

Oral History Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Hazel Bingham

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Location: East Ayrshire Women's Aid

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Interviewer: Elsa Rodeck

Time period: 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s

Groups: Kilmarnock Women's Aid, North Ayrshire Women's Aid, Perthshire Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid, South Ayrshire Women's Aid

Roles: Finance worker (Kilmarnock WA, North Ayrshire WA), coordinator (Kilmarnock WA), treasurer (SWA), manager (Perthshire WA, South Ayrshire WA)

Can you describe what your connection to Women's Aid was and why did you get involved with Women's Aid?

Well, I came into Women's Aid as a paid worker on a short term basis many, many, years ago, '83, as, err ... It was a Manpower Services commission thing, to get people back into work. And I'd just had my family and had taken time off having my family, and what I did previously with new technology, it had moved on considerably, so ... I decided to go to college and do a small book-keeping course, and I just loved it, so I got a post, a part-time post in Kilmarnock Women's Aid. It was called that at that time, Kilmarnock and Loudon. That ... During that time, it was for a year, and during that time I was offered training. I found it absolutely fascinating and I found that I really wanted to help women that had been subjected to domestic abuse. And during that time I expanded my role and became able to provide frontline services as well as doing book-keeping.

Right, so you started out book-keeping...

Book-keeping, yep, got the training...

What year was that?

November '83, and it was the book-keeping that I originally ... the thing that I went in for, but everyone, at that time, we all go through the training, you know, at that time, and it just expanded to me being able to provide frontline service as well. Then during that first year I was there, the

group had applied for Urban Aid funding, which is another source of funding, and it was for longer, it was, like, for five years, so I was given the opportunity to apply for my post, but with Urban Aid funding, so, I did.

So, were you aware of Women's Aid before that?

Not really no, I wasn't aware of it.

Yeah. So, when you first joined what were the kinds of things ... I know you say book-keeping ... So, what were your main activities?

Making sure, right, everything to do with the cash, whether it be, you know, checking the petty cash, administering that, right up to grant funding and negotiating with the local authority for our funding and so on, funding applications, everything to do with finance, paying all the bills and everything. And it was manual book-keeping [laughs], double entry book-keeping, ledgers and so on. I've been back a while. It really was that kind of thing, so. That's what I did.

Yeah. And could you describe a bit more how you then moved into frontline services?

Well again, as I say, I went through the training at that time, it was quite comprehensive the training. I think it took about 3 months. We did it on that kind of basis, read it over an amount of time, and then what I would do is sit in with someone who was delivering the service till I got confident and knew what I was talking ... I must say that in that period of time, the last 6 months of that year really, I was taking part in delivering the service. There was other workers there obviously, paid workers, but with everything else it gets a bit busy, so if needed, if need be I would join in. But like everything else when you're just learning something new you're out and in, 'Is that right? Is that right?', checking everything, and I've always found that aspect of working in a collective very, very good, that you've got your fellow workers to bounce things off, making sure that you've got the right information, you know, you've told the woman what her choices are. And that is something as a manager now that I encourage the staff to do as well, is talk to each other. You know, making sure that they know what they're saying is right. Come and talk to, obviously, management but I think there's that peer support that's so important, and I learned that early on in the collective.

00:04:27 *So was it a collective structure...*

Absolutely, yeah.

...where it was run from the beginning ... and it's still like that now is it?

Not East ... No, we've all moved on. You know, I moved on to ... That was Kilmarnock and Loudon. Then came the period of time where it changed to the East Ayrshire.

So, is it all based in this building is it?

No, no, it's all the Ayrshires, across...

So, the Kilmarnock one is in Kilmarnock. Obviously, that would make sense! Ah...

No, I've only been in this group for 4 years now, 4 years next month.

Ah, so you started at Kilmarnock.

I started at Kilmarnock...

Right, and that was collect-, just to get back to the collectively run...

That was run as a collective and I left there on ... When did I leave? I left Women's Aid because of problems in my own family, sickness in my husband, and I thought, right I'll take some pressure off me and went to Cross Roads Care, and I knew within the first two weeks I'd made a mistake. I was given the opportunity within that year to go to North Ayrshire Women's Aid, and work with them, as a finance worker as well, in Saltcoats, it was in Stevenston at the time when I went to work with them. And also deliver service. Then a year after I was in North Ayrshire, my old post became vacant again in Kilmarnock, so I went back to Kilmarnock. I think I was on a bit of elastic, but I went back to Kilmarnock and carried on there.

Until 4 years ago?

No, 4 years ago. [4 years] I've been here. 5 years in Perth. So it's 9 years ago I left Kilmarnock Women's Aid.

00:06:12 *And had it changed much over that time?*

Yes. Yes. It was still a collective when I left. It's now a management structure but at that point it was still a collective. I knew that I had ... You know, my feeling was always that as the collectives were moving to a manage structure, that that inevitably would happen, it would be imposed on a group if

they didn't make the decisions themselves. And that proved to be the case with a lot of funders. A lot of funders, you know, said 'You really need to get moved into a management structure'.

And do you think that's changed the Women's Aid groups?

