

Evaluation of Women's Aid Refuge Accommodation in North Ayrshire 2018

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About the authors

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1. Introduction, Overview and Context

1.1 Introduction and Overview

Burns et al. (2015: 4) state that 'Domestic abuse is persistent and controlling behaviour by a partner or ex-partner which causes physical, sexual and/or emotional harm. It is common but often concealed and in most cases it is experienced by women and children and is perpetrated by men.' The forthcoming Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill will create a new offence that includes coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships between partners and ex-partners as well as violence. The last study carried out on refuges in Scotland by Fitzpatrick et al. (2003:5) pointed out that 'there is no consensus within the Women's Aid (WA) network on the definition of a 'refuge' or 'family' space'. A basic analysis of definitions of refuges emphasises the word 'safety.' Interestingly, the Oxford Dictionary defines it as 'An institution providing safe accommodation for women who have suffered violence from a spouse or partner.'

From the 1st April 2017 to the 31st May 2018 North Ayrshire Women's Aid (NAWA) have had 114 women admitted to refuge accommodation and 100 discharged. From this 18% were supported into their own tenancy and 13% into their own private let. The average length of stay in refuge accommodation is 73 days.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research was to find out what women and children *really* felt about the accommodation. All are very grateful of North Ayrshire Women's Aid (NAWA's) support and reluctant to say anything negative, so to push through that, it was made clear that this is not about the staff, but rather about the accommodation, facilities, how it makes or made them feel, the layout, how they used the space, what worked well, what needed to be improved and what they really would have liked. For those women who have never been in refuge their reasons or in some cases reluctance for not going in were discussed. It was also important to hear directly from staff too what they felt about the refuge accommodation and what direction they felt NAWA should move towards.

1.3 Structure of Report

This report will firstly sets out the methodology, followed by the context of refuge accommodation drawing on past research, current policy and potential housing models. The next sections will focus on the findings and implications, followed by recommendations and conclusions.

1.4 Methodology

The fieldwork took place over May 2018. 31 women took part, 21 who had been or were currently in refuge accommodation and ten who had not and were being supported either to remain at home, or to access their own tenancy.

Nine women were currently in refuge accommodation, five had been in refuge accommodation less than a year ago, six over a year but less than two years and one woman had been in refuge accommodation over ten years ago. Her testimony was included because since that time she has still been receiving support from NAWA up until recently to remain in her own home. The other nine women had never been in refuge accommodation but were receiving support from NAWA to either remain in their own home, or had taken up a private let, or had been living with family. The women were aged between 16 and in their fifties.

Two young people from one family currently in a refuge took part in joint interviews, and two gave written submissions but declined to be interviewed. One young man who did not have to go to a refuge was also interviewed. The young people were aged from 12 to 15, specifically one 12 year old, two fourteen year olds and two 15 year olds.

Eleven staff members were individually interviewed. Two were relatively new to their particular posts but all had many years of experience in this field.

Notes were made throughout the interviews, written up, sent to those interviewed so that they had an opportunity to check and add to the notes and these were then analysed drawing on grounded theory. Specifically, the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998) informed the analysis, whereby codes were created based on the data and analysis abductive.

1.5 Summary of Current Refuge Accommodation

'Refuge A' is located within one of the main towns and discreetly hidden down a side street and has limited parking. NAWA pays rent to a housing association for the property and to maintain the accommodation. The town has fairly good transport connections. There is a large door that someone inside has to authorise access in unless the individual has keys and CCTV is in operation. In the building there are six separate self-contained flats that can accommodate up to one woman and four children. The flats are painted beige, have leather sofas, dark carpeted floors and in each flat there is a kitchen and bathroom as well as bedrooms. The flats are a little dated. A separate corridor and door leads onto the communal space that includes a playroom, dining table, kitchen and small living room. The office is also based here where there is normally one worker present during office hours. At the back there is a fenced garden with seating area and some swings. There are also a small number of outdoor toys for very young children.

'Refuge B' is down a side street in one of the main towns and has limited parking. It has a secure entrance and at the front of the building there are cameras and CCTV in the office. There are single bedsits than can accommodate one mother and her child in each of the rooms and a small TV. All of the spaces, such as cooking, living room, and washing, drying clothes and eating are communal. The food cupboards and fridges have separate locks. There is a playroom that also functions as a room for therapeutic treatments and a

very large garden that at present has some seating and a limited number of toys for young children. This refuge has been recently renovated and the décor is tasteful.

'Refuge C' is in a small town in a rural area and a contract exists with the same housing association as Refuge A for the rent and upkeep of the property. There are poor transport connections. The main door and outside appearance is run down. The accommodation has a mixture of individual self-contained flats and also rooms that lead onto a communal kitchen, dining area, living room and garden. The large garden has seating and a barbeque. The building and flats are dated and in need of refurbishment.

1.6 Wider Context: North Ayrshire

North Ayrshire covers an area of around 886 sq.km and has a coastline of 225km (North Ayrshire Council, 2018). The main settlements are Irvine, Kilwinning, Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Stevenston, Beith, Dalry, Kilbirnie, Largs, Dreghorn, Springside, West Kilbride, Seamill, Fairlie, Skelmorlie, Brodick and Millport. North Ayrshire NAWA also covers the Arran Islands.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) uses a range of socio-economic data to calculate deprivation across small areas known as data zones. There are 6,976 datazones across Scotland each with an average population of around 800 people.

Of the 186 data zones in North Ayrshire 51 are in the 15% most deprived in Scotland, an increase of 5 since the index was last published in 2012 (North Ayrshire Council, 2018). The Social Market Foundation (Corfe, 2017) highlights that coastal towns in Britain are lagging behind their inland counterparts in terms of earnings, jobs, health and education. North Ayrshire alongside nine other local authorities across Britain are recognised as especially disadvantaged due to the above UK average unemployment rate (ibid).

North Ayrshire's housing market may be described as mixed. The latest Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) (North Star Consulting and Research, 2017) shows that there is generally lower priced market housing including private rented prices when compared to many other Scottish local housing markets. In some areas private rent and social rent levels are converging. However, average household incomes are also low and so affordability must be considered relative to local incomes. The HNDA identifies a low requirement for additional housing supply which will be driven by the falling population trends. The HNDA identifies high demand / occupancy of temporary accommodation, and issues around the affordability of this temporary accommodation.

1.7 Housing in Scotland and in North Ayrshire

Scotland has an ageing population. There is a lag in the number of affordable housing, and it is predicted that Scotland would need at least 12,000 affordable homes a year for the next five years to meet demand, where current programmes, at best, provide only half

of that (Powell et al. 2015). Powell et al. (2015) reflect that there is a need to preserve rural communities and Scotland can expect an increase in the number of households with the exceptions of Argyll and Bute, Inverclyde and North Ayrshire. In terms then of housing options within North Ayrshire, due to less pressure and demand there is more room for innovation in comparison to other areas. Indeed, rather than being preoccupied with having to fulfill demand with quantity, they could concentrate on quality. North Ayrshire from 2009-2014 had below median house growth so this also means that they can offer more affordable options. In North Ayrshire the Council have a 'no homelessness' policy and work towards housing people into stable accommodation as quickly as possible.

1.8 Refuge Accommodation in Scotland

The last study carried out in Scotland on refuges (Fitzpatrick et al. 2003: ii) described three different types of accommodation in Scotland offered by Women's Aid at that time. Namely

- . **58 shared refuges:** a flat or house in which families share facilities such as kitchens, living rooms and bathrooms, what is termed the 'traditional form of refuge.'
- . **18 cluster refuges (containing 90 flats):** a number of separate flats grouped together in the same building/complex.
- . **39 dispersed flats:** individual flats spread across an area.

1.9 Views of Refuge Accommodation then

The authors concluded that the standards varied.

