

Wirral Women & Children's Aid

Chairman's Report

for the year ended 31 March 2011

WWACA is an established and mature organisation now twenty nine years old and not at all afraid of the big 30. In fact the wealth of experience contained in the staff team and trustee body could be measured in the hundreds of years and 30 may be a distant memory to many of us. I know that everybody from top to bottom strive their utmost to meet the complex needs of all our residents. We constantly revise and assess what we do, how we do it and what more needs to be done, be it for an individual or for all. We do not hesitate to work in collaborative innovative ways with other agencies and will seek additional funding. I have no doubt that the service we provide is of the highest quality and is realistically budgeted as the trustees report will disclose. We appreciate the hard work and assistance of the Wirral MBC Supporting People team in these challenging times.

I do have anxieties about the negative impact of competitive tendering where it is driven purely by cost and not by quality. We are not offering a dustbin collection facility but a deeply personal service to the most vulnerable people. The tendering process and questions must be based on the best professional understanding of these issues. We note the recent disclosures of serious abuse of residents in the care home system by low paid unqualified and unsuitable staff. WWACA employs appropriately trained people who benefit further by accredited training, NVQ / apprenticeship and other informative input. We provide training placements for social work students from Liverpool John Moore's University which is evidence of the standing of our work.

I am also concerned that, despite the wealth of knowledge now accumulated on domestic abuse and its long lasting and emotionally disabling impact on victims of all ages, there is a tendency by the authorities to see refuge as a short term provision for a few weeks dictated only by the speed with which new accommodation can be found. Refuge provision must be understood to be a therapeutic experience for women and all their children. WWACA ensures that residents of all ages have access to flexible, supportive, empowering individual and group work throughout their stay and for as long as they wish to have it thereafter. Many of our current children will not enter their own relationships for upwards of fifteen years but their views and beliefs on the roles and status of men and women in a family have already been influenced adversely by their negative experience. This does require significant corrective input to rectify which we aim to provide through our age specific provision of crèche, Rainbow Group, Youth Club and individual support.

We are most fortunate and grateful that the Mayor of Wirral, Councillor Moira McLaughlin, has named WWACA as one of her charities of her year of office. It was a pleasure to welcome and to discuss our work with her.

We have established a Forum of Independent Refuges through which we hope to address issues of mutual concern and to raise awareness in the wider community of factors impacting upon us all.

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Mrs Valerie Sanders, Head of Service took up her post in June 2010 and is a most reassuring presence. We have attended events run by NCVO and ACEVO which have helped us to address the complex changing factors affecting work in the voluntary sector. She attends the Wirral MARAC - multi agency risk assessment conference where monthly around thirty cases of life threatening domestic abuse are considered and steps taken to protect the women and children. It is good to be involved and it enables first rate communication and cooperation between around thirty agencies to be effective.

I am as ever grateful to all who assist with gifts both in cash and in kind, to our devoted staff team and to all the other Trustees whose support in the governance of our affairs is crucial for long term planning and future development especially in such uncertain times.

I know that you will gain a greater understanding of our work by reading the staff team contributions. I have also read the many heartfelt thank you letters from families following their move to new housing and have seen the growing happiness and confidence which they have developed during their time with us. It is their renewed energy and enthusiasm which fuels our desire to continue to develop and enhance the work which we undertake.

Stephen R. Ross
Chairman

Wirral Women & Children's Aid
Trustees' Report
for the year ended 31 March 2011

The Trustees present their report for the year ended 31 March 2011.

Reference and administrative details of the charity, its Trustees and advisers

The registered name of the charity is Wirral Women and Children's Aid, charity number 1106399, company number 5250366.

All Trustees who served during the year are listed on page 1, along with details of the registered office and the charity's professional advisers.

Structure, governance and management

Constitution and organisation

The company was registered with the Charity Commission on 21 October 2004 and is a company limited by guarantee, governed by its memorandum and articles of association, incorporated on 5 October 2004.

With effect from 1 April 2005, all the assets and the activities of the previous charity, which was constituted as an unincorporated association by trust deed, were transferred to the new company, using the same name of Wirral Women and Children's Aid.

The Management Committee appoints all new trustees, based on selection criteria which ensure that collectively it maintains a broad range of relevant skills and experience. Nominations are sought from current trustees and from interested organisations and individuals.

The Management Committee meet at least 6 times per year with other subcommittees set-up to consider and report back to the Management Committee as required. Day to day operational decisions are delegated to the Head of Service, Mrs Valerie Sanders.

Risk management

The Management Committee has overall responsibility for the system of internal control for the charity. However, such a system can provide only reasonable, but not absolute, assurance against errors and fraud. The charity operates a comprehensive budgeting process which is approved by the Management Committee. Reports of actual financial results against budget are made to the Management Committee at the end of each quarter, including linking financial performance with resource and activity levels.

