identify to what extent women are supported in the city now, and what is available. There is also the issue of COVID and whether that has exacerbated and increased the need for complex need support across other women in the city.



As such the mapping will adopt this focus.

There is a general description of both the demographics of the city and a broad explanation of the services, partnerships and networks currently working to support women who experience complexity.

### **How the mapping was undertaken**

Existing partners were invited to interview especially if they felt they had new information to disseminate following COVID. Some of the partners responded and direct interviews were held with some CEOs and one project invited the navigator to attend a special team meeting so that opinions from the frontline could be included.

The mapping exercise also overlapped with the LCC call for evidence with regards to VAWG and the implementation of the statutory duty of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. In order to lay the groundwork for developing service user voice through their statutory process, LWA took on the role to collate service user voice for this and when women were interviewed about this, they were asked about their own experiences of help seeking behaviour. Every woman who was involved would have reached the criteria of experiencing complex needs.

As the mapping took shape specific organisations were approached – especially where it became apparent there were gaps to both assess existing provision and to scope for activity development. For example, services which work with older people were targeted later to enquire as to gender specific work after the first mapping demonstrated this was not being done by the women’s sector.

The groups who took part in the mapping include women, staff, managers or senior leaders from Leeds Women’s Aid, Basis Yorkshire, SARSVL, St Giles Trust, Women’s Counselling and Therapy Service, Women’s Health Matters, Shantona, Women’s Lives Leeds, Age UK Leeds, Touchstone, Leeds Older People’s Forum. In total nearly 50 women were consulted.



## 2. Local context

This section compiles the demographic background to the population of Leeds.

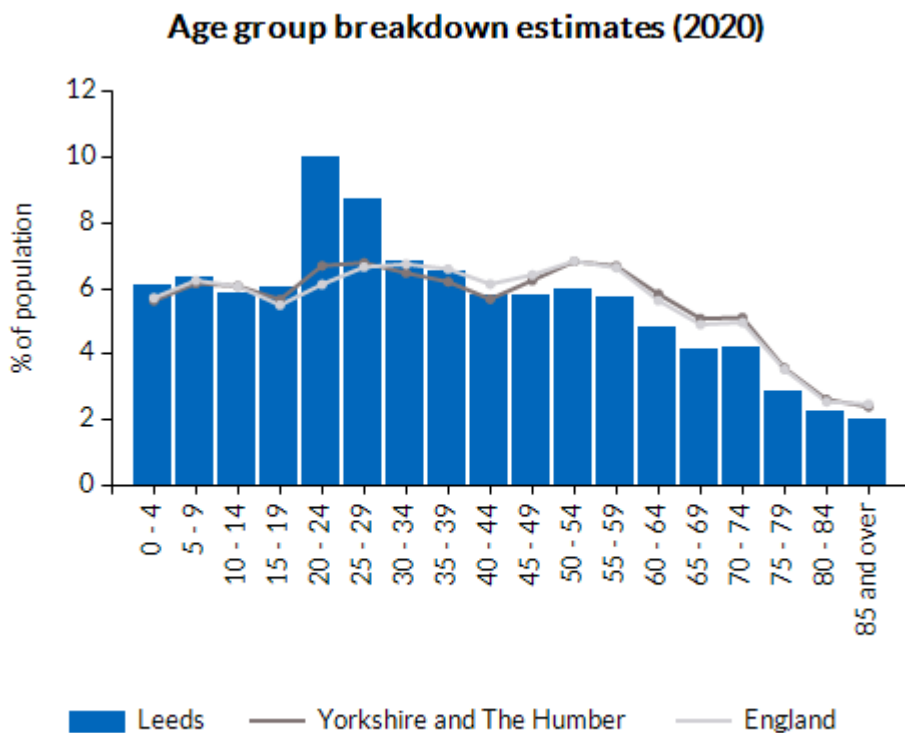
Information has been taken from the Joint Needs Assessment 2018, the most recently published data set for the population and health of the city. Information has also been collated from Leeds Observatory and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It is of note that a lot of the data is taken from the last published census of 2011 and it will be interesting to review this against the pending 2021 census which will be due for publication imminently.