- . **Shared refuges** most often had space problems, were less homely, less well furnished but least lonely, and best located to shops, services and schools.
- . The quality of **cluster refuges** was mixed: purpose built clusters in particular were likely to feel very secure, be wheelchair accessible, and all offered additional communal facilities, such as children's rooms and on-site NAWA offices. They could also be large with bullying between the women most often reported in this type of provision.
- . **Dispersed flats** were more likely than the other two types of refuge to be used as single occupancy accommodation and to be well furnished and equipped, but they were least likely to act as a deterrent to ex-partners harassing residents.

The report concluded that

By far the most popular model of refuge amongst women children and workers was that of cluster refuges containing single occupancy flats and communal facilities for both women and children. A minority preferred dispersed flats, and most workers favoured access to some such flats in their area to accommodate those families for whom shared/clustered provision was inappropriate. None of the women or children interviewed actively preferred shared refuges although a small number of workers have some attachment to this model (ibid: iii)

It was reflected that many of the women had had negative experiences or expectations of sharing facilities but that most appreciated having mutual support and a sense of security gained by having other families in a similar position living beside them, or as they summarised later 'privacy plus contact' (ibid: 79). The report did not unpack which of these was more important and indeed if there were other ways the women may have preferred achieving such connections.

The other key concern of women and children with regards to the design of refuges was external security, particularly to stop intrusion by ex-partners. They also preferred refuge workers to be based within the refuge rather than at an off-site office and placed a high premium on an effective 24-hour emergency service from NAWA, with more extensive (non-emergency) weekend and evening cover also seen as desirable. The availability of follow-on support was also very much welcomed, such as drop-in facilities/groups and visits when they moved into their own place.

Children's workers were viewed as important and accessibility to children's rooms with disappointment expressed at the general absence of weekend/evening cover. 'There was great disquiet amongst some women and teenage boys interviewed in relation to the exclusion of boys aged over 16 from refuge' (ibid: iii).

The authors reflected that there was a clear preference for cluster refuges (*'flats and a communal area'*). However equally, 'most women felt that they would need an 'excuse' or purpose to go to a communal area other than simply social interaction (it is also notable that only three out of the nine shared living/meeting rooms in existing cluster refuges were reported as being used 'often' by women for informal interaction' (ibid: 44). Despite this observation the authors concluded that the best way forward was for purpose built accommodation of this style. It was also felt by the workers that dispersed flats were too resource intensive.

At that time, NAWA refuges had a much larger staff to women ratio, offered more children's support workers and on-site staff.

1.10 Scottish Women's Aid and the current status of Refuge Accommodation

Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) is the umbrella organisation for 36 local Women's Aid organisations across Scotland providing practical and emotional support to women and children of domestic abuse. They are the lead organisation working towards the prevention of domestic abuse and developing effective responses in Scotland.

At present the UK Government are consulting on the funding for short-term supported housing. SWA have raised serious concerns, for example, highlighting the inflexibility of Universal Credit, and the move towards grant funding enabling more women with no entitlement to housing benefit to access refuge but not those with no recourse to public

funds. In response to the consultation SWA recommended that there is a separate and specific definition and funding stream for refuges. SWA (2018: 2) state:

We believe a definition of refuge is important as it contextualises the issue, develops understanding, validates women and children's experience and determines future funding provision. The definition must be one in which refuges are clearly visible and understood.

For Scotland the proposal is to devolve funding for short term supported housing to the Scottish Government to decide how best to allocate funding.

Universal Credit replaces other benefits and includes a housing cost element that replaces Housing Benefit (Scottish Housing Network, 2017). However, the Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Supported Accommodation) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 has added refuges to the 'exempt accommodation' which protects them from some of the changes and cuts in welfare benefit provision. Paragraph 75H (4), defines a refuge as: accommodation which

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- (a) *Is provided by a relevant authority or relevant body to the claimant because the claimant has left the home as a result of domestic abuse; and*
 - (b) *Consist of a building or part of a building, which is used wholly or mainly for the non – permanent accommodation of persons who have left their homes as a result of domestic violence.*
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The above definition therefore highlights that refuges can be stand-alone properties or part of a building.

In the explanatory note, it further defines 'Refuges' as 'for victims of domestic violence where these are managed by local authorities, county councils, housing associations, registered charities or voluntary organisations.' In Scotland as care, support or supervision is provided in refuge accommodation it meets the Supported Exempt Accommodation or Managed Properties criteria where the landlord is a housing association, charity or voluntary sector organisation or, if a local authority is the landlord (Scottish Housing Network, 2017: 6). This means that a preferential rate of subsidy/reimbursement from DWP to the local authority in respect of the Housing Benefit can be paid out for such category of claims (Scottish Housing Network, 2017).

1.11 International research of other housing models

Being the victim of domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women (Sullivan and Olsen, 2017). Burnet (2017) carried out an extensive review of domestic abuse and housing options, reviewing developments in the UK, Canada, the USA, Australia, visiting around 60 different services. She states

The model of a refuge at crisis point and transitioning to independent living is well established across the world. However, this Fellowship highlighted to the author the critical need to consider whether it meets the needs for everyone impacted by domestic abuse.... In the UK the first well documented women's refuge opened in Chiswick, London in 1971. Society has moved on greatly from the early 70's when a women leaving an abusive partner was less likely to be in paid employment, highly skilled or otherwise and less likely to be the named tenant on a tenancy agreement, leaseholder or mortgage holder. We also need to critically reflect on the theory at this point which viewed women as battered women or having 'battered women syndrome'. This theory meant that a lot of women were viewed as not being able or fit to make decisions for their family as they were in such trauma. However, individuals experiencing domestic abuse will be at different points of their journey and will be dependent on so many aspects of themselves, wider community, family children and beliefs and we must hold this central if we are to truly practice self-determined advocacy

(Ibid:7)

The author further notes that to be trauma informed is about:

- Providing the survivor information about the traumatic effects of abuse
- Adapting programmes and services to meet individual's trauma and mental health related needs
- Creating opportunities for individuals to discuss their response to trauma
- Offering resources and referrals to individuals
- Reflecting on our own and our programmes practice (ibid: 8).

1.12 What other housing models can we look to?

Burnet (2017) carried out a comprehensive study and a number of key options are now discussed.

Firstly, the USA's **rapid rehousing** is regarded as good value for money, as rather than refuge accommodation being a 'waiting room' the idea is to rehouse people temporarily and then get them in to more permanent housing in a shorter timeframe.

Housing First is also discussed and the core principles outlined, namely:

- To move people into housing directly from streets and shelters without preconditions of treatment, acceptance or compliance;
- The provider is obligated to bring robust services to the housing. These services are predicated on assertive engagement and not coercion;
- Continued tenancy is not dependent on participation in services;
- Units are targeted to the most vulnerable homeless members of the community
- Embracing a harm reduction approach to addictions rather than a mandating abstinence. At the same time the provider must be prepared to support resident commitment to recovery;
- Residents must have leases and tenant protections under the law.;
- Implementation as either a project based or scattered site model (ibid: 17)

It could be argued that this could point towards creating a whole new set of skills and specialisms.

Sullivan and Olsen (2017) contend that Housing First principles as they stand would need to be adapted to suit the needs of those who have been victims of domestic abuse and particularly to address issues relating to ongoing safety concerns. They report on success of the 'Domestic Violence Housing First' programme, 'designed to increase survivors' access to and retention of not just stable but safe housing' (ibid: 5). The 5-year evaluation of the pilot that involved 13 DV agencies from diverse areas within Washington State, seven of which were in rural areas, indicated that 96% of the families receiving DV Housing First retained their housing at 18 months. Additional positive outcomes for families, included increased safety, improved health and well-being, and restored dignity. Four key service pillars of the model were identified, namely to be survivor-driven with mobile advocacy, so meeting people where they were, to be flexible with engagement and funding, helping people to get on their feet, trauma-informed and enhance community engagement, partnering with housing, health providers and local services. The philosophy that underpins the model is that survivors and their children need individualised and flexible levels of assistance. It was found for example, that in some cases giving women financial assistance so that they could stay in their own home was all that was needed. The authors also conclude though that above all else affordable housing is key, which is true for most people, not just women who have suffered domestic abuse.

