

# Nottingham Women's Centre

## Mapping of Local Support for Women in Nottingham

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**labyrinth  
project**

This report was produced under the Labyrinth Project and delivered by Nottingham Women's Centre.

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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.

### Nottingham Women's Centre

[www.nottinghamwomenscentre.com](http://www.nottinghamwomenscentre.com)

We work to help all women in gaining the confidence and skills needed to become stronger and more independent. We provide a safe and supportive environment in which women can do this, either by: taking part in training and activities, getting support and accessing services, or campaigning and becoming active to bring about change.

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# 1. Introduction

## Purpose of this initial intelligence gathering report

As part of the delivery of the Labyrinth Project, Nottingham Women's Centre (NWC) has undertaken a mapping report for the following reasons:

- To bring together our existing intelligence on the range of services for women in Nottingham
- 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
- To provide information for delivery planning and direct any targeted mapping of services for specific communities of women.

## What the mapping covers

The mapping area is Nottingham.

## How the mapping was undertaken

A desktop review was undertaken of existing information available to Nottingham Women's Centre from:

- Partnership work, including case studies
- Women's Organisations Network discussions
- Women's Voices
- Policy and influencing officer information
- Caseworker records, reports and case studies
- NWC database records

## 2. Local context

See Appendix 1

### 3. Findings

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

NWC works with 27 organisations that are women only or women led (primarily for women). Some are specifically for LGBT+ people while others are women led and primarily work with women but also support men (these include VAWG specialist services Equation, Notts SVSS etc.) We also link into a number of organisations that provide support projects either specifically tailored to women or providing support to a service user group that is women dominated. This includes a number of organisations who attend our Women's Organisations Network because of their work with women (examples: an organisation providing mental health support to Black and minoritised people; Nottingham City Homes Employability team which has a women in construction project; a self-harm and suicide prevention organisation; a self-advocacy support organisation).

Over the past 7 years NWC has increased our partnership working and collaboration with women's organisations. Part of this has been because of a small grant pot of funding which we co-ordinate for women's groups. This means that we have developed a good knowledge of many grassroots women's groups and organisations (including charities, CICs and constituted groups). Through our links with the NCVS, infrastructure organisations and the City Council community cohesion team. We are always learning about new women's groups which has given us a good understanding about the provision that is out there for women – particularly when combined with the knowledge of our caseworkers and Policy and Influencing Officer.

#### What are the main gaps in support?

##### **Cultural competence**

In a recent network meeting an organisation spoke about harsh enforcement for things such as FGM, gave an example of police visiting the apartment of one of the women she works with as they were concerned about FGM on her young daughter. There was a lack of sensitivity and trust from police. Being misunderstood culturally – for example lumping together of many groups of women, such as all Arab women being seen as Asian. With no understanding or appreciation of the diversity.

##### **Poverty, hardship & financial issues**

In the case studies reviewed for this intelligence gathering poverty and financial issues was included in the overwhelming majority, both from partners and for NWC service users. There are many hardship costs for people who are falling through the cracks. Many women rely on informal jobs, most of which have gone during the pandemic.

## **Trust & fear**

Scaremongering and fear – link to losing connection methods, for example some women stopping using WhatsApp or Facebook, because of the fear being fostered, this then has an impact on them being able to use key communication methods for contact with friends. Some organisations have had a lot of additional work in moderating information and communications online – especially around mis-information and scaremongering.

Many women and communities have a lack of trust in the health system. One service user almost died as didn't trust the health system enough to call for an ambulance to help. This applies more widely to a lot of government organisations. How can we help to build trust for people who are afraid of everything?

Ways to help with this include arranging meetings/ videos/ workshops with a variety of government and health agencies – to meet them and build relationships, this is more challenging in Covid times. One partner organisation has found a buddy system has worked well – a volunteer to go along to hospital, shops etc. with the women.

## **Mental health support**

Almost all partners and organisations in our networks are raising mental health support as a need. This includes a range of types of support and from a variety of providers to ensure that women can access the best service for them – for example more services from BAME providers so as to ensure cultural competence. This also includes mental wellbeing in tackling isolation and loneliness and dealing with past trauma.