### Population of Leeds

According to the ONS mid-year estimates for 2017, there were 785,000 people living in Leeds, up by over 33,000 from the 2011 Census. The Leeds Observatory now projects the population figures to be as follows:

Population Estimates (2020) ONS source 798,786

Male 49% (391,667) Female 51% 407,119



Source: ONS\*

### Ethnicity of Leeds residents



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18.9% (141,771) of residents have a minority ethnic background (source ONS 2011)

12.5% (99,000) of the population born outside the UK (source ONS 2019)

4.5% of households in Leeds where no one has English as a main language (Source ONS 2011)

#### Country of birth in Leeds (Census 2011)

| Usual Residents whose country of birth is:      | Number  | %    | Yorkshire and The Humber (%) | England (%) |
|---|---------|------|------------------------------|-------------|
| England   | 647,767 | 86.2 | 89.1                         | 83.5        |
| Scotland  | 10,281  | 1.4  | 1.3                          | 1.3         |
| Wales   | 3,829   | 0.5  | 0.5                          | 1           |
| Northern Ireland                                | 3,390   | 0.5  | 0.3                          | 0.4         |
| UK not otherwise specified                      | 74      | 0    | 0                            | 0           |
| Ireland   | 4,762   | 0.6  | 0.4                          | 0.7         |
| EU: Member in March 2001                        | 8,276   | 1.1  | 0.9                          | 1.7         |
| EU: Accession countries April 2001 - March 2011 | 12,026  | 1.6  | 1.6                          | 2           |
| Other countries                                 | 61,080  | 8.1  | 5.9                          | 9.4         |

Source: ONS Census 2011

#### Ethnic makeup of Leeds (Census 2011)

| Ethnicity                 | Number  | %    | Yorkshire and The Humber (%) | England (%) |
|---------------------------|---------|------|------------------------------|-------------|
| White - British           | 609,714 | 81.1 | 85.8                         | 79.8        |
| White - Irish             | 7,031   | 0.9  | 0.5                          | 1           |
| Gypsy                     | 687     | 0.1  | 0.1                          | 0.1         |
| Other White               | 22,055  | 2.9  | 2.5                          | 4.6         |
| White and Black Caribbean | 8,813   | 1.2  | 0.6                          | 0.8         |



| Ethnicity               | Number | %   | Yorkshire and The Humber (%) | England (%) |
|-------------------------|--------|-----|------------------------------|-------------|
| White and Black African | 2,493  | 0.3 | 0.2                          | 0.3         |
| White and Asian         | 4,906  | 0.7 | 0.5                          | 0.6         |
| Other Mixed             | 3,420  | 0.5 | 0.3                          | 0.5         |
| Indian                  | 16,130 | 2.1 | 1.3                          | 2.6         |
| Pakistani               | 22,492 | 3   | 4.3                          | 2.1         |
| Bangladeshi             | 4,432  | 0.6 | 0.4                          | 0.8         |
| Chinese                 | 5,933  | 0.8 | 0.5                          | 0.7         |
| Other Asian             | 9,256  | 1.2 | 0.8                          | 1.5         |
| Black African           | 14,894 | 2   | 0.9                          | 1.8         |
| Black Caribbean         | 6,728  | 0.9 | 0.4                          | 1.1         |
| Other Black             | 4,271  | 0.6 | 0.2                          | 0.5         |
| Arab                    | 3,791  | 0.5 | 0.4                          | 0.4         |
| Any other ethnic groups | 4,439  | 0.6 | 0.4                          | 0.6         |

Source: ONS Census 2011

### Religious populations in Leeds

| Faith          | Number  | %    | Yorkshire and The Humber (%) | England (%) |
|----------------|---------|------|------------------------------|-------------|
| Buddhist       | 2,772   | 0.4  | 0.3                          | 0.5         |
| Christian      | 419,790 | 55.9 | 59.5                         | 59.4        |
| Hindu          | 7,048   | 0.9  | 0.5                          | 1.5         |
| Jewish         | 6,847   | 0.9  | 0.2                          | 0.5         |
| Muslim         | 40,772  | 5.4  | 6.2                          | 5           |
| Sikh           | 8,914   | 1.2  | 0.4                          | 0.8         |
| Other Religion | 2,396   | 0.3  | 0.3                          | 0.4         |





| Faith       | Number  | %    | Yorkshire and The Humber (%) | England (%) |
|-------------|---------|------|------------------------------|-------------|
| No Religion | 212,229 | 28.2 | 25.9                         | 24.7        |
| No Response | 50,717  | 6.7  | 6.8                          | 7.2         |