Burnet (2017) found that most of the refuges in the USA have now scrapped rules about male children, drinks and drugs and moved more towards a harm reduction model. The author encourages services to 'screen in' rather than 'screen out' those who need support (ibid: 29).

Burnet (2017:) also draws attention to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Agreement set up between local authorities and registered housing providers in London to prevent homelessness in cases of domestic abuse and other high risk groups. 'The Agreement achieves this by increasing housing options for people with a social housing tenancy in

London who are at high risk of harm and need to move to a safe area of London' (ibid: 23).

The merits of supporting women and children to remain in home and the '**Staying Home, Leaving Violence**' programme in New South Wales are also outlined. This benefits families to:

- Prevent Homelessness;
- Hold perpetrators accountable;
- Cause less disruption on the families' circumstances;
- Have moderate longer term consequences on safety;
- Economic security, housing and social support networks. (ibid: 25)

The author states after presenting these and other options that:

It is clear from all of this work that there has been a shift in thinking over decades to how we can support people to stay safe in their own homes where it is safe to do, therefore minimising disruption whilst holding perpetrators accountable through sanctions or modifying behaviour. This is the start of critically reviewing Refuge/Shelter as one option and accepting that we need to diversify our models if we are truly going to end domestic abuse. (Burnet: 26)

Overall, it is recommended that Housing First is explored and implemented in the UK.

1.13 Other developments

It is worth noting that in Scotland the Robertson Trust have funded the development of the first Women's Centre in Cummnock in East Ayrshire. This is 'designed by local women for all local women' not just those at risk 'which could, in turn, potentially provide a form of early intervention for those at risk of negative outcomes' (Jamieson, 2017: 27)

Scotland appears also to be moving towards a rapid rehousing and Housing First policy approach. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was set up by the Scottish Government in October 2017 to produce short and long-term solutions to end homelessness and rough sleeping. Rapid Rehousing has been endorsed by all partners – Scottish Government, COSLA and ALACHO as a key to ending homelessness.

In developing its vision for Rapid Rehousing, HARSAG has consulted with all 32 local authorities, and representative bodies including Chartered Institute of Housing, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Glasgow and West of Scotland Housing Forum. The outputs from this consultation is set out in HARSAG's report Rapid Rehousing – Market area analysis, legislative and culture review (HARSAG, 2018).

As at March 2017 there were 10,873 households living in temporary accommodation in Scotland, with many households living in temporary accommodation for long periods with an average of 97 days, but up to 501 days. The housing options available to homeless people vary considerably by the type of housing market, and according to the different processes and housing access policies in different areas. Within this context HARSAG has developed a vision for Rapid Rehousing in Scotland defining it as:

Preventing homelessness in the first place;

Making temporary accommodation the stop-gap that it was meant to be with a minimum time spent in any form of temporary accommodation, with the fewer transitions the better;

The preferred temporary housing option should be mainstream temporary furnished flats within a community, over B&B or 'homeless' accommodation (shared living in hostels or accommodation projects, usually provided/ commissioned for single people);

The preferred settled housing option is housing-led, that is being in mainstream housing, with wraparound support if it is needed, over 'homeless' shared or supported accommodation;

Where mainstream housing is not possible or preferable for whatever reason (safety, risk to self or others, choice), then the size and quality of shared accommodation provided should be smaller and within a psychologically informed environment.

A Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) "... is one that takes into account the psychological makeup – the thinking, emotions, personalities and past experience – of its participants in the way that it operates." It's an approach to supporting people out of homelessness, in particular those who have experienced complex trauma or are diagnosed with a personality disorder. It also considers the psychological needs of staff: developing skills and knowledge, increasing motivation, job satisfaction and resilience. ¹

1.14 Conclusion

Drawing on international research it is reflected that there is need to think critically about refuge accommodation and look to other housing models such as the USA's Rapid Rehousing Programme, Housing First or the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal Agreement. It is clear that Scottish Government through the work of HARSAG is now moving in this same direction.

¹ For more information see MEAM - <http://meam.org.uk/new-resource-on-psychologically-informed-environments/>

2. Findings Part I: What the women with experience of refuges want

2.1 Overview

The following analysis is based on 21 women who have experience of being in a refuge. Two focus groups, one with three women and one with five took place, and 13 women were also interviewed individually who had experience of refuge accommodation. Five had been in refuge over a year ago, 7 less than a year ago and the remaining 9 were currently in refuge accommodation at the time they were interviewed.

2.2 What matters most to the women?

The top priority for all the women was to feel safe and to have their own space.

I had my own wee flat and my own wee space. (W1)

I just wanted the peace and quiet and to feel safe... Everybody is different but I think you do need your own space. (W12)

I just want my own space. (W13)

I want my own space...I am even in rent arrears now paying for this place and waiting for the other flat to get done up. (W14)

Ideally I would like my own kitchen, bathroom and living room and a bath and shower. (W16)

I think if I could have had what I really wanted it would have been my own space and even that you had a wee corner in your room where you could make a cup of tea. Everyone is different but that is what I would have really liked. (W17)

I had my own flat and had no issues with others but also didn't know anyone there... I want to start building a life for myself. (W18)

I think it is important that I have my own space. I don't use the communal areas. (W21)

One person commented that in addition to having their own space, they felt that it was important that they regained contact with their family.

The important thing for me is my family and the support that I get. Before, I didn't have that whereas now I do. (W15)

One person said that they felt it was important that their accommodation was beside others and so they didn't feel alone.

I also liked that I knew that I was not alone which is good for my mental health... It wasn't as if I would go and chap doors but still I knew I wasn't alone. It was a block of flats. (W1)

Although this is just one person, it is important to consider and highlights that one of the housing options that WA could explore for the future, could involve having a choice of flats within the community that are close together.

2.3 Views of the Accommodation

The women felt that both Refuges A and B were in fairly good condition but that A and C were bland and could do with colour. Some women suggested that it would be good if they could even paint one wall within the room, especially considering that they could be staying there for many months. Storage was also mentioned as being an issue for some women. All in Refuge C felt that it was in need of refurbishment and also that the rooms often contained unused furniture, which they could understand but also made them feel as though it really was a temporary situation. One woman commented that she had been put in a room with a cot and it was not appropriate.

There is a lot of furniture in my room. 'I had a cot in my room and I was like that is not right. They should really think about how that might effect some people.' (W19)

It was also felt that there could be more done in each of the Refuges to maximise the garden's potential and more by way of toys and activities for kids and teenagers.

Women who had arrived on a Friday said that this is less than ideal because in some cases they had not seen anyone over the weekend, and if a bank holiday, not until the Tuesday.

When I went into Refuge C it was a bank weekend and it was the worst weekend of my life. I didn't see one from Friday until Tuesday. It feels like 'the land of the forgotten.' (W4)

When I first came into the refuge I was very scared I am not going to lie. I had the worker there though and she was able to talk me through. I think it must be very hard for those women who come in on the Friday and there is no one there...People just stayed in their rooms really. (W11)

2.4 Views of Location

Both Refuges A and B were viewed favourably because of their location and transport connections. Refuge C on the other hand was viewed as being 'too far away' from anything with transport to nearby towns infrequent and NAWA have set up a fund from local donations to support transport costs. The area was described by the women as 'ghostly quiet and 'quite lonely' and 'nothing to do.' Women also complained how expensive the main shop was in the area. One woman reflected that realistically it is not a choice where women are placed and it was confirmed that there is a waiting list for Refuge A (the cluster refuge with the best transport connections). The interviews confirmed that women like being there because all the flats have their own facilities and also there are good transport links.