## **Specialist LGBTQ+ Domestic Abuse and Violence support**

Trans women are twice as likely to experience domestic violence<sup>1</sup> yet there is no specialist provision in Nottingham, unlike other UK cities. We know many LGBTQ+ people, particularly trans women, do not feel comfortable accessing mainstream services<sup>2</sup>.

## **What barriers prevent women from accessing services?**

### **Childcare**

A lack of wrap around care outside of school (e.g 3pm – 5pm) is making it harder for some women to return to work, or search for new work. Lack of access to childcare can be a huge barrier to accessing services. One organisation has found that women have had to cancel medical appointments because they can't bring their child with them. So they're

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_home\\_and\\_communities.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_home_and_communities.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nottinghamwomenscentre.com/news/our-evidence-for-women-and-equalities-committee-inquiry-into-gender-recognition-act>

perhaps even less likely to access ‘non-essential’ services or activities, leaving them more isolated.

### **Information and knowledge**

Many women have a lack of knowledge of where they can find support. For example some women using the journal function on the universal credit system to ask for help around domestic abuse. Organisations also can struggle to know the best way to find appropriate, specialist support for the women they work with. This links to the next point – inappropriate referral.

### **Inappropriate referral**

Women are being referred to services that are not appropriate, can cause a barrier in them seeking a more suitable service as may have been rejected and so makes it harder to ask for help again.

### **Issues with online provision**

Finding that with the shift to a lot of online only contact this isn’t giving some women the opportunity to be able to speak freely about issues they are experiencing due to lack of privacy. Also issues around access to IT and digital exclusion.

### **Not seeking help**

Some women have not sought help as assume that they are not in enough difficulty to take up provision. For example during the pandemic to the Notts SVSS helpline calls actually decreased, which is not a good sign. Common for women to feel that their experiences were “not enough” to justify calling, and some don’t have a safe space to actually make the call.

### **Language**

This has been a huge barrier, especially where things have switched to written communication – online chat functions etc. as this can be harder to get translation support for. Language barrier is also a significant issue. Even women who can speak English fairly well sometimes don’t necessarily feel confident enough to attend activities or Zoom meetings or don’t have as good written or reading English.. This can be really isolating, especially as for women who don’t speak English as a first language often rely on word of mouth – which means that marketing and outreach needs to take this into account. It’s also a reason why a strong partnership of a range of organisations is important.

### **Not feeling a service is ‘for me’**

There’s also an issue with BAME women not accessing services because they don’t feel like they belong there, or are scared that they will be the only BAME woman there and won’t connect with anyone. There’s often a preconception that if communications around a service isn’t directly aimed at a certain group then the service users will all be white. This ends up becoming a vicious cycle.



## DVA

Women in abusive, violent or coercive relationships may not be able to freely access services due to restricted freedoms, ongoing traumatic events or the women's centre being perceived as being 'anti men'.

## Digital exclusion

Women may not have easy access to a digital device or wifi, which means they cannot access support such as peer support groups.

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

Mechanisms for women to influence planning and decision making:

- Women can influence political party manifestos in the run-up to local elections through NWC's Womanifesto ([https://issuu.com/nottinghamwomenscentre/docs/womanifesto\\_2019](https://issuu.com/nottinghamwomenscentre/docs/womanifesto_2019))
- Women can influence NWC policy and work through our regular VIEW focus group
- Many women's organisations (including NWC) have developed good relationships with MPs and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), and some get funding from PCC
- Nottingham Together Board – a space for community groups to influence Nottingham City Council (NCC)
- Nottingham Women's Voices which NWC supports has a connection to NCC
- Nottingham Citizens forum – coalition of civic organisations in Nottingham with direct access to Leader of NCC
- Issues raised by partners and through our WON network are fed through to the NWC Policy and Influencing Officer.

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

**Organisational burn out** - Our partners report a wide range of issues that service users ask to be supported with, this is often the result of each organisations sometimes being one of the only places that is trusted by the community. This means that staff and volunteers have a lot to try to understand for example complexity of systems for support, complexity of issues some people are facing. This can also result in the potential for burn out for those running the smaller organisations, and feeling isolated in their work.