The charity has risk management policies and procedures, throughout in which risks arising from the existing operations and strategic developments are identified and evaluated. All major risks to which the charity is exposed have been reviewed and systems implemented to mitigate these risks are continually being developed or enhanced.

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Mission Statement

Wirral Women & Children's Aid intervenes positively on behalf of women, children and young people whose lives have been shattered by domestic abuse and violence. We fulfil this by the provision of a safe, caring environment within which we address their identified needs through:

- individual support and supervision
- group work activities
- Ofsted accredited crèche
- a therapeutic programme for young children and their mothers
- a Youth Club.

We facilitate additional needs through active involvement with a range of key services which include health, social care, education and housing.

Our service is unique in Wirral for a number of reasons which include:

- Quality and depth of support given
- Knowledge, experience and commitment of staff
- Minimal staff turnover and high level of staff retention
- 24 hour cover and Helpline
- High level of involvement with other agencies
- Ability to accommodate a wide range of needs including some levels of disability and older dependent adults

The success of the Refuge depends on our commitment to professionally assessing the needs of the women, young people and children to provide a cohesive and holistic plan which will nurture, support and empower them. This is reflected in the individual support plan which is set up, developed and monitored for each new resident. The phrase "one size fits all" is totally inappropriate when dealing with each individual and family who need to use the services of the Refuge.

In planning our activities for this year and future years we keep in mind the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

Achievements and Performance

The core operation of the Refuge, which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, is funded by Supporting People. The Supporting People grant, which is based on the maximum number of women who can be accommodated in the Refuge at any one time, together with the rental income, covers the core staffing and day to day running costs of the Refuge.

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Achievements and Performance (continued)

During the year to 31 March 2011, the Refuge accommodated 63 women and 83 children. The accessible flat was utilised during the year for 5 families who had disabilities such as mobility, pregnancy problems, whilst the first floor flat, which has two bedrooms, was utilised for 5 families with older boys, and 6 families with cultural needs. We received referrals for a further 127 families who could not be accommodated either because the Refuge was full at the time of referral (25 families) or they were deemed to potentially pose a risk to other residents and staff owing to a variety of reasons including mental health issues, alcohol and substance misuse and other challenging behaviours. In addition, referrals were received and accommodation was offered to 24 families who decided not to accept.

We accommodate a diverse range of people including black minority ethnic, teenage parents, elderly and frail elderly, those with physical or sensory disabilities and others with a history of substance misuse. We are committed to investing time and resources into staff training as we believe the people working for us are our principal asset. We are aware that the support required by our residents becomes ever more complex each year and we continue to assess and develop our service so that we can meet these changing needs. Our staff have attended a number of training courses during the year including child protection, first aid, drug awareness, adult ADHD, supporting people, mental health. Since the year end, 10 staff have completed a 30 hour accredited training programme on Mentoring which was delivered by Wirral CVS. For a second year, the Refuge provided a 100 day placement for an MA social work student from Liverpool John Moores University commencing in January 2011.

Wirral Women and Children's Aid has joined both the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and have found the information provided by these organisations to be very useful.

During the year the Women's Group continued to meet weekly on a Monday evening in one of the lounges in the Refuge. The format of the group has evolved from a closed group working through eight structured sessions, to a more fluid structure with a rolling programme which can accommodate women at all stages of their time at the Refuge. This mix of women at various stages in their journey has had a positive impact with those who have been at the Refuge for a while encouraging newer arrivals by describing how difficult things were for them at the start and how much stronger they have become as time has progressed. The programme continues to focus on building self confidence, recognising personal hopes and dreams, assertiveness skills and working towards personal goals.

The charity operates the Domestic Violence Helpline which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Refuge has its own website, www.wirralwomensrefuge.co.uk, which provides contact details and explains the facilities available, including photographs. We are sensitive to the need for constructive liaison and cooperation with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations in order to provide a seamless service to all our residents.

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Achievements and Performance(continued)

The role of Outreach Worker is central both in our intervention with women experiencing abuse in the community and to the positive resettlement of our residents. The aim is to keep to a minimum the numbers of women who return to abusive relationships and risk further loss of accommodation and disruption to the lives of their children. As previously reported, we appointed an Outreach/Resettlement worker in May 2010, funded for two years by grants from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales, the John Moores Foundation and the Eleanor Rathbone Trust. The Outreach/Resettlement worker focuses on identifying and providing support and information to women experiencing domestic violence who are living in the community while the project workers' outreach work aims to reduce the levels of repeat homelessness for women who have been in the Refuge and returned again due to issues of isolation, lack of support, difficulty in accessing services, etc.