It was lovely but too out the road for me... You can just get pure bored in here. For me as well trying to stay on the straight and narrow, boredom is a real challenge. I have been in and out of prison before and just want to move on in my life now. (W14)

There is nothing to do really but sit in your room and I think they could put in more things for the women...There is only so much window-shopping you can do. It can get depressing. (W11)

All there is you can go for a walk or sit around in the refuge. (W16)

It is boring being here and there is nothing to do. It would be good to have gym passes or a walking club. I want to get a job...I am cleaning constantly just to have something to do.' (W20)

However, one woman enjoyed the quiet.

I think Refuge C is what I need right now. I came up from England and have been in a few refuges and this is what I need – peace and quiet... I like it as it gives me headspace. It is more out of the way and I think it is a friendlier environment. You have your own space and that is really important to me. I have my own bedroom. There is less hustle and bustle and the police are just down the road so if there is any trouble you know where you can go...I feel safe here and I love it... I am writing a novel at the moment about my experiences...Here there are no distractions. (W16)

2.5 Use and Views of Communal Spaces

The idea of having communal spaces is that it brings women together, to support one another. One woman interviewed said that at the assessment this had been the reason that she had opted for this. She said:

I moved in there because I thought I wanted company but the reality is that there is no one really there that I get on with...We are in the same situation as each other and you should be supportive but the reality is that not everyone is like that and just because you have been through similar things does not mean that you get on...I have left my family and friends to get away from him and hoped I could meet people here but that hasn't happened... I have my own shower but there is a communal living room and kitchen. I have a wee TV in my room but it is tiny...There is a shared bath and I like to have a bath so I have used it a couple of times and both times it has been left to me to clean up the mess of others. It is disgusting. (W10)

Underused and tolerated

Two stated that they felt Refuge A which has separate flats and a communal space offered 'the best of both worlds.' Yet, both said that other than the playroom that they used with their children now and again, they never used the other communal areas. Two women had met other women from the refuge, but this was through attending the groups rather than in the communal areas.

The interviews revealed that the reality is that the communal areas are hardly used unless staff invite the women to come together, and where women have no kitchen facilities and have to cook in a communal area, this is tolerated, with all saying that they would have preferred to have their own kitchen.

I wasn't used to the communal areas and you would have to push yourself to go in... The communal areas are always empty and it is hard to go in yourself... There is a TV with a couch there for two people. I think the reality is that you don't really want to use that because people are coming in and out and you might be watching something and what if someone comes in. (W1)

To be honest I was down there a couple of times to the living room but no one really uses it. I think it would be better to just have a bigger TV in your room. (W10)

I think for me it was easier because I had my family nearby. There was a woman in Refuge C when I was there who was from England and she didn't know anyone so having that shared space was a way of meeting others, although we all spent most of our times in our rooms. (W11)

I think for some people they were stuck in their bedroom and it is very hard for kids. I had a 14 and 3 year old and that was hard. Generally no one used the communal areas. (W12)

I didn't go down the shared spaces, I just wanted peace. (W7)

Women who had been to the communal areas as staff had organised a 'get together', for example to make soup, said that they didn't have the confidence to initiate this type of thing themselves and again just generally wanted their own space.

One woman said she had used the communal area but was glad that she had been the only one.

The communal areas I would say are unused. That suits me because then it means I am the only one in this big living room. (W16)

One woman commented that there were days when she didn't want to have to deal with people, especially after seeing and leaving her children.

Not permitted

In one of the refuges the women who live in the flats are not permitted into the communal areas. One woman interviewed who had been in this situation said that throughout the month she had been by herself but was happy to meet others through the groups run by the organisation. Women appreciate the opportunity of meeting other women, but like it to be on their terms.

'Too close' and wanting to get out

One woman also said the communal areas are 'too close' and that when she was in the refuge she was really glad to have somewhere to go and something to do away from the building.

I also think that the communal area is almost too close to home. I think it is good to get up and have somewhere to go and feel that you have a purpose. You want to get out of the building. (W1)

Not always a good thing

One woman revealed that she had relapsed in one of the refuges and there was always a chance of meeting someone who wasn't a good influence. As will be discussed, the staff also felt that now more than ever this was an issue with the number of women they were supporting also having substance misuse issues.

2.6 Being able to choose company and whom to associate with

All of the women said that they would ideally like to choose when they have company and whom they associate with rather than having to share facilities with others, who some said they would normally avoid. Women said that sharing kitchens lead to many issues, with people taking food, not sticking to their cleaning rota, just generally not getting on or having to 'stay away' or avoid them, and there not being enough space available to cook.

You have to cook in the kitchen with the other women and you just get on with it. You have to watch though too because some of the women, they wouldn't be the women you would usually choose to be around, but then you have to be respectful too of what they have been through... I would prefer that you had a choice, that you can go and see people but you also have your own space. This way you have to see people, but then you don't often see them at the same time too. (W16)

I was sharing facilities and you just make the best of a bad situation. There were issues there with people taking others food from the fridges. Things were also going missing...The good side of sharing is that you meet others, but it would be better if you had a choice to do that...There are some people you get on with and some you don't . If you didn't want to speak to them then you could just go to your room...I was there on my own and some of the children could be unruly, but you kind of expect that. (W17)

Having to cook and share the facilities with other people is less than ideal...It would be good to even have a kettle in the room. (W20)

I keep myself to myself here and just socialise with my friends when I leave...I have had a bad experience here too that makes me want to have my own tenancy...I feel like I have been thrown into a totally different environment to what I am used to. I have had family problems but no issues with substance misuse. (W21)

2.7 Importance of communicating with family and friends

In the refuges, currently women and children are not allowed any visitors and only one woman interviewed felt that this rule should remain, however, she came from the local area and had easy access to family and friends. For the other women, one from England, this rule seemed harsh. They instead felt that visitors should be permitted on a case-by-case basis.

It was also raised that there isn't a phone in all of the refuges to call out and one woman felt that this would be really useful, especially in the evenings or weekends when staff were not there and the women could access helplines. It was also pointed out that the on-call number is not free. In one of the refuges the Wi-Fi connection is really poor and this had an adverse impact, with one woman from the Highlands unable to make Skype calls to her children the way that she had hoped.

2.8 'The Rules' and not feeling in control: No visitors, No pets, alcohol, staying out more than two nights a week and not dealing with payment of the housing costs directly

No visitors

All but one woman commented on the rules 'no visitors' and felt it should be changed, and as will be discussed, this was also one of the main reasons why women did not go to the refuge in other cases.

You are not allowed people in, it feels like you don't have control. I am in my box. (W3)

This is isolating, you should be allowed visitors. (W15)

Visitors should be allowed. I have two single beds in my room and I could have my mum up for example but I am not allowed. (W16)

A big issue for me was not having visitors and my sister had my kids at the time and so she couldn't visit, I couldn't see them. It was very hard. (W18)

No visitors allowed is hard. (W20)

No Pets

A number of women spoke about having to rehome or give up their pets and again this was a reason for some women not coming into the refuge.

I have had to have my rabbit rehomed with a friend until I get out of the refuge. The rabbit was my wean and the one way in which I was able to calm down. (W3)

I had to put my two cats Tom and Jerry into the cats protection and when I went back to get them after two days they were gone. I had had them for eight years. (W8)

I had to put my dog in the kennels and was paying through the nose for it; I would have taken up the chance for the fostering. (W18)

The service has now sourced an organisation that fosters dogs though so this should be less of an issue.

No drinking

Two women spoke about how they felt that the 'no drinking' rule could be relaxed.

You aren't allowed to drink and I suppose I can understand the rule but also they are tarring everyone with the same brush. (W15)

Having to hand over alcohol that they had and were keeping for their own personal use 'We have had to give up everything and I think to then give up more is a lot to ask.' (W20)

No staying out more than two nights

Two others drew attention to the rule that women were not allowed to be out more than two nights a week as this is linked to housing benefit and the requirement that they accommodation is needed.