For the better. For the better. I think there's a lot of direction, there's a lot of ... now more structure. In the beginning, you know, we didn't have written policies, we just talked about each case, we spent a lot [emphasised] of time talking about things. A collective meeting could last all evening. We used to have them in the evening because we had paid and unpaid workers there, so they could last until about 10 'o clock at night, from about half six or something. You would be discussing things and then you'd think about, well, here's a new situation we've got, how do we actually deal with it? And always at the heart of anything we were doing was what was in the best interests of the woman and the child at the time, you know. And that has carried with me, that I feel it's very much about let's think out of the box for a wee while, and see how we can help. We can't do everything for everyone, it's impossible, no one can. But if we can, and it's possible, well why don't we go that extra mile? And there are times when we have gone that extra mile and it's been to the benefit and I don't regret it one little bit, you know, doing things like that.

So were you a manager in Kilmarnock as well?

I was the co-ordinator, they didn't have ... They only became a manage structure after I left.

Ah ok. So then you've become a manager here?

I was the first manager in Perth. And then I came back here four years ago and I'm the manager here now.

So, what are the frontline services that you've talked to about? What are the ones in the South Ayrshire Women's Aid?

In here? Yes well we have an office based worker and we have, at the moment, three workers who are working in the community. We cover the whole of South Ayrshire, which is quite a big area as well. It's common with a lot of Women's Aid groups, a vast area. Perth was enormous. So there's a lot of work done in outreach, we even meet the woman if it's safe to do so in her own home. If not we find a convenient place, it could be a community centre, it could be a room in a doctor's surgery, or something. But we have a network of places we can go with a woman, as long as it's safe to do so.

And because the time it would take for a woman to come here and have an appointment here and away the back, the travel, the expense as well, the woman can't afford it. You know, they'd take all day practically and then you've got child care, and you've got children come home from school, so. Outreach is happening a lot more. We also have an independent domestic abuse advocate, so, erm, who works with the mainly high risk, you know, in the short to medium term for, erm, taking them through the court or the system or whatever, safety planning at this point as well because they're in extreme danger at that point. We also have a women's refuge, which is a communal refuge at the moment called The Willows. And in that we have 8 spaces. Everybody's got their own ensuite facilities and everything else is shared. And we have workers based up there and we have two children's workers based up there, who do the majority of their work in the schools with youngsters on an appointment basis. And then cover any support for children in The Willows too. We also, we provide our service in the accommodation, The Willows, seven days a week. So we have a shift system, the workers are here till, from 9 in the morning to 7 at night and then at the weekend it's 9 to 4.30 pm, both days. It's ... What's happened with that is any issues would arise, you know, in a communal facility are not escalating over the weekend, plus the women are more relaxed at the weekend. You know, they're rushing about all week, maybe going to get the children from school or whatever appointments they've to go to. And that's the time when they find it's good to talk. They want to talk about their experiences in ... That's more relaxed for the worker as well, and we also have ... They cook communally, they have a brunch or something on a Sunday, share a meal together or something. A real community coming together, in the refuge.

00:11:35 *So, were there ideas that were connected to Women's Aid that were important to you at the time? I think when Women's Aid started it was around the time of the Women's Liberation movement and there were some women who were keen to do something practical. So, that question, for this project ... was wondering about that. If there's not, it's fine.*

It was early on ... I actually started working early on. But the group in Kilmarnock, I think it was established about two years before that, so it was early days, you know, Kilmarnock and Loudon as well. But when I took the job as a book-keeper, it was a job basically. It then became much, much more than a job to me. And the satisfaction you get of actually helping a woman move away from violence ... I learned such a lot, it was a great education to work in that collective at that time. And I truly look back with fondness, the years that, you know, I worked there, it was really good.

So, could you describe a day in the life of your Women's Aid group?

Oh my!

I know you've been telling me a lot already.

Well, as one worker in the network said, and I found she summed it up very well, she says, 'What other job, could you be spending the morning cleaning out a toilet, your hand down a toilet cleaning it and in the afternoon you're speaking to the press'. It's so varied, and I think that is what I find fascinating about working in Women's Aid. It gets under your skin, and it is so varied, and it actually spoils you for any other job that you go to. You'll never get ... Well, I personally never got the same sort of job satisfaction working elsewhere. My heart always pulled me back to Women's Aid because I believe very strongly in what we're doing. I've seen many changes but I've also ... What never changed is the feeling you get when you actually support a woman and a child to move on. And how grateful they are, and you see them blossoming. I've seen women coming in to speak to me about their situation, wanting some advice, and been unsure whether they can sit in that chair or not, you know. 'Oh can I have a cup of tea?', you know, and then blossoming into really strong individuals, you know. It's been absolutely amazing. Then we see them years on ... And also I've had the experience of women that I have supported as needing this service, down the line becoming my paid colleagues. And friends, and close friends. And I find that very rewarding. It's satisfying to see that change in people.

00:14:49 *Yeah. What is it that you think Women's Aid and the workers do that enable that? I mean, obviously, it gives a bit of space, you know, but could you describe what it is? You know, you see people blossom and they go from being very scared and then coming through...*