Source: ONS Census 2011

## The economic picture

Leeds is very much a tale of two cities with positive statistics for work and growth however poverty persists in some parts of the city.

- 450,000 people work in Leeds, with three quarters in the private sector, putting the city in the top five nationally for private sector employment. Very strong private sector growth since 2010 has maintained the city's employment rate, with 77% of the working age population in employment (June 2018), above regional and national averages.
- Leeds continues to be the main driver of economic growth for the city-region, and has key strengths in financial and business services, advanced manufacturing, health and creative and digital industries, with a strong knowledge-rich employment base. These strengths, linked to the city's universities and teaching hospitals, are major innovation assets for Leeds. Leeds also performs well in terms of business start-ups, with strong growth in digital and medical technologies, telecoms and creative industries.
- An area for concern is the 'hollowing-out' of skilled and semi-skilled occupations increasing across a wider range of sectors. Recently this has been accompanied with growth in high skilled/high valued jobs in the knowledge-based sectors, together with growth in lower skilled/lower income jobs often in consumer-services, which combined with flexible employment and perhaps the early impact of welfare reforms has seen a growth of in-work poverty.
- Over 170,000 people in Leeds live in areas ranked amongst the most deprived 10% nationally. One in five children in Leeds lives in poverty.
- Child poverty is at the root of many poor outcomes for children and young people and their families. In 2015 almost 20% of children (under 16s, 28,000 children) were estimated to live in poverty in Leeds, compared to 17% nationally.
- National estimates of 'relative poverty after housing costs' when applied to Leeds equate to almost 172,000 people living in relative poverty.
- More recently Leeds have seen growth of in-work poverty, with an estimated 70,000+ working age adults across the city being from working households and living in poverty.



### 3. Findings

#### What support is currently available for women in the area(s)?

Leeds has a thriving third sector and the women's sector is well established with some major players working in the city for decades. Over five years ago, 12 of the most prominent women's organisations in the city formed an alliance known as Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) to both deliver services together and to act as a lobbying, voice and influence mechanism in the city. Between them, the partners have specialisms in domestic violence, health, sex work, counselling, education and criminal justice. The alliance also brings together some of the key organisations working with black and minoritized women in the city. Leeds Women's Aid is the lead partner and the longest standing organisation and celebrates 50 years in 2022.

The original partners (and their specialisms) are:

- Leeds Women's Aid (domestic abuse and violence against women and girls)
- Behind Closed Doors (domestic abuse – community support)
- Basis Yorkshire (women who sex work)
- Getaway Girls (young women)
- Shantona (South Asian women support)
- Asha Women's Centre (South Asian women support)
- Nari Ekta (Education and training for women who are newly arrived in the UK, predominantly South Asian)
- Together Women (women involved with or at risk of involvement with criminal justice)
- Women's Health Matters (women's project looking at all aspects of women's physical and mental health)
- Women's Counselling and Therapy Service (Counselling and therapy)
- Hooner Kelah (education and training)
- HALT (Help, Advice and the Law Team – Domestic Abuse). HALT merged with LWA in 2017 and Hooner Kelah has ceased operating as an independent project.

Two new partners joined the alliance in 2020 – The Joanna Project (Christian approach to women who sex work) and SARSVL (Support after Rape & Sexual Violence Leeds).

Regarding women who experience multiple disadvantage, WLL offered a complex needs service offering one to one intensive support with women. It is currently in the process of applying to be refunded. It was the only gender specific complex needs service in the city.