How much does this cost and how is it being paid?

Two women also said that they would have liked to know what the costs of the refuge were and explained more in detail about how these were being covered.

I think it would be good that if you came in they talk you through your options but also how the money will be managed. They just said to me 'Don't worry about it.' But you do worry about it and it would be good to know what things are costing. I went from paying my rent and managing my own money to then not really knowing what was going on and I didn't like that...I trust them but you want to have some control. I know they are trying to protect us but I think it is important you know what you are doing. (W1)

I didn't get any information on how the refuge was paid and that would have been good to know. (W18)

Too expensive

One woman interviewed who had been in the refuge more than a year ago explained that it had been very expensive to stay there because she had been working and paying the full rent. The rate of payment set is outwith the control of WA.

Can't wait to move on, life being 'on pause'

All of the women felt that time in a refuge felt like life had been 'on pause' and they couldn't wait to get their own place and feel like their life was back on track.

I have been in here now six weeks and it has felt like a life time and I can't wait to get my own place. (W10)

I was in there for two months but I couldn't imagine being in there for months on end, that would be hard. (W12)

2.9 Importance of meeting other women

Almost all of the women were attending the groups on offer by Women's Aid and felt that as well as the support being given by staff, it was the opportunities to meet others at the central office space that was really beneficial.

The groups are the most important thing because it is helping you to meet with others, build confidence and when you first start you are worried about who is there, but now I am not worried...I met other women through going to an event on International Women's Day...The best thing is meeting other women and the groups, without that I would have nothing and probably want to go back to what I left. (W3)

I think the cooking groups are good because you get to mingle with others. I think they should really try to bring all of the women together so that they get to know one another. We have all been through similar things. They have this confidentiality agreement thing but of course you are not going to share about someone's experiences...You have a lot of time on your hands then and having more groups and getting out is important. (W11)

My depression can get bad at times but it is important that I keep coming to the groups, meeting others and focus on the next chapter of my life. (W15)

There should be more groups so that if you want to attend things you can. (W19)

Over the past year in Ayrshire, North Ayrshire Women's Aid are now offering different groups work programmes, such as computer courses, emotional wellbeing, domestic abuse and mindfulness. They have also made connections with the local college and women receive free complimentary treatments such as massages and staff are trained to deliver acupuncture. It transpired that rather than having to meet women through the refuge accommodation, what women really wanted was to have a hub in each of their local areas. It was suggested that this hub should be open to meeting women from all walks of life rather than being specifically for women from Women's Aid, and it was felt that it would not carry the same stigma as going to the main branch at the office. All felt that for those women first in the refuge staff could help them to come across to the hub and introduce them to other women, helping them to make those initial connections and build confidence.

I think it would be good if there was a kind of drop in and you could access it at any time and you use it whenever for different things...could use it for more formal things but also for creative things too and have a relaxation space, a 'safe bubble'...I think if there was a place you could go and the support is there then I would go...I think that it could be a place also where you come together to then head out to what is happening in the community. It is about an opportunity rather than a space...I think we should find out what is in the local community and link in with that too. For example, if you wanted to go to yoga, you could have that in the hub, but you could also meet in the centre and then all go together. I think

that is the hardest part is making that trip across on your own...I think we should also try to get volunteers to run the space as well. (W1)

It would have been good to have had something like a hub...I didn't think I was that affected but when I went into the house and had all that time on my hands, it was hard...I didn't know anyone when I came here and I think there could be more done to introduce you to others, having a hub would be great... I also think that it should be for all women and not just Women's Aid...I think also with walking into Women's Aid, the community know who you are, you are a new face, and I think having that hub would be better...I think also I am dead private and don't want to talk about what has happened in the past. I just feel like if you are talking about it you are not moving on. I want to move on in my life...I don't really have the confidence to get out of the house and go to these groups on my own, but I think if I was supported in the beginning that would be fine. (W18)

It was also felt that ideally a crèche facility should be explored.

2.10 Importance of opportunities

Some of the women were keen to get back into education and work.

I am looking at going to college now but missed the deadline but will definitely be going there when I can. (W13)

I feel like my life is on pause at the moment. I am sick of moving around and want to get my qualification in writing. I want to have my own personal space that is mine. (W16)

One of the initiatives being taken forward by NAWA is the development of 'Young Voices', whereby volunteers go to schools and deliver training about healthy relationships.

I am one of the first set of volunteers, and we are now in touch with Skills Development Scotland. (W1)

Other women spoke about how they wanted to also play more of a role in supporting other women, by themselves acting as peer mentors or even running groups. To this end, Wise Voices has been created which will allow women moving through the service to become volunteers to promote the service, co facilitate groups and provide peer mentoring.

Here they have went of their way to help us and I liked when we did the cooking course. You get to help others and that is good too. (W15)

2.11 The process for women moving into their own tenancies

At present women and children are offered furnished, or semi-furnished (depending on whether it is permanent or temporary tenancies), by the Council and some require more work to be done, for example, carpets to be fitted or white goods installed in order for them to be comfortable to live in. As a result, women apply to the Welfare Fund to make these change and have to wait weeks for this to come through and the work to be done, all the while accumulating rent arrears as housing benefit only pays for one property. Effectively, many of the women leaving the refuge and taking up their new tenancy begin so in rent arrears. This is a feature of Housing Benefit regulations and outwith the control of the Council.

I am even in rent arrears now paying for this place and waiting for the other flat to get done up...I think that women in this situation waiting on the Welfare Fund, it should be fastracked, because I am in arrears now. (W14)

One woman was so keen to move out of the refuge that she regretted taking her first offer.

I also made a drastic decision because I didn't feel like I had a choice. I feel like it was very rushed and there should be time given for women in these situations to have a week say where you have a chance to move in properly. I felt like I had no choice and I had to take it. (W18)

2.12 The impact of living in a refuge

Some of the women discussed openly how the entire situation was affecting them negatively. They said:

I feel like I have lost myself. (W19)

I feel like I need a job, just to get my dignity and self-esteem back. I feel like everything has been taken away from me. (W20)

I feel like life is on pause. (W15)

You think to yourself 'what has my life come to.' (W2)

I am very glad of their help but I also wish there were more support for learning life skills... I have been in the refuge now for a year and I don't think I am ready to leave because I don't think I have the life skills yet. When I meet with the staff I just feel like I am catching up rather than getting prepared for moving on... I want to know how to pay my bills. I know I pay for gas and electricity here but I need to know how to manage bills. (W21)

2.13 What would be the ideal?

In the interviews conversations turned to what women would *really* want. A number of options were discussed and all of the women said that they would want their own place, have CCTV installed, front and back, a hub in each local area and a worker allocated to them to introduce them to others or get more specialised support, and have the opportunity to meet others when they wanted. They also really liked the idea of getting their own place and instead of being in temporary accommodation, having the opportunity to be in stable accommodation from the very beginning. They recognised though that this was difficult.

2.14 Conclusion

The findings here reflect that the women view their time in the refuge as their life being 'on pause', they prioritise being safe but really want to have their own space. Only one woman said that she also wanted her flat to be where there were others around as this made her feel safer, and despite being one person, it is important that as far as possible, there are options that fit all. Communal areas are unused and shared facilities tolerated. Women also feel like they are not in control, and moving away from a position of being disempowered the refuge should try as far as possible to not replicate this. The women find the rule 'no visitors' particularly difficult and this should be reviewed. Women are very keen to move in to their own place, in some cases they accept housing that is not ready to live in yet, and in other cases are running up arrears as they await the Welfare Funding and the work to be completed to make it ready for moving in. A Rapid Rehousing approach with temporary housing provided in temporary furnished flats within communities could help mitigate the situation with emergency accommodation provided for the absolute minimum period required. The key positive aspect of contact with Women's Aid is not just the support they receive from workers, which has not been focused on in this report, but also meeting others. The opportunity to meet other women is especially appreciated by those new to the area and some women felt that the hub should be open to all the women in the community so they can meet others from all walks of life, much like the Women Centre currently being piloted in Cumnock.