The fact that we are a specialist organisation, we understand the dynamics of domestic abuse, we understand all about coercive control as well. We know what happens to women, we've heard it time and time again from them, their stories. What I find as well is we're not a statutory organisation, so we're not threatening to take their children away or, you know, have to comply about this order or that order. We're here to support them. We never tell a woman what to do. We lay out what is their choices, and it's their choices. And they've got to make the decision. And whatever decision they make and that might be to go back to the violent partner, we understand that, because it's a process coming away from an abuser. And he can offer them sun moon and stars, you know, he's awful sorry and they'll go back, because what we do realise is that they've, the abuse that they suffer is a part of their life, but there's maybe another part of their life that actually has

deep feelings for this person. And also maybe they've maybe got a family with them, they've got children and, you know, they try to go back again. And where I believe that Women's Aid is unique is that we never give up. A woman could come back to us 100 times and we're not going to say, 'Och here she comes again'. No, no, it's 'Maybe this time she'll make it'. You know, we never judge her, we never sort of say, 'Oh, this is a waste of paperwork' or something like that, you know, 'Here we go again, filling this out, she's just going to go back to him', you know. Family and friends give up, some organisations get a bit, ehm, short with women, but we certainly don't, we keep our doors open. And I think the women feel that, that we're here to support them. The workers that are in our facility, the refuge, have made that very much the women's home and they have got the privilege of working in their home, and they emphasise that to them a lot. That we're doing a job in your home, and there's a lot of respect given to the women, as well. And they feel that, they're supported and not judged for his actions, why would they be judged for his actions. But I'm afraid the term 'failure to protect' has been, you know, bandied about, and women are subjected to that – it's their fault, if they don't leave the abuser. And there's all sorts of reasons why they stay there. But it's, it's a unique service and I think it's an amazing service and I'm really pleased to be in the service just now, where things have moved from us not having any policies and nothing kind of structured, to yes, we do have a structure, yes we are inspected by the Care Inspectorate, yes we have staff who are qualified, and shortly we're staff that are providing frontline service [that] will be registered with the SSSC, and the registration for that for practitioners...

Sorry, what's SSSC?

The Scottish Social Services Council. So every worker that works within Women's Aid will need to be registered with that, so. There's been a lot happened, a lot of changes, and for the better, and I think along with the changes that we've seen, it can be hard, because it was ... It is hard sometimes for the Care Inspectorate to fit a square peg in a round hole because we're not a care service as such. But we have been inspected to **[inaudible 00:18:51]** under that regime for quite a number of years now, and we're all getting used to the idea that we, we do that. But what it's done is professionalise Women's Aid, and I think it's actually helped with the perception of Women's Aid nationally. And the Scottish Government has done a lot as well, you know, to move that forward, with the different strategies they've put in place, different groups that they go to now.

00:19:21 *Yeah. I'll ask about the Scottish Government in a bit. I was just going to ask if you could say, as, a bit about your day when you come in, as a manager. What do you ... I know it will be varied as well [laughs].*

My day now? [laughs]. It can be very varied as well. Normally I just ... check everything, check all the diaries, make sure everything's covered. We're very careful about that, if anyone's off sick, you know, we maybe have to rearrange things as well. It's my role to make sure that externally, with the connections with the local authority, I've mentioned the Care Inspectorate, other funding bodies, that's my role, to make sure that I meet their requirements, go to external meetings, the Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership for example, sit in forums that are relevant to Women's Aid. And check all the emails and that can take forever. And also we have external book-keeping here, an accountant does that, but the ... I still pay the bills [laughs], so I manage to pay the bills and keep a check on how the money's going. I serve on the board as well. So every day can be different, **[inaudible 00:20:40]** a board member's asked me for something which they did this morning, so I've sent that information out. So, all the time you're getting asked for information. And again, I do work closely with the assistant manager, we're in the same room. But we do operate an open door policy, so the staff can come in and they might just want a wee bit of advice, what to talk about a situation that they're dealing with and how do they deal with it. Or that it might be that we need to make sure someone else is going to cover that, when somebody is sick, so. Typical day ... There isn't a typical day, it's whatever's flung at you that day. Sometimes you can structure your day and it's good, you're going to certain meetings, but always, always ongoing stuff.

Yeah. So how many staff are there here?

In this office here? Well we've got 15.

Does that include the outreach workers?

Yes, yes, it does. We've got 15 at the moment. I think it's quite a nice size for a group. It's quite manageable.

How big was Kilmarnock?

It was roughly about the same size.

Ok. So during your time with Women's Aid, have you and your groups – because you've obviously worked in Kilmarnock [and Perth] – have you had links to Scottish Women's Aid, in Edinburgh, and if so can you describe what the link was like?

Right, well at one point I was treasurer at Scottish Women's Aid .

Oh right!

Yes! Many moons ago! Before, when it ... Scottish Women's Aid at one time was a collective as well. So, I could go back to those days when it was a collective and the ... all the other collectives in the network were in effect Scottish Women's Aids employer. That was difficult at times but – you know, because you were quite removed – but I can go back to the days when we had big executive meetings when there were a hundred women in a circle, and you're straining to hear what the other person is saying at the other end of the hall, because they're echoing and so on. Because that's the way we would hold executive meetings. We would have information come from SWA and a decision had to be made. And it could have been a decision about their own pay and conditions or something like that. But anyway, we had decisions to be made and we would meet up with other Women's Aid groups in this big executive meeting. And I was saying, it became unwieldy but at that time that's what it was like. You know, you had to listen to everybody's views. You took the views of your own group, you would have the discussion in your group, you would go along and you would vote on whatever needed to be done. Until it became a bit too much and then they decided they would move into, kind of, regional groups as well, localised group meetings and that was very successful in Ayrshire. We did right down to Stranraer. We had part of that localised grouping. Other localised groupings in the network didn't work as well. Ours did. And even after that sort of, erm, structure was done away with, because it wasn't working for everybody, in Ayrshire we missed that. We missed the coming together and getting ideas, 'Oh, did you know this ... We need to do something about ... An HMO, for instance. Did you know about this training?'. Things like that happened, and also what we did, both nationally and locally is, we would be part of any sort of actions that was to take against something. Supposing there was a grievance in a disciplinary matter, then you could be asked to go in and help another group out with that. Very much helped each other out with recruitment. So we would have two people internally and we'd have one externally, so we all did that in the Ayrshires, and usually kept closely together at that, but I've also done that in other areas as well, you know, went in and interviewed **[inaudible 00:25:03]**. But with Scottish I felt very much at that point we felt more connected, with the national group. Everything has changed, and it's a bit