The women's sector is well established, and support is, in theory, available across the city. Funding for specific projects, however, remains short term and piecemeal therefore long-term strategic planning is difficult. Often services apply for funding trying to make need fit



the funding rather than identifying needs and offering support accordingly. Some sectors have demand far outstripping supply e.g., counselling support and specifically support for women after sexual violence report very long waiting lists. Smaller organisations don't have the resources necessary to continually apply and reapply for funding on a yearly basis. Such funding structures also make smaller organisations particularly vulnerable to closure.

Housing in the city remains a key issue as without safe, secure housing many organisations report that it can be challenging to even try to work to support women in other areas of their lives when the fundamentals remain so fragile. The recent independent needs assessment commissioned by LCC as part of the DA Bill implementation looking at DA provision, highlighted the lack of suitable housing for women fleeing DA who experience complex needs.

"Complex needs" workers are found now in various guises in organisations across the city including both internal appointments within WLL partners, the complex needs service itself and the wider arena, especially in the larger players e.g., BARCA, and Beacon Housing. A lot of the housing providers offer this service, however not usually with a gender specific approach.

With regards to complex needs workers forums or networks, currently there is no mechanism in the city to join, share good practice, learning and training opportunities with the sole focus of complex needs, let alone a gender specific network.

### Violence Against Women and Girls/Domestic Abuse

Leeds has a solid domestic abuse sector with LWA working in partnership with three other agencies to deliver Leeds Domestic Violence Service (LDVS). There is a comprehensive offer of support for women experiencing domestic abuse in Leeds including the LDVS 24-hour helpline for the city, community support in various guises both internal to LDVS (delivered by Behind Closed Doors) and through other third sector agencies, specialist IDVA provision for both individual cases and to support the safeguarding structures in the city, The DRAM (daily risk assessment meeting) and MARAC both facilitated by West Yorkshire Police. LWA hosts both commissioned and non-commissioned bedspace, and there are some smaller providers in the city such as Palm Cove Society, who seek to support specific communities eligible for the Destitution Domestic Violence concession. The city also has groupwork provision delivered via LDVS (Women's Health Matters) and pre COVID offered drop-in services across the city and within GP settings. Some of these have restarted however not all venues allow the return of external agencies.

Whilst COVID has created an additional spike in demand, the services were already stretched with bedspaces often not available and the waitlist for community support often closed due to capacity. Innovation was seen during this period though with schemes like



the city council changing housing allocation from bid system to direct lettings panel, with the result of speedier move on for clients and hence freeing bedspaces in refuge.

WLL are currently chairing the DAVA (Domestic Abuse Voice and Accountability) forum, the third sector forum which feeds into the statutory DALPB (Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board) which is overseeing among other things the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act.

With regards to the wider VAWG agenda, Basis Yorkshire reported that COVID and the cessation of the Managed Approach has moved more sex work to be indoors and hidden, which could put more women at risk.

WLL have been working with the now finished project, WYFI to develop and deliver a countywide women's forum for agencies working with women who experience complexity. The result is the West Yorkshire Improving Women's Lives Network which is establishing itself across the region. There are nearly 100 senior professionals working from across the sector on the mailing list, with 40 of those regularly engaged and an average attendance of 25 at each meeting. West Yorkshire has seen the election of a female Mayor and she in turn selected a female Deputy Mayor. The mayor attended the network as part of her call for evidence regarding violence against women and girls and she has a specific interest in women who experience complexity.

#### Legal Support for Women who experience complexity

Legal support specific for women is non-existent unless accessed via the private legal sector at personal cost to women. Some solicitors offer introductory "free sessions" but invariably these are insufficient to cover anything in depth. There used to be a free legal centre in the city, but this was closed a few years ago. Currently if women want free support, they can attend Citizens Advice Bureau or utilise phone numbers of national support e.g., Rights of Women. If a woman finds herself in the court system in Leeds without representation she can apply to the charity Support through Court, which is a national charity with a Leeds base. It is a volunteer service where trained volunteers help an individual navigate the court system and will be with them on the day. The other free option is the University of Leeds law students take on some pro bono advice and case work. Women who experience insecure immigration status have even more difficulty accessing support. Where women are being supported to utilise the DDV concession LWA report that they are having to send women to solicitors out of area as no Leeds practice will take them.