3. Findings Part II: What the women who have not been in refuges want

3.1 Overview

Of the ten women who have not been in a refuge, seven stayed in their own home through support by NAWA, two moved into the first flat offered to them, one a private let that they are satisfied with and one a council tenancy that they now regret. One woman lives with a friend and is still awaiting a tenancy.

3.2 Main reasons for not going into the refuge

Of the ten women, four said that they were emotionally abused and after leaving their partner and WA supporting them to make their home safe they did not feel in immediate danger.

I was supported by the workers here to really understand that I was being abused and that I wasn't going insane. I think that with physical abuse, people can see it, whereas with emotional, no one can and it is more dangerous. (NR3)

I was actually referred to here because I was accused of being the abuser which was not true. He abused me. The outreach work really helps. (NR7)

They helped me practically to get the locks changed so that when I made the split I felt safe. (W9)

I was able to stay in my own home and NAWA helped me to get a panic alarm and I had an outreach worker. (N10)

Two said that the main reason for not going into the refuge was because of the 'No visitors allowed' rule.

The big thing for me is that you weren't allowed any visitors, my family are really important to me and you were not allowed men in either. I had a good friend who was a male who was helping me through at that time and to think that none of these people could come and visit me was a no no for me...I think that would be an isolating position to be put in. (NR1)

The only thing really that held me back from taking the offer of the refuge was that you are not allowed visitors. I don't drive and my family are so important to me. (NR6)

Two felt that moving into the refuge would be too much for their children, one child had mental health problems and another autism.

I was glad to stay in my own home. It was about the kids as well, that upheaval from school...My boy has mental health issues so it would have been really hard for him. (NR4)

My son has autism and so it is would be too difficult to move. (NR6)

One woman did not want to have to share or live with others.

I was able to stay in my own home and got counselling...I think if I had had to go to the refuge it would have been a lot of stress and my world would have been turned upside down...I think having to share a kitchen. It would be difficult. I think you would feel ashamed. Why has this happened?... I think when I had my mental breakdown you don't want to see anyone...Company should not be forced. (W8)

One did not want to leave her pet.

I didn't go into the refuge because of my wee dog. (NR2)

3.3 Secondary Reasons

Women gave a number of secondary reasons why they didn't go to the refuge, relating to the rules imposed, not wanting to leave their home and not wanting to live with others.

No control over where to stay and 'the rules'

I think also with being in the refuge, you don't know how long you are going to be there before you get a place that you want to live in, and also the first thing that they offer you, you are supposed to take it. I didn't want to feel like I had no control over that. I wanted to choose where I stay...It was important to me that I had control and I think with the refuge it didn't feel like I was in control. (NR1)

It didn't want to leave my home

One woman was adamant that she was not moving out of her home.

I have got my house and spent all my money on it and there is no way that I am moving out. (NR5)

Did not want to share

Three additional women were wary of sharing space with others.

I also think that moving into those places where you are sharing with others, you don't know the dangers...I am not keen on sharing. Also, when you have been in a relationship where there is domestic abuse, you feel isolated and you don't want to be among others, you feel paranoid. (NR1)

I prefer to have my own space. (NR6)

I would not like to put up with having to share with others. (NR3)

3.4 What helped them?

There are a number of specific types of support that really helped the women offered by NAWA. Firstly, offering them reassurance and helping them understand the abuse, making their homes feel safe and in one case liveable, and having an outreach worker was really valued. Women also welcomed accessing groups, practical support to get their tenancy in order, fulfil appointments, deal with court orders, support their children and build confidence. Lastly, one woman said that without the Council's rent deposit scheme she would not have been able to make the move to her own place after refusing to live in the refuge.

Emotional Support, Reassurance and Understanding

Women spoke about how NAWA helped them to stay sane throughout the process offering reassurance and specialised support.

I don't know anyone in my life who could have helped me the way that they helped me to deal with it and to get away from it. They helped me to reaffirm my decision-making...stay sane...You think you are losing your mind, that you are becoming insane, you know he made me doubt myself so much, but they helped me to get out and to realise that I was right, this wasn't right. They helped me to see, this isn't love and if it is, I don't want it...They have been a massive support and they helped me to see the light. (NR9)

I was supported by the workers here to really understand that I was being abused and that I wasn't going insane. I think that with physical abuse, people can see it, whereas with emotional, no one can and it is more dangerous...He had taken over my mind and I thought I was crazy. (NR3)

It is good to be able to speak to someone if I am having a hard day. (NR6)

NAWA has really helped me to talk and been there for me. (NR7)

Supported to make house 'safe'

Three women spoke about the support to get panic alarms and locks changed as vital.

I was able to get help with getting my locks changed and getting a panic alarm. I had an outreach worker and did some counselling sessions and it really helped for me to realise that this wasn't just me. (NR4)

The panic alarm really helped. (NR6)

Support to make houses liveable

One woman spoke about how through NAWA she had accessed the Welfare Fund.

I needed a lot of the help at the time. Women's Aid helped me to get a washing machine and supported me emotionally. (NR1)

Deal with court and different appointments

One woman said that the support given to deal with court and different hospital appointments for her son was appreciated, particularly as she didn't drive.

The support I have received here for court...The support I have received from NAWA for appointments to the hospital etc...or to be able to get answers to questions I have about court etc. (NR6)

Support for Children

One woman had a children's worker and felt this had a positive impact on the whole family.

I have a children's worker –she is able to speak to the school and help with things too. (NR7)

The groups

Four women attend the groups and felt that this was really important to help them build confidence.

I keep myself to myself but the groups are helping...It is good to have things to come to and socialise. There are times when I want to come and there are times when I don't. I think that it is important that it is not imposed on you. (NR3)

I think it is important to have this support and to meet others who have been through the same experience. I have made good friends and it is good though to meet other women too. (NR4)

I come to the computer classes and to be honest I don't like going to groups but this fine. (NR6)

I think having the different activities is important and to not be by myself. (N10)

Having somewhere to go

The groups organised at the central office also meant that women had a reason to 'get out.' For one woman, on the day of the interview, it had been the first time in a year she had left the house on her own and explained that this had been because of the groups.

This has been small steps for me, I went from not being able to go out to now getting the bus myself. I think you can get into that situation where you don't go out and you stop even from getting dressed. It is important to keep that up...I would recommend this to anyone who needs the support. (NR7)

Feeling part of something

It transpired that the women feel part of something when they continue to attend the groups and be a part of NAWA. It was felt that they staff really care.

They even got back to me today to tell me about a nursery for my two year old. (NR9)

Rent deposit scheme

For one woman, without the Council offering a rent deposit scheme she would not have been able to afford a private let.

They give you a list of properties from the council and it was a case of just trying to get a place where I wanted to stay. I was lucky that there was a 4-bedroom house that I could move into that was safe...With the rent deposit scheme, the council pay the deposit and then you pay them back over a couple of years. For me, it was £22 a month over 2 years and that was manageable for me. (NR1)

3.5 Have there been any negative outcomes as a result of not going into the refuge?

Two women reflected that they are currently living in unsafe or situations that are not entirely of their choosing, one because they don't want to leave their pet and another because she took the first tenancy offered and feels unsafe because of where it is located.