less like that because we aren't all coming together like that now. And even when it became the localised groups, then it was a representative or two from your localised grouping. So again the decisions would be made, the voting would be made, in your localised grouping and then you'd take that decision to an executive. But cut down from 100 women to something more manageable, you know! But that was good as well, but you still felt connected, you know, to...

00:25:46 *So does that not happen anymore?*

No, because the national office is a company, in its own right. Yeah, that structure has changed. But things have changed, you know, from the '80s really, from my experience. And for the better, you know. I think it's good. I think it's good the way it's gone.

Yeah. Do you have much connection with other Ayrshire Women's Aids for instance?

Now? Erm, what we try to do in Ayrshire ... There's three managers, myself and another two, and we try to meet together, you know, regularly just to support each other and understand what we're all facing. I mean, North Ayrshire did face some severe funding cuts which was a hard time for them. And ... You know, we've all faced difficult situations so it's good to know, that because the managers are in the same situation you can get a lot of support from your peers. So we try to do that. And also celebrate our successes as well, what's heartening, what's good about it as well. But that's about the extent of what we meet together. We do also, across Ayrshire, from time to time, if there's training, we would maybe, if we were laying on the training we'd ask if anyone else can come, so we try to share as much as we possibly can. And I find that's what's really good about the network, that if you put a question out there, someone is bound to come back and support you. You know, I don't feel that people are just closed off from other groups in the network. We also ... Back in the very early days as well, two groups we were part of ... I actually helped them to develop and one was Wigtownshire Women's Aid, which we went down and did public meetings, went and did training with the group of women who were keen to start up Women's Aid, and did that in one woman's front room, with the cakes and everything, it was really good [laughs].

Yeah.

Yeah, so I was privileged to, you know, be part of that, and also to help with Cumnock Women's Aid as well. But then Cumnock and Kilmarnock merged together and became East Ayrshire Women's Aid. So I've been through that process as well.

Ok. So is there one in each council area?

Well, no, it should be one. Well, mostly it's one in each council area but we had two, and there is, other areas where there's two in a council area but they decided in East Ayrshire they weren't going to have two groups, they were going to have one East Ayrshire group. Because Cumnock was Cumnock and Doon Valley, Kilmarnock was Kilmarnock and Loudon. So they became one. There was talk at one time there'd be one Ayrshire group, which would have been not a good idea. But it's good that we've got them in each authority.

00:29:00 *Yeah. So could you describe any interactions with external organisations, or groups, such as social work, or police..?*

Yes, well that has changed dramatically as well over the years and I think the biggest change I have seen is in the police. At the beginning it was like, if something happened, they would, with the man, take him round the corner and get him into a row basically, and let him back out. The way that they have moved forward is just amazing and I think this ... Having a domestic abuse unit, you know, and the task force and everything that's there now, and the good connections we've got with the police, is really good. But I think back to the days of, you know, the Zero Tolerance and so on, and there was a time when we were asked to become involved with training of the police, the whole of Strathclyde at one point, so I became involved in delivering training to different groups of police. Mainly here in Ayr, but that police station [opposite] where we all worked in Kilmarnock, but it was mainly in that police station, sometimes at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning, so depending on the times, it was all different times. So very much, I can see the difference in their understanding.

The work that Women's Aid has done with the police has had a major impact...

Absolutely, absolutely. It's like night and day. Yes, there's been individual officers who haven't changed their attitude but on the whole I would say the majority of them have. And especially come down to the domestic abuse unit, the people are getting a better understanding, you know, of what domestic abuse is, and how complicated it is. So it's really, really good that association now. Social work, I would love to see social work and health being a little bit more proactive, like the police are. Social ... Even police officers, they change a lot. You know the domestic abuse unit will change. So we constantly go and meet them and say, 'Here we are, this is what we do'. I think sometimes that's

what is needed a lot, because there's this perception of Women's Aid that we're only there to deal with women who are physically abused. And also they don't understand the range of services that we provide. You know, so, that needs to be reminded when there's a staff turnover, and also it's always good to have a face, you know. When you're talking to somebody on the phone, you know who you're talking to, you've met them, rather than this voice at the other end of the phone. So I think it's important that our outreach workers, the **[inaudible 00:31:54]** worker will go and meet with the new police, whoever they are. In the same way we did a whole round of this and we're about to do more with social work because social workers have changed, there's been a whole change of the main team in Ayr. So we need to go into the teams and let them know exactly what we do because sometimes it is just passed on and they limit what we actually do. So that needs to be done quite a wee bit.

Yeah. So how do those sorts of more open relationships now, how do they help your work?