## Signposting

Lack of knowledge of places to refer women to, how to make a referral, how to contact support organisations in the most effective way (i.e. is there a good first person to contact) how to do a warm handover referral/ signposting. How to support women while they are accessing support from other places. Communicating effectively will help with this, we have already improved this with our Women's Organisation's Network in addition groups

have said that creating a centralised activity log/calendar alongside a database of all women's organisations and projects and a forum for communications would be good.

### **Evidencing need for and impact of service**

From our role as lead partner assessing funding applications along with our steering group partners we note that there is a lack of skills of writing effective funding applications, including how to demonstrate needs, and demonstrate, record and evidence the impact of their work.

### **Funding**

Support around finding and applying for funding for organisations and projects. Including linking into local organisations already doing this and also identifying gaps and specific needs for organisations. Especially needed for funding and support for core costs, organisational capacity and administration.

### **In addition**

- Outreach, marketing and engagement.
- Campaigning and influencing together and support around co-production of campaigns with service users.
- Work and meeting space, especially that is appropriate to the needs of the service users.
- Supporting a diverse range of people in group contexts – neuro diversity, past traumas, etc.

### **How good is joint working and collaboration?**

#### **NWC joint working**

Nottingham Women's Centre does a range of joint, partnership and collaborative working.

- We work closely with our tenant organisations Juno Women's Aid and Notts Sexual Violence Support Services to provide a comprehensive women-only hub to those in crisis.
- The support we provide is complex and we add significant value by working in partnership, on a day-to-day basis, our staff and volunteers work with a very wide range of statutory, voluntary and community sector agencies to give women, children and young people the best help possible.
- We work with local community cohesion teams on issues relating to young girls, crime and violence. This includes co-ordinating a Girls, Women and Violence Network for VCS organisations.
- We are a member of the Notts Women in the Criminal Justice group working together to provide a Whole System Approach. We are part of the national network of women's

centres working with women in the criminal justice system campaigning together and sharing good practice.

- We sit on the board of Opportunity Nottingham helping to support women facing multiple disadvantage.
- We represent the voluntary sector on the One Nottingham Board working with partners across the statutory and private sector to make a difference to our citizens.
- We are a member of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence campaigns group for Nottingham, co-ordinating campaigning on this locally.

### **Other women's organisations and projects**

Through our partnership work directly with women's groups and our Women's Organisations Network we play a role in linking up organisations with each other where relevant and also making organisations aware of other groups providing similar or complementary work.

Also through our partnership work we are aware of some organisations being very well networked in their relevant area, for example POW is present on a range of statutory and non-statutory and local and national boards and committees to represent sex workers and Nottingham Muslim Women's Network is likewise for their community. For example, linking up with PCC office, Muslim Council for Britain, Integrated Care Pathway - Severe Multiple Disadvantage.

There are some gaps in our knowledge as to other ways that women's organisations engage with statutory services. NWC is available to signpost organisations to relevant people also the NCVS locally has a Vulnerable Adult Provider Network and a Children and Young People Provider Network to link up groups with relevant services. Through our Women's Organisations Network we have some members from some statutory services (DWP, JCP, NCC, Nott city homes) and have provided a platform for networking across groups.