I had left my abusive relationship and moved back in with my mum, but that's not good. I don't get on with my mum or her partner. They were fighting all the time too and so you think that is normal. After a while I moved in with my gran and started seeing someone else who was also very manipulative. He basically was paying my gran off and treating me badly. I am now living with a man who is a friend and I have the spare room. I have put in for my own place...I feel secure enough but not completely safe. (NR2)

I wish I had gone to the refuge but instead I took the first flat that had come to me. I am now living surrounded by junkies. I found my neighbour dead from an overdose and have found needles and all sorts around the garden...I used to stay in quiet area and now I am here and you wouldn't wipe your feet on the way out. (NR6)

3.6 What they want to see happen for the future

All of the women were keen to get their life back and also made suggestions about what could be improved. Interestingly, all that were able to remain in their own home said that this was the ideal, and two felt that having more outreach workers would be really beneficial. For those who had to move, they felt that rather than being offered a refuge, being offered their own place would be much better. One woman also commented that the council should make women in these situations a top priority. All felt that a hub in the local community was also a good idea.

I think NAWA do so much for the women and in reality it is the council who have to also realise what the women are going through and really offer them support. They don't care and I think they should keep some of the housing stock for supporting women like me. (NR6)

I think it is good to meet other women who have had similar experiences but also like the idea of meeting women from all walks. (NR10)

Women were also asked what they thought about the word 'refuge' and generally the word 'safe' came to mind, except for two women, who instead felt that this word put people off and made them think of institutions.

*I think the word 'refuge' should be changed to 'temporary accommodation.'
When I think of a refuge I think of Victoria House, which is a hostel for
homeless people, it is full of drug users and alcoholics. (NR6)*

*When I think of a refuge I would imagine that they are like children's homes
where you have your own room and then you share everything else. (NR7)*

3.7 Conclusion

Ten women who had not been in the refuge were interviewed. Four had been emotionally abused and felt that through the support of NAWA they were able to leave the relationship and remain in their own homes. For the other six women, the physical violence had been a real threat. In three cases, getting the locks changed and panic alarms installed really helped them to feel safe and remain in their own home. Reasons for wanting to remain at home were mainly because they didn't want any upheaval and also the rules imposed in refuges and particularly the 'no visitor' rule that women really did not feel they could cope with, especially knowing that they could be in the refuge for many months. Two women had rather put themselves in an unsafe location, taking the first tenancy offered than move into the refuge. It is strongly advised that such rules are reviewed. Moreover, it was reflected that being offered 'your own place' was what women preferred. The emotional and practical support offered by NAWA is invaluable and the groups that bring people together crucial to helping women build confidence. Women welcomed the idea of having a hub in their local community for all women from all walks of life to meet.

4. Findings Part III: What the young people want

4.1 Overview

Three young people were interviewed, two currently in a refuge and one young man who had been supported by NAWA throughout the time that he left his home with his mother and stayed with his grandparents. Two other young people being supported by NAWA at school wrote submissions about what they think a refuge should offer. All were aged between 12 and 16. The following is an analysis of the views gathered.

4.2 What do you think a refuge should have?

All of the young people were asked what a refuge should have and for those currently in the refuge, what they felt was good and bad about their experience. Both young people were very grateful for the support given and glad to be safe, but they also felt comfortable to speak also about what they would like to see change for other young people in the future.

Own Space

All said that they would like to have their own space and did not want to have to share their bedroom with anyone.

I would like the age of 10-11 you should have your own space, i.e. Your own room. (Y3)

Would prefer a house/flat rather than a place where everyone goes. (Y4)

One girl, aged 12 interviewed in the refuge found sharing with her brother really challenging.

I am 12 and my brother is 6 and we have to share a room and a bunk bed. We used to have our own room...it's hard. (Y2)

Both her and her older brother spoke about feeling like there wasn't enough space.

I don't feel like we have very much control and with four of us in the flat it can feel very small. The kitchen and living room is too small, too cramped.

One young man who stayed with his grandparents for a year until they had their own place, also spoke about how difficult sharing had been for his sister.

I had my own room at my grans. My sister had to share with my mum though and that wasn't ideal. She now has her own room and it is a real sigh of relief for her. (Y5)

Access to the same School

All three interviewed spoke about how important school was and for the young person who did not go to the refuge, this was a key reason why they had opted not to go into the refuge.

Being at the same school was really important to me... I think if I had missed school as well that would have been hard because you don't ever want to have to play catch up. (Y6)

Three of the young people in the refuge, (one too young to be interviewed) had not been in school for the five weeks they had been there because their taxi organised by the social work department had never arrived. Staff at the refuge had been chasing this up and it was a great relief to the young person that the next day after the interview took place that she was finally getting to school.

I am still waiting on a taxi to get to school and that has been five weeks. It's a 30-minute drive away. (Y2)

Her older brother explained that he had stopped going to school to protect his mother from the abuse, but now really wanted to get back and was concerned that the opportunity was lost. Staff at NAWA were supporting him to look again at his options.

I am worried about my school as well. My mum and I are really close and I was worried about her so to keep her safe I decided to just stop going to school but I want to get back. (Y1)

Have visitors

All commented that the 'no visitors' rule is really challenging.

It would be good to have visitors. We can only see our bigger sister at the weekends. (Y1)

The freedom to come in and out of the refuge to keep in contact with my friends. (Y4)

I think it would have been really hard if we weren't allowed visitors and not allowed to see my grandparents. They are my main family. (Y6)

Having things to do

Both young people in the refuge complained that it was boring and there was little for them to do and were quite far from friends. This compounded how much they had lost by moving out of their home.

I think there could be more here for children and especially older young people...It would be good to have a computer or something to pass the time... It would be good to have books here for teenagers. We lost everything. It would be good to have a pass to the gym to have something to do.

Should feel like home

Both young people in the refuge commented on the 'fences' and generally had noted that what they would normally do wasn't able to happen and they also found it hard not having their pets.

It has big fences and big walls and so I think in here should be more colourful... We are not allowed deliveries or takeaways either. (Y1)

Not treat all men as bad...

One young man aged 16 was uncomfortable about the blanket rule against men who were over 16 and also asked 'Where do men who are being abused go?'

4.3 Perceptions of a Refuge

The young man who had not been a refuge thought of it as a hostel. He said:

I didn't want to live in a hostel and neither did my mum...When I think of the word refuge I think of refugees and I didn't want to be that. (Y6)

4.4 Support given by NAWA

Both young people who were being supported at school and the young man interviewed spoke about how important it was to have support to make sense of what had happened and to have this specialised support.

The best thing about this service is that I have someone to talk to who is not my mum. Sometimes I am worried about my mum and this way I can speak to someone else about her but also know that she is ok.

The two young people in the refuge wanted to move on with their lives and saw their time at the refuge as something they had to put up with and were concerned about how long they might be there.

4.5 Conclusion

Young people want to ideally be in their own home or as close to it, have their own space, be able to go to school, have freedom to meet their friends and live as 'normal' a life as possible. They do not want to have to deal with uncertainty, sharing with others, having no visitors, and in some cases don't want to talk about what has happened either, but move on. In other cases though they do want this specialised support and undoubtedly the expertise that NAWA have in this area is invaluable. In terms of accommodation though, it would be fair to say that for young people, the family getting their own tenancy which would allow for as little disruption as possible to their lives is what they want.

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5. Findings Part IV: What the Workers Want

5.1 Overview

Eleven staff members were interviewed individually to seek their views of the refuge accommodation. Many had worked for Women's Aid for many years and all but two had worked in the refuges in this area at some point.

5.2 The Main Priority: Safe and homely

Above all else, quite simply the workers wanted the refuge accommodation to feel safe and homely.

We should make this as comfortable and as cosy an experience as possible.

(S1)

5.3 Views on Communal Areas

The workers reflected that the idea behind having the communal areas of bringing people together worked well in the past, and many said that they had been attached to this model but had changed their view on this in more recent times.

The workers all felt that having shared space created many issues, with some women arguing, food going missing, and people generally staying in their rooms. Also, for women in recovery, meeting other women also in recovery was challenging. One worker summed it up as 'I used to be its biggest fan but it has had its day' and detracted from the 'real work' taking place.