Well firstly, when we're dealing with any woman we've got the consent to share, and that's always signed before we would share any information. And she might have been actively involved with social work, or an addiction service or whatever. So we make sure we know who she's involved with, and, as I say, the consent to share information is there, you know, to support her. But that's not consent to share every piece of information she gives us, it's only what's necessary, it might be we share something with social work round about the children. But we don't tell them everything she discusses with us, so. Because we have to build up the trust with the woman, she needs to know that she can, whatever she says to us, she won't be judged and she can trust us to keep a certain amount of information. We always explain our confidentiality very clearly. But we do have that relationship with social workers that's really quite good at times. And they refer to us, and we also, if we've concerns with a family, you know, we'll talk to social work as well.

00:33:44 *Ok, so could you talk a bit about your views of Women's Aid work with children?*

That has really changed as well. I think, we were a good number of years into Women's Aid nationally before there was the recognition of maybe more needing to be **[inaudible 00:34:06]** with children. They came into the refuge with their mother, we had a play room and things like that, and we had volunteers that would **[inaudible 00:34:15]** that did some work with them. We had paid workers. But they changed to actually viewing the children as needing a service, a service that will help them, to move on from what they've seen, what they've heard, because we understand how

much children took on the guilt of it. And just the same with women, to see children blossoming and moving on from that, and understanding it, and I'll give you a for instance ... When I was directing some workers in Perthshire Women's Aid to do this, and it was like ... So anyway, we got to the stage where they were putting groups on and I said, 'Don't worry about it, you know, it will be fine', and the first group session they did ... And I remember coming in the next day, and one worker had the biggest smile on her face. 'Come and see this', she said. And I went through and there was all, writing all over the walls, you know, putting up bits of paper with their thoughts and everything, and I said, 'See, I told it would ... you'd get job satisfaction', and in about 3 - 4 weeks after that she said to me, 'Do you know what happened last night?' and I says, 'What?' and she says, 'One wee girl says to me "I know now, it's not my fault"'. And she was 9. And I said, 'Well, what you have done for her, she'll carry that with her. It's not her fault'. And that is where we want to get children to be, that it's not their fault, and they recognise that. So group work, is just amazing with the children. You see you're bringing them together with their peers. We understand that, and they gel very, very quickly.

One of the things that was, that came out of that kind of work, that is on ... was actually work with a storyteller as well in Perth that I had known and met in **[inaudible 00:36:15]**, so I asked her to come and work with the children's workers in Perthshire, and she's very artistic, and the children made a felt hanging, with hands on it, hands. And they went on to write their own stories, tell their own stories, which was then filmed. And they called that, you know, the name of it was Stop. They came up with that. And it actually tied in with SWA's campaign! But they didn't know that. So at the time that's what they did, and it was filmed professionally. And we had ... Which was really, really good as well, because we decided we'd have a wee premiere, see what they think about this. Because although the children had taken part in this in ... You cannot see, you know, make out who they are, their voices are over it as well. It's still important that they were comfortable with this before it was used in any way, you know, in schools or whatever. So we had a premiere, and it was just lovely. They decided that they wanted really posh cakes, that's what they wanted so, and Ferrero Rocher if I remember rightly. So we said, ok we'll get them something. We got these, sort of, champagne flutes, you know, plastic things or something, got fizzy Schloer or something like that for them. And they came in, all dressed up, coming to their premiere, and at the beginning of it – and I was invited to come along – so at the beginning of it, you know, it was, 'Oh, that's me, that's me' and then silence, and they watched it. And I was so proud of them. And we did talk about it, 'How would you feel if somebody at your school recognised you, and saw it?'. And without fail, every one of them said, 'No,

don't worry about it'. And that actually happened. One of the teenagers that was in it, eh – because it was a mixed group, we brought them together to do this project – and one of the teenagers, he was saying that when it was shown in his class, by the children's workers who were, you know, saying this is children's views of domestic abuse, what hap-, their experiences, and what they need as well. And some of them did recognise ... perhaps it was his voice, his profile or whatever that they did, and they came up and they spoke to him. But he was ... they were really supportive, you know, to him. So to get their voices heard was really, really good.

00:38:48 *Was it shown around schools?*

Yes, it was used by the children's workers, and it was used by anyone who was promoting this service, and in schools as well, they did use it there, for awareness-raising. So now it's ... I don't know if they're still using it, but [it's] certainly on Perthshire Women's Aid's website. So that was really good to hear their voices. And the other thing that's happened here is, One Young Woman's Voice, she had been given support before I came here, for her own teenage relationship, and she'd written her story down, and she asked me to read it, because what she wanted ... She wanted to do something with this story that would actually warn other young teenage girls that ... how easy you could get sucked into this kind of relationship. You know, she said even if it helps one person that would be great. So she showed me it and I said, yes, we'll get this typed up, see how we can use it, and just at that time I got a, a request to work with the Burns museum here, and Creative Scotland, and we turned that into a drama. And yes, so that is used, and it's also ... What we've done with it is, it's broken down into a worksheet as well, and teachers can use it, break it down into different sections. The drama was very, very powerful. It was filmed up at the university and we used that regularly in schools.

Does every Women's Aid group have a children's worker?

No. I'm sure there will be groups in the network won't have. They might ... Or if they have, maybe be part-time, or for instance, they've had a number of children's workers, now they're down to one.

So then does it fall to the other staff to provide the support as well?

Yes, yes. Well, women come into the accommodation with their children, not on their own. If they've got children they need to come. But we're finding more and more that woman are coming to us in their real crisis situation when perhaps the children are being looked after, accommodated

elsewhere. So we found less and less children coming into the refuge at that point. But we still have children coming in. And that work is done. Also, you know, if there's women getting supported on an outreach basis, and they've got children, that's done as well. So I think it's so important, and to see these youngsters, you know, really coming on, it's just amazing, you know, and blossoming. It's really good. Getting rid of the fear as well.