The childcare workers continue to run both the playroom and the Youth Club. The children this year have covered a wide range of ages from new born to 17 years but the workers ensure that each individual's needs are met so that they feel safe, secure and welcome. This year has seen another first for the Refuge with the appointment of a male childcare worker. Coren was already known to the childcare workers and to some of the children as a Youth Club session worker and is covering the maternity leave of one of the childcare workers. He is providing an excellent positive role model for all the children and young people, something that has been missing from the lives of some of them. A significant donation of £86,658 was gratefully received in August 2010 from the Trustees of Dangerzone being a share of the charitable funds distributed on the dissolution of that charity and some of these funds have been used to cover the cost of the maternity cover so that all the playroom and Youth Club sessions could continue.

Women and children often arrive at the Refuge frightened, emotionally traumatised, financially insecure and with nothing other than what they carry. The professional, supportive, highly trained and caring staff provide them with a unique holistic service which is second to none. The superior, fit for purpose living accommodation provides them with a secure, safe environment. The Refuge gives them the time and space needed in order to move forward, make decisions and plan for a future which will give them a better quality of life and increased resilience.

The Refuge is able to respond to the needs identified by the residents and is dependent on the generous donations received from supporters in the absence of any statutory funding.

The dedicated hardworking team of staff work tirelessly to create a safe haven where children can flourish and thrive and women can take control and begin to realise that positive choices can be made which will improve their emotional and physical well-being.

The Management Committee would like to thank the staff and volunteers who work so hard to provide such a high quality service on the Wirral.

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Financial Review

Results

In summary, total incoming resources were £443,659 whilst total resources expended were £346,065 resulting in a net surplus for the year of £97,594.

Total funds at 31 March 2011 were £394,254 of which £94,947 are restricted to specific funds, £81,318 represents fixed assets (being primarily building costs) and the balance on the Charity's general fund of £217,989 (including the Welfare Hardship Fund which is classified as a designated fund).

Principal policies

The Management Committee expect to maintain a position whereby the combination of fund-raising, fees charged for accommodation and grants received are at least equal to operational expenses. General donations are used for the benefit of the women and children in the Refuge including providing basic food and clothing in cases of hardship, funding activities and days out and assisting families as they move on from the Refuge.

Reserves policy

Transfers between funds are made in accordance with the charity's reserves policy. Details of the policy, including explanations of the various funds, are given in notes 9 and 11 to the accounts. The Management Committee's policy is for free reserves (being unrestricted funds not invested in tangible fixed assets) to be maintained at a level equivalent to between four and eight month's expenditure less depreciation, in order to be able to meet shortfalls in income or unforeseen expenditure. This equates to between £100,000 and £200,000 in general funds and, at this level, the Management Committee believe that in the event of a significant drop in funding, they would be able to continue the current activities of the charity and have time to consider and access alternative funding and/or consider how the services provided by the charity could be changed.

The free reserves at the end of the year were £217,989, which is greater than the upper limit set by the reserves policy. The main reason for free reserves being higher than expected is that the occupancy levels in the current year were significantly higher at 86% than the levels experienced in previous years and therefore rental income received was higher than budgeted whilst costs were consistent with budgeted expenditure.

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Future plans and events since the year end

A comprehensive three year business plan and budget has been prepared in response to the requirements of the Supporting People core funding. Within the business plan are four strategic objectives which will be monitored and updated annually:-

- To explore the possibilities of a volunteer service and register
- To update and deliver the therapeutic Rainbow Programme for children and their mothers
- To maintain and investigate the possibility of employing an additional member of staff as Child Development/Outreach Worker if funding can be obtained
- To facilitate an annual development day

We have identified the following as our key performance indicators

- Strive to prevent women from returning to known abusive partners by giving appropriate support in resettlement and thereby preventing repeat homelessness
- Seek reduction in costs whilst developing services through use and training of volunteers
- Ensure full contractual compliance with the requirements of Supporting People and other funding bodies
- Speedy enrolment at appropriate school for children and particularly those of secondary school age where we have encountered delays
- Multi –agency approach to resolving issues and solving problems/challenges
- Exercise effective risk assessment procedures in order to safeguard residents of all ages from harm and thereby secure the reputation of WWACA

WWACA was represented at a meeting with Wirral councillors on the Scrutiny Committee on Domestic Abuse, following which Cllr Moira McLaughlin visited the Refuge to see the facilities available at [REDACTED] and to discuss the work being done. We are pleased to have been named by Cllr Moira McLaughlin, Mayor of Wirral for 2011-12, as one of her charities for the year and we look forward to working with her and her team.

Since the year end we have held a joint meeting with trustees and managers from a number of independent refuges to discuss issues of common concern and it has been agreed that we form a Forum of Independent Refuges (FIR) to enhance our ability to take matters forward collaboratively. Further meetings are planned to include relevant MP's and local councillors to address the serious issue of funding for refuge work.

In recognition of our 30th anniversary of providing accommodation and support to women and their families affected by domestic abuse, we have decided to celebrate by arranging a one day conference in the autumn for our supporters, both those who we have professional contact with and those who generously support our work with donations in cash and in kind. The theme of the conference is Reflect, Celebrate, Aspire.