### Financial Support for women with complexity

Support with finances is offered across Leeds and various statutory and charity services deliver specialist tailored support with budgeting, bills, benefits, and debt management. They include Scope (specialist support for disabled clients), Shelter (specialist housing bills/debt support) and Citizen's Advice Service, Christians Against Poverty, St Vincent's Support, Ebor Gardens Advice Centre, Leeds Money Buddy Service and StepChange. It appears the support in this area is quite robust however it is of note there is no gender specific service.

### Education and Employment services for women with complexity

Unsurprisingly there are no specialist education and employment services for women who experience complex needs. There are however women's services which support women become ready for work e.g., Nari Ekta offers course to support women (primarily from a South Asian background) in both English and Maths but also basic computer skills and work administration skills. The city has other colleges which don't offer gender specific services however do offer services to suit women at differing ages and accessibility points, e.g. Swarthmore centre and Park Lane College.

As part of the mapping there were conversations around women who would have been described as having complex needs, who as part of their journey of recovery were volunteering (within the third sector) to gain personal purpose and work experience. There was a common theme amongst volunteers though that making the leap from being a volunteer with lived experience in the women's sector to an employee was incredibly difficult if not impossible.

### What are the main gaps in support?

For women who experience complex needs there are many gaps in Leeds although individual services attempt to reach the needs of this cohort with varying degrees of success.

The main gaps identified by the mapping are:

- Support for women who have their children removed.
- Age specific support often dictates help e.g. Personal Disorder treatment only available for under 25s.
- Support to stabilize clients with complex needs – need the basics (physically and psychologically) in place before support work to facilitate change can be done.
- Suitable supported housing – often women who experience complex needs are refused access to regular housing support/DV services as their risk is deemed too high.



- Suitable move on housing – waitlists for Leeds clients with priority band a now approximately two years.
- Mental health services were identified as impenetrable and opaque by the professionals who were supposed to be able to sign post service users.
- Where mental health services are available there is an overreliance on CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy). “Long term support has all but disappeared”.
- Support for migrant women.
- Digital support- as COVID has moved support to digital platforms often those most in need have been left behind.
- Transitions between child/adult services for this cohort.
- Making the leap from volunteering to work – long term solutions for women with lived experience.
- Criminal Justice Systems incredibly long wait lists for court hearings, often waiting for years for a trial, difficult to sustain support for organisations and difficult for women to move on whilst court overshadows their lives.
- Specialist older women’s services – no gender specific service for women in the city. Training that exists often doesn’t reflect older women’s experiences eg self harm/MH training. Older women don’t see themselves in support groups etc so don’t think they are for them.

### What barriers prevent women from accessing services?

There are multiple barriers which prevent women accessing services. Different agencies obviously highlight differing issues for their client base, but the following were raised:

- Stigma and fear of accessing services, being believed.
- Poor previous experiences – services are not trauma informed and women have negative experiences e.g. telling story multiple times
- Inflexibility of service – e.g. times, procedures for missing appointments etc. Services designed for someone who is stable, not someone who is in a place of chaos.
- Systems requiring IT/phones /internet which women just don’t have.
- Poverty – more pressing need e.g. fuel/food poverty.
- Lack of knowledge- women don’t know what is out there and haven’t been consulted as to what they want.
- Physically accessing the space – transport, creche facilities etc.
- Confidence – it is very intimidating to walk into a space or make a call in the first instance.
- Social Isolation – especially for older women- unable to access physical or virtual spaces “runs through all trauma – the ill of our times”.
- Housing – women often had insufficient skills to manage running a home and so often tenancy failed as not sufficient support.

- Housing – often women found systems overwhelming and impossible to navigate

### **Barriers for specific communities or groups of women.**

Asylum Seekers - experience massive barriers to inclusion. One service reported they give monies for bus fares in advance as they know the women won't have the money to be reimbursed. They also know that some women choose to use that money on other things and then walk five miles to attend. They do not insist on receipts and accept this without question.