00:42:01 *Yes, so. Do you remember any media stories on domestic violence that were in the news during your time at Women's Aid?*

There's been many, you know. There's articles, you know, go into the papers on a regular basis, I mean, [could spend] years talking about them, but, one of the recent ones that was highlighted here, certainly, was South Ayrshire, or Ayrshire, was asked to be part of the pilot for the Disclosure scheme. And it was launched from our offices in ... not these offices, our, the previous ones in Miller Road in Ayr. So that again was a big media splash of what it was for, as well. And it was also, you know, in the radio networks and so on. There's been many occasions where we've been asked to maybe respond to something that's happened in the media. Or we would use the media to promote the services that we actually do. But we know that it's, unfortunately, a very, very common occurrence for things to be written in the paper about domestic abuse, how women are feeling...

Er, yeah, absolutely. I think one of the things that this question also is referring to is in the '70's when Women's Aid groups were setting up, and how, you know, there's been such a change in the way domestic abuse is thought of, or understood, and how people have written about that in the papers and things because, you know, I'm sure there's still shocking examples of how it is written about in the papers today. You'd hope ... You know, some of the things in the archive [at Glasgow Women's Library] for instance, it's just unbelievable, what was written and how things were reported, and also the change in terminology as well, you know, from battered wives and...

Yes, yes, exactly, that's what I was thinking, just the terminology. I think an awful lot of that is down to recognising the professionalism of Women's Aid, that we are a specialist organisation, we do know what we're talking about. The work that the national office does as well, the work they've done with the government, the government themselves come out with strategies and seeing how important it is to tackle this, has sort of raised the profile, considerably. Again, I'll go back to the way the police are dealing with things, is absolutely raised the profile, so these things can only be good in as much as they way it's reported. But, yeah, you're right there'll always be some reporter will say something horrendous, and you'll think, 'Where did you come from?'

00:44:59 *Yeah [laughing]. So could you describe any significant turning points or times of change, and how were these managed by the Women's Aid group? Either Kilmarnock or...*

As I've already said, I think one of the biggest changes was the need for the groups to be registered with the Care Inspectorate, it just moved the organisation forward quite a bit. And having to make the criteria and getting more professional. And things that we knew, things that we did automatically, it was the way we dealt with the women, the way we dealt with colleagues and so on, then became structured more because we needed, you know, things in place. And I remember Scottish Women's Aid doing a lot of work on giving us model policies, which was a great help, for each individual organisation and you could make the choice to adopt these policies or make your own. Or have an amalgam. And that was a big, big shift forward. That, you know, getting things in place and getting more ... And we're recording as well. So we're showing really clearly the numbers and the way people are affected and who's referring and so on. So that, that was a big, big shift I think.

Ok. And what about changes in Scottish politics in recent years? Has this had any impact on the work of Women's Aid or how domestic abuse is talked about?

Yes, I think the Scottish Parliament and the government has done really a lot to heighten the profile and bring it to the fore. I think one of the things that, as a worker in East Ayrshire Women's Aid, was the announcement of the money for refuge development early on, as we, at that time, had a Victorian building and it was two houses into one, two semis into one. It served a purpose but its days were numbered sort of thing, and we were looking for something else, and to have the opportunity of getting a purpose built core and cluster refuge was just amazing. So that came about because they recognised the need. You know, again, I'll come back to the lobbying that Scottish Women's Aid have done, as well, you know, to bring that to the fore. But to get that money and to have the privilege of working, you know ... To see that come to fruition and, you know, work hard to get the funding to equip it and everything, was a challenge, but to actually see the facility...

What is a core and cluster refuge?

Core and cluster refuge is when the core of the building, and this was very important to us in East Ayrshire, that the actual heart of the building housed the office, a communal lounge, the children's facilities, teenage facilities, and it was individual flats. It was a two story building, and individual flats

around this. And where women go into the building is right where the office is, they're not being missed. It's not a block of flats, and we'll stick an office on the end. It's very much, you know, at the core of the building, and that's what we mean by core and cluster, when you have facilities and a cluster of individual flats around it. And what women felt was that ... There was a report done by Scottish Women's Aid about refuges, and what women were saying is they wanted their own front door within a building that had a secure door as well, you know. And calmness and so on. And it very, very ... If nothing else that I'm proud of in Women's Aid, and there's many things, but I think for me that was the cherry on the cake. I'll be really proud of that. It was an amazing experience to actually ... What do we want, and how do we want it? And a lot of discussion went on, a lot of visiting other Women's Aid groups as well.

00:49:15 *Yeah. Do other groups have that kind of model of...?*

Yes. There are a few, yeah, and more so since that one was built. It was definitely, I think, the way people are moving forward to that, to have individual houses.

So the Scottish government seems to be quite clued up? They seem to be quite supportive, would you say?

Er, yes. They definitely have recognised this ... Women's Aid has been a specialist organisation and they need to consult with Women's Aid. I mean, they've done that with the Equally Safe strategy, and are continuing to work with Scottish Women's Aid. The only problem that I have with the government, the big problem that I have with the government, is funding. And I think that can be very disheartening to groups, that it's either a yearly basis or, if you're lucky, you get three years. And it's so disheartening, you know. People will ... You can't say ... The decision ... And the decision that you, is made for future funding, is always left to the last minute. So you've got staff saying, 'Should I apply for another job?'. We've lost staff in here, and other people, and other organisations, have went onto more permanent kinds of jobs and kind of funding. Because it's difficult, it's difficult. You can't say ... I mean, they're times we've just found out the week before the financial year ends. And that's not uncommon.