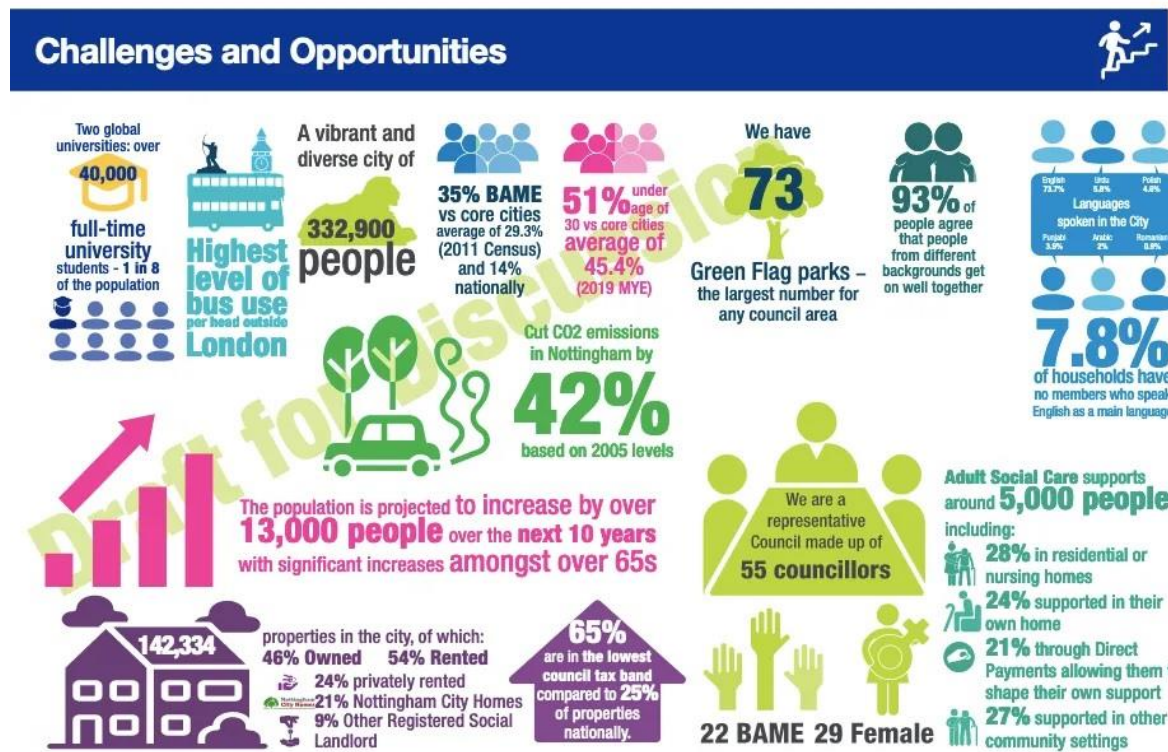
### **What impact has COVID-19 had on provision/capacity?**

Many of women's organisations adapted their services during the pandemic to offer almost full provision, some changed their services drastically and others took the decision to stop their activity until the pandemic was more under control. Adaptations and changes made include:

- NWC's counselling service took a two week break in order to train all our counsellors for working online. In the meantime we carried out wellbeing checks calling women who were most vulnerable. Many partners spent a lot of time telephoning and checking in through social media and WhatsApp with service users to convey information – particularly where language barriers were an issue.

- NWC courses and activities were suspended or transitioned online.
- NWC recruited a number of new posts including new case workers to support more women, a communications officer to help us better reach and engage with women and an Activities, course and events coordinator.
- NWC and many other groups began delivering essential items directly to women – this included food (including culturally appropriate) and toiletries. We and other partner also provided phone credit, electricity pre-payment cards and other essentials.
- We have found that open spaces for women to go into which are currently not available have made things difficult for women who are insecurely housed. The Women's Centre welcome space, library and showers were a refuge for women to get a cup of tea and be able to relax.
- Women who couldn't phone services or access them online (no phone, language barriers, no IT or wifi) lost out most.
- For organisations working in VAWG it's been really hard to work from home in terms of trauma.

# Appendix 1 – Overview of Nottingham City (from Nottingham City Council Strategic Plan 2021)



# Challenges and Opportunities



## Nottingham

ranked **11th** most deprived area in the country and **30%** of our neighbourhoods are in the **10%** most deprived in England overall.



Most people **(51%)** who work in the City do not live in it



On average men and women in some of our poorest areas die **12 years earlier** than those in the most affluent areas

Average earnings in the city are lower than the England average  
**£30,400** vs **£39,500**



Employment rate **7.8%** unemployed compared to England average of **6.4%**

**69.8%** of working age adults have entry level skills (equivalent to 5 good GCSE passes) compared to England average of **75.6%**



We support **737 Children in Need** and **604 Children on a Child Protection Plan**, as well as their families



**688 Children in Care**, of which

**485** are with foster carers

**92** are in a children's home

**53** are semi-independent living placements

**58** are in other placement types

Healthy Life Expectancy in the city is **58 years** for men and **54 years** for women. This is 5 years less for men and 10 years less for women compared to the England average

**1 in 3** adults are physically inactive



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