I found in the refuge with the communal areas, you spent a lot of time as a worker trying to 'fix issues' between women who were not getting on, rather than really helping them and getting to the nitty gritty. (S9)

I think it works best when the women have their own independent flats as communal is too much hassle and it really is about if women get on and if they want that company. (S6)

I think people would prefer that rather than having to share, instead they have their own space and they can choose instead to meet with others. (S7)

In Refuge B the fridges and food cupboards are separate and locked and it was felt and observed that this in itself compromised how welcoming the space could be. It was also believed that there are better ways of bringing the women together.

I think that it is important that the women get to meet with one another but there are other ways in which you can do that, for example by running the groups. (S9)

I think the key thing is that the women are able to come together and that can be through the groups. I think the reality is that they don't always have confidence in the beginning so we need to support that to happen. (S11)

5.4 Play Areas and Facilities for Teenagers

In both Refuges A and B there are play areas for younger children. It was reflected that there is however very little for teenagers and in all of the refuges there could be more done with the gardens. One worker reflected on the rooms that they had set aside for teenagers in the past and remarked:

We had rooms for teenagers in the refuges but they don't want that, what they really want is their own room in their own place. (S9)

Two workers commented that none of the refuges would be able to cope with a larger family.

5.5 More staff

NAWA have reduced their number of staff over the past years due to the cuts in funding and there is now only a very small number of children's workers, with refuges having only one member of staff. All agreed that this impacts upon the level of support women and children are offered.

5.6 Relaxing the Rules

Staff are keen to see rules relaxed and recognise, as has been evidenced in this report, that they can prevent or deter women from coming into the refuge.

They need to relax their rules. There are two pages of rules. (S5)

In the Outreach flats boys over 16 are not allowed. This should be made more Flexible. (S1)

Case Study: Impact of 'no over 16 year old men' allowed

One mother left the refuge because her 21-year-old son was couch surfing and the service made the rule more flexible so that they could be in the refuge together but he was not allowed to be in any of the communal spaces.

5.7 Accessing what is available in the local community

Workers feel that the women could be connected up more to their local communities rather than offering courses only through NAWA.

I have been looking at what is available in community centres and helping women to link in, this is what needs to happen. (S5)

5.8 Barriers to childcare

Childcare is a particular barrier and a major challenge for woman who want to access support and it may be that NAWA look to other models and work with other services to create something more innovative.

We are not supposed to look after the children but again there should be flexibility with that. We had one woman last week and she wouldn't have been able to go for her massage if I hadn't stepped in and looked after her two kids for an hour. This is what needs to happen. (S5)

5.9 Trying to not be too overprotective and really listening to the women about what they want

Some of the workers felt that staff could be too overprotective of the women, for example, advising them to hold off from doing courses until they are 'more stable', and also encouraging women to talk when some did not want to. As one worker said 'I think we really need to ask the women directly, be direct, 'what do you want?'

5.10 'Women led'

In one of the refuges the décor had been chosen based on what the women who had been living there at the time had wanted.

This was all woman lead, we asked the women and we designed it how they wanted it. They valued that they had been asked. (S8)

The workers felt that in in refuge A and C the accommodation looked tired and dated. The workers also recognised that sometimes women did not have a choice about where to be

placed because of the number of spaces in each, and although being in a more rural area suited some, the majority found it difficult.

The workers are keen to listen to the women and recognise that in doing so, refuges as they currently exist with shared facilities need to be reviewed. Staff felt that the women want their own flats and these could be made safe with panic alarms and CCTV. There was some discussion about these flats being in close proximity to one another and with a local hub in the community.

One of the women I am supporting is not able to access any of the groups because she has no money. There is nothing for her down there and instead it is all up here. (S4)

The move therefore is that NAWA moves towards refuges being flats or houses in local communities that temporarily accommodate women until they achieve their tenancies and offer outreach and follow up support.

The women should have what they would have in their own home and we give them security also with CCTV... They could also have alarms and a phone that can ring out. (S9)

I think what I would like to see is if the accommodation was barrier free. (S6)

We could have flats and they could have alarms and have CCTV. A hub would be a good idea in each of the local areas. (S11)

5.11 Good practice

Staff identified good practice that they would like to see replicated in their area and this re-emphasised the move towards women having their own tenancies and opportunities to meet other women.

5.12 Conclusion

The workers want above all else for the women to feel safe and 'at home.' Although many had been advocates for the refuges with communal areas, such as those that currently exist, they now feel that these create issues and the women and children should ideally be supported to gain their own tenancy as quickly as possible. They also feel that a hub should be developed in each local area and that this doesn't necessarily have to be for women from NAWA alone, although they recognise that some women need specialised support. In short, NAWA as it currently exists in terms of refuge accommodation and the support offered needs to change towards a Housing First model and offer more outreach.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Research carried out in Scotland on refuge accommodation fifteen years ago concluded that Women's Aid (WA) should invest in cluster refuges (flats with communal areas) and dispersed flats were too resource intensive. Drawing on international research there is a call to critically appraise refuge accommodation and this study set out to find out from the women and children directly what they *really* think about it.

31 women took part in this study, 21 who had been or were currently in refuges and ten who had not, and were supported either to remain at home or access their own tenancy. Five young people aged between 12 and 16 years old, two currently in refuge and three being supported by NAWA at school also gave their view as well as 11 staff members.

The findings show that the women prioritise being safe but really want to have their own space. Communal areas are unused and shared facilities tolerated. Women also feel like they are not in control. They are very keen to move in to their own place, in some cases accepting housing that is not ready to live in yet, and in other cases running up arrears as they await the Welfare Funding to come through and work to be completed before moving in. The key positive aspect of contact with NAWA is not just the support they receive from workers, which has not been focused on in this report, but also the opportunity to meet other women. Some suggested developing a hub in each local community open to women from all walks of life, much like the Women's Centre currently being piloted in Cummnock.

Of the ten women interviewed who had not been in the refuge, four had been emotionally abused and through the support of NAWA left their partners and remained in their own homes. For the other six women, the physical violence had been a real threat. In three cases, getting the locks changed and panic alarms installed really helped them to feel safe and remain in their own home. Reasons for wanting to remain at home were mainly because they didn't want any upheaval. The emotional and practical support offered by NAWA is invaluable and the groups that bring people together crucial to helping women build confidence. Women welcomed the idea of a hub in their local community.

Young people want to ideally be in their own home or as close to it, have their own space, be able to go to school, have freedom to meet their friends and live as 'normal' a life as possible.

The workers are keen to listen to the women and feel that refuges with shared facilities have had its day, and instead women living in separate flats or houses made safe with panic alarms and CCTV should be promoted. There was some discussion about these flats being in close proximity to one another and with a local hub in the community.

In short, refuge accommodation as it currently exists with shared facilities and communal areas is not what the women, children or staff want. Instead, a Rapid Rehousing or

Housing First approach with temporary housing provided in the form of furnished flats within communities is recommended and that emergency accommodation be provided for the absolute minimum period required. It is further recommended that a hub in each local community be set up.

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Appendix: More detailed breakdown of the analysis of women in or had been in refuge accommodation

- W1 –in refuge less than one year ago
- 2 – currently in refuge
- 3 - was in refuge a year ago
- 4 - was in refuge a year ago
- W5 – currently in refuge
- W6 – in refuge over a year ago
- W7 – in refuge over a year ago
- W8 – in refuge over a year ago
- W9 – in refuge a year a year ago
- W10 – in refuge
- W11 – refuge less than a year ago
- W12 – in refuge more than a year ago
- W13 – in refuge
- W14 – in refuge
- W15 – in refuge less than one year ago
- W16 – currently in refuge
- W17 - in refuge around 10 years ago but continued to receive support through outreach
- W18 – in refuge a year ago
- W19 – in refuge
- W20 – in refuge
- W21 – in refuge