It seems strange if the Scottish government seem to be supportive of Women's Aid.

Oh it's been raised time and time again. It fits in with their budget, and fits in with what they are deciding, when their budgets are decided. But, unfortunately, as an organisation, we don't have the

reserve to keep running, to say we might get the funding, you know. We might not. It's difficult. That's the issue. With the local authority it tends to be a little easier, you know. Not easier to get the funding because, obviously, you've got difficulty to get it in the first place. They've got a legal obligation to deal with women who are subjected to domestic abuse. So, working with the likes of ourselves ... I mean, they own the building that we use, The Willows, they own that. So we work closely with the council, and they recognise the funding that's needed, but again, there's constraints in their budgets. And you just wait to see, is there going to be a cut in your funding? Is there? Is there not? Or you get static funding for years and years, and that's just exactly the same. It's a cut because you're not getting the incremental rises, you know, for years. Funding's a big, big issue. You just keep reapplying, and keep trying again. We're hoping perhaps the Scottish Government in this tranche, the next tranche that's been offered, we hoping that it will be three year funding, you know. It can be a de-motivator for some individuals, you know.

Absolutely, yeah.

And you sit and you think, should I be taking more work on, you know. It, kind of, can stifle development at times. It's the main bug bear that I have. You can enter into a service level agreement with the local authority which will give you – that's what we're negotiating at the moment – and it will give us a three year block of funding. With an additional two years after that. So initially five years funding, which is a lot better. But they still will look at the budgets every year to see if they can afford to, you know, fund us at the level, that they're funding us. But there's a commitment to fund us, you know, for initially three [years] and then it will roll on.

00:53:27 *It's funny because it's not as if the need is going to go away.*

No, no. And you think to yourself, and you look at, and you read Equally Safe, and you read that strategy and you think, there's no way, how are they going to deliver it if they don't fund specialist organisations, whether it be Rape Crisis or Women's Aid or whatever. So we know that for them to carry out this strategy they need Women's Aid to exist.

And yet they're not prepared to commit the funds.

Well, it's difficult when they make the decision at the last minute. The difficulty is just having a bit longer. And it's been flagged up time and time again, and it's really good, they have done blocks of three years, don't get me wrong, they have. You just, you know, think right, breathe a sigh of relief,

and you feel as though, right you can really get into things and not worry about that. But it's this past two years, has been ... Well we're, we had a 15 month block, and then we've had another year, which has taken us to June. So after June I don't know what's going to happen. Prior to that we'll find out what the application process is.

So is it a lot more work applying, re-applying...

Absolutely, absolutely. It's just, you know, I feel that is the thing that has been quite draining over the years. I thought we'd established there's a need for it. Why do we have to keep on establishing, there's a need for these services and how you're going to deliver these services? So I find that can be quite wearing.

Definitely. Er...

But again when we look at Scotland, and we look at the government and what they're trying to do, through strategies that are put in place, we see that it is leading the way in a lot of issues round domestic abuse so.

Do you think the changes in Scottish politics, has it had an effect on the way domestic abuse is talked about? Or...

Mhm, I think it has. I think it has. And having the privilege to go up there and lobby, you know, for funding and so on. I've been involved in that as well, early on in the Parliament. But yes, it is, because they're talking about it. It's not a hidden thing now. It's not something to be ... It's sometimes as well something to be joked about. It's not funny, but some people can do that and, oh some people bury their head in the sand, and think it's, it doesn't happen. You know, it happens, it happens in all areas of life, it doesn't matter who it is, it happens. So I think, yes, with the government being willing to talk more about it, yes, it's been good. And to actually, to come out with strategies of how they're going to tackle it.

00:56:53 *Ok. What do you think the impact of Women's Aid has been, both on society and on you at a personal level?*

Well, as I said to you earlier on, on a personal level, it has totally got under my skin. The whole service I feel passionate about it. I think every time, you know, I go to a conference or something like that, and I hear someone's personal story, I remind myself that's why we're here. I think listening to

women's ... how they've made that journey through Women's Aid, and where they are now, is absolutely amazing. It always invigorates me to, to keep on going. And I really don't see myself working anywhere else until I retire! Which won't be that long, but, ehm, it really has had a big impact on me. Also through me, I've had an impact on my family, my friends as well, acquaintances, by educating them about what is domestic abuse.

Yeah. Do you feel that you speak to your family and friends about your work, obviously confidentially, but...

Yes, yeah. No, I, I've had the privilege as well of going out and doing talks, as I told you earlier, you know, police training. It's quite normal for me to go out doing talks elsewhere, into the schools as well. I did that. The Zero Tolerance campaign when that came out, in East Ayrshire, we brought the idea of, you know, using the Zero Tolerance materials into East Ayrshire, and we continued to have that as a, kind of, publicity pack, of our domestic abuse forum at the time. We still had this Zero Tolerance thing and we would use materials from ZT and we actually went in and asked one of the schools if they would work with us, and we put materials together and it sort of expanded from there. So I was very much involved in that. Going into the hospital for instance, we were teaching hospital ... the Crosshouse hospital, and going in there, you know, with nurses. We were especially asked to go in and do that kind of input. So, yes, I have done a lot. And talking to friends as well who don't really understand and opening their eyes to what we mean, you know, what it is. And that's been good. And, on society ... I'd like to have seen it having a bigger impact but I think we've laid inroads, that at least it's being talked about. And...