Women from Black and minoritized communities less likely to report assaults and accessing services. SARSVL reported that women underreport in some communities as "it is dealt with in the community". For women whom English is not their first language, it can be very intimidating to access relevant counselling services and fear that translators may be known within their community.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) – women who have no access to public funds have legal barriers from accessing some services and psychological barriers to accessing others.

Older women have additional needs to access support, including the first contact that really matters – to listen and understand, for staff to have a better understanding that older people minimise their difficulties and often time there are serious underlying issues which people don't expect – e.g. sexual and domestic violence. Older people and alcohol misuse. Older women also can have specific transport needs – connected to mobility.

### **How well are women's voices represented in the area?**

As part of the previous project delivery, Women's Lives Leeds set up a Women's Hub for Leeds which is open to any woman in the city. It acts as the formal women's element of the Leeds City Council Equalities Assembly and feeds into LCC decision making mechanisms.

Out of this original forum, back in 2017 when the first conversations went on around what were the important issues for women in the city, which has grown into the project Women Friendly Leeds (WFL), which is now a separately funded piece of work to promote Leeds as the first Women Friendly City in the UK. A city where women's health and safety is prioritised meaning that everyone is safe.

Women who engage with the organisations within the alliance have historically been involved within the hub however it is fair to say that COVID has impacted that, and although the team works tirelessly to offer multiple platform engagement opportunities, it is fair to say it doesn't reach all women in the city.

The WFL project did undertake during the lockdown a survey on women's safety which received more responses than a similar UK wide survey (over 1000) and this information is being fed into the various mechanisms within the city.





Leeds has had for the last few years a female city council leader, Judith Blake, and the West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracy Brabin, and Deputy Mayor, Alison Lowe, are both female. Tracy Brabin the mayor has been running calls for evidence around the issues that are of concern to women and girls and has pledged to prioritise women. There was a specific element in the call for evidence around the needs of women with complex needs.

Feedback from the mapping did question to what extent all women's voices are heard and there were comments around the "whiteness of those that do engage" and that organisations outside of WLL were unaware of the existing mechanisms. Some respondents said that even with knowledge of those mechanisms in the city, they did not feel that women's voices were heard, especially trans women's voices.

### **What are the capacity building needs of the sector?**

Most interviewees felt that Leeds had a fairly robust offer for women with complexity and yet felt there was much to build upon. There was a positivity which was thread though conversations, with people noting challenges yet speaking with passion and resilience whilst they described the work.

More than one interviewee identified the need for a "stabilising" service. It was identified that women who experience complexity often aren't ready to access the services they need and that there is a mismatch trying to get women to access services they are not psychologically ready to receive. In developing such an offer, it would be possible to build capacity as the time that is lost currently between broken down assessments, missed appointments and clients not engaging, could be offered to others needing support. Let alone the impact on women having "failed" engagements. It was also mentioned that there was an insufficient offer outside office hours and that "women aren't suicidal only between 9-5".

Most respondents also noted that any capacity building is more difficult due to the funding set up, where short term contracts are the norm. The ability to see bigger picture and the long-term offer, let alone where services could benefit from tweaking to improve capacity is nigh on impossible. Smaller organisations struggle also with the time restraints of compiling multiple funding applications and so have disproportionate disadvantage of the current scene.

On respondent said that she thought the city needed to improve its offer for young people and that it can't be just one agency trying to deliver across the city and that the need for youth work and gender specific youth work was vastly underserved.

Another reported that she felt the main area for development was service user engagement, and that her organisation had the willpower to act upon it however they lacked the staffing to make it happen.





### How good is joint working and collaboration?

Within the women's sector itself there is good joint working and collaboration. There is, as already discussed, the WLL Alliance which now pulls together most of the women's sector. It is commonplace for member organisations to bid in partnership for other separate pieces of work and to really utilise a collaborative approach.

The wider third sector is served by forums such as Third Sector Leeds and Forum Central. These are all established networks and are well known across the city.

As for more strategic spaces there are various networks which focus on issues which affect complexity e.g., "Housing Solutions for Women who experience complex needs in Leeds" was established by LWA, Together Women and Basis in 2017. There are multiple housing forums although no others that are gender specific. There is the West Yorkshire Consortium for Adults Facing Multiple Disadvantage (previously, West Yorkshire Finding Independence or WY/FI Core Partnership Management Board). Known now as the WY Multiple Disadvantage Consortium – it has the network for those who work with multiple disadvantages however lacks a gender specific approach.

The West Yorkshire Improving Women's Lives Network was established to purely focus on the needs of women who experience complexity and is in the process of becoming established as a mechanism for collaborative approach.

As for joint working with the statutory sector, reports were mixed as to the success of how that works. Some reported that it was "sometimes fantastic and sometimes shocking" that it would not be process driven but would rely on individual kindness and goodwill, so the results were subjective and certainly not consistent. Some reported strong working relationships with the police "even when we don't agree with them" but highlighted that it was not so good with health professionals. A participant mentioned that she there was an ignorance around the impact of life events and trauma, within statutory services and that there wasn't something "wrong" with women.

### What impact has COVID-19 had on provision/capacity?

The impacts of COVID have been immense and profound on the women's sector, provision, delivery and capacity, staff and the women who engage with the services.

- organisations have used additional resources to offer services to fewer individuals.
- as services moved online – clients experienced a split reaction- some loved it and others not so much.
- Some people experienced digital exclusion and therefore isolation massively increased for this cohort.
- Capacity much lower than demand for services as social distancing impacted on physical spaces.



- Some organisations reported that a “virtual offer” isn’t compatible when working with women who experience complexity .
- Spikes in levels of need – especially with older cohorts- mobility has reduced and frailty increased.
- External services have slowed down greatly e.g. court processes making support cover a much longer period (often years not months), which greatly impacts capacity.
- Some services reported massive spikes in needs for services e.g. Leeds Domestic Violence Service and shared adaptations made during lockdown e.g. development of LiveChat.
- Some reported innovation in statutory services to try and meet need. E.g., Housing panels managed to rehouse women in order to make space for new clients in refuge.
- “We all went through it” so staff and managers not immune to the effects of COVID and were also living through the day-to-day impacts, making it sometimes harder to give as much as before.
- Staff illness much higher than in regular years (obviously).



## 4. Implications of the mapping for project development

The mapping clearly demonstrates that even in a city like Leeds, where the offer for women is relatively cohesive and accessible, the intersection of differing levels of complexity and the impact of COVID means that women who experience complex needs are particularly vulnerable in accessing services and that those services are fit for their purpose.

The Labyrinth project therefore needs to clearly identify realistic mechanisms that a difference can be shown in the duration of the project. As such two clear groups have been identified to specifically improve the offer of services available to:

- A) Women who have their children removed
- B) Older women who experience complexity

*The Navigator will work to devise ways to directly improve the offer to them as there is currently no gender specific support in place for them*

The mapping shows the need to continue to develop networks for the women's sector, improve better systems and processes, and to work collaboratively so that smaller organisations, and therefore broader voices, have the ability to be heard at citywide and regional levels.

*The Navigator will work with the existing networks within the city to continue to strengthen and develop women's networks, and to ensure the focus remains on women who experience all complexities.*

The mapping shows that there are other specific issues which are felt necessary to address in lobbying for better services/provisions/perspectives of this cohort.

*The Navigator will work with mapping participants to raise those issues within the network frameworks. The Navigator will work to ensure different voices are heard within the networks.*

The mapping shows that there is a need to develop a specific network for practitioners who work with women with complex needs. This is needed to share training opportunities, to create cohorts to support staff as often an organisation has one staff member who takes all the complex cases. It is necessary to share good practice and to improve outcomes for women. A practitioner's network could also feed into the strategy develop around this area.

*The Navigator will develop a Practitioner's Forum for staff who work with women with complex needs.*



The mapping showed that participants felt that service user engagement and the voices of women (all women – not us and them) were often absent.

*LWA will utilise its position within DA frameworks - DAVA (Domestic Abuse Voice and Accountability) Forum and the DALPB (Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board) to raise the profile of service user voice, and the Navigator will facilitate discussions with partners and develop a Survivors Forum.*





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