00:59:44 *Definitely, and through all these ways that you've been talking about.*

Absolutely.

That is an impact on society.

Yes. But I think one of the biggest things is actually getting into schools, and educating youngsters.

Does that happen much?

Oh yeah, we're very, in every school, every secondary school in South Ayrshire and we have a private school here as well, we're into that one as well, do awareness-raising, we do sessions, we do, erm ... At the moment a couple of the schools are working on this on a timeline. So they've been given

information from us, so they're going to end up with a timeline that goes all round about this, a particular room. And it's all about abuse of women through the centuries, and how things have changed, so. We try and make our inputs, you know, good and interesting and engaging, and certainly in the past year it has exploded, the number of times we've been asked to become involved. And, you know, involved with also sexual exploitation, we're doing a lot of work on that as well. So I think that is going to have a big impact, down the road. And I think the more we do work like that, and even go into, erm, primary schools as well and talk about respect, you know, talk about good relationships and bad relationships, we can obviously use the materials, you know, age appropriate.

Yeah. It's so important, especially in this age of the Internet as well, it's just another whole area...

Oh, very much, very much so.

...to be challenged. It's just unbelievable.

Yes, and we do a lot of talking about that, about online safety, yes.

I can see that, generally, the way domestic abuse is understood is getting a bit better but then you have the Internet as well which is a whole other...

I thought one of the, one of the things that our workers do to illustrate that – because once it's out there it's out there – and it's just a simple thing, they take a piece of card, or a bit of paper, and they ask for a volunteer. And they've got a tube of toothpaste. And they ask them to squeeze a line of toothpaste out there, and then they ask for another volunteer, 'Right put it all back in again', and that just clicks with them, you know, it's impossible to get that back in. So we use that to illustrate ... that's what we mean about social media, that's what we mean about you taking ... if you took photographs that are compromising or whatever, or whatever you say, you know online, texts and so on. That is out there, and it really hit the nail on the head with quite a number of the youngsters. A good illustration, just simple! And that is all it takes to get a point across, you know. But we do a lot of work on that, and, yes, yes it is important. And it's one thing that I'm hoping that the government will realise, in the Equally Safe strategy this time, prevention is high up there. And one of the major ways to prevent, you know, domestic abuse is education. Education about what is a safe relationship, what is safe on the Internet, what do we mean by domestic abuse, what's coercive control, all these kinds of things we need to get across, at age and stage appropriate, obviously, and I

would like to see, reinstate the training money that they did many years ago. We had trainers, nearly all over Scotland, and that ... It was training consortiums, you'd maybe get money that would go to a certain area and then, they employed a trainer, or two trainers, and the money would be divided up, that each individual group in that area would get so much of the money to go and do this kind of work. And they would employ someone. And that was really good, there was a lot of good work done then. And then that money went.

01:04:10 *Ah. How long ago was that?*

Oh, the exact amount of years I couldn't tell you.

Yeah, but it hasn't been there for a while?

It hasn't been there for a long while. It sort of went, and it's needing to come back, that's needing to be re-established again, because it is so important. Although, at the moment, our worker who's doing this kind of work is funded through the Violence Against Women and Girls fund, and they recognise the need, you know, for prevention. It needs to be a dedicated ring fenced amount of money, and that's specifically what it's for, because the difference that that makes is incredible. Also not just to go in and, you know, do the training with children, you know, the inputs with children, also needs to be in frontline services. That every woman goes to or every child would come into contact as well. And they change so much and you need to have people that are on the ground who do understand. So yep, that's me flying the flag for that!

Yes! [laughs]. And so what do you think the future holds? What would you like to see happen next?

I think I've said a bit.

Yes.

Erm, really, I know that funding is a big issue for everybody, and I do recognise that, but I think a considerable amount of money needs to be ring fenced to make sure that the services are carrying forth. I don't like the idea of a wee project starting up, see there's a need for it, you develop ... there is a need for it, you develop a service, and then the carpets pulled away from you, and you can't get funding elsewhere. Funding is, is really crucial. What I would really like to see, and I think, I don't know if will ever happen in my lifetime, what I would like to see [is] refuge accommodation free at the point of entry. I think because women who come to ... some are working, some cannot afford

what it costs, or even the difference between housing benefit and that. The fact that housing benefit is paid ... See if it was just a grant that was paid for the running of that, and there'd be nothing prohibiting a woman from coming into the refuge as far as finance is concerned. I would really wish to see the government just saying, 'Take that money out of housing benefit that's been paid already', you know, and put it in a grant form to make sure that all refuges are free at the point of contact. I think that would be amazing.

Yes, because does that stop quite a number of people coming in?

It can. It can stop. You're back to each individual group. Can that group afford to take a loss? We need the income to keep the facility running, and sometimes within that income as well are also cover staff costs, you know, to have the refuge workers paid by that, for the housing management part, not for the support. So you've got staff costs going in there as well. So to have a situation where a woman is coming along and she is working, and when she's assessed for housing benefit she would need to pay say £100, you know, a week, or it could be that difference. Or even if it came to, it was 60 or 70 short, and the housing benefit with her claim, how's she going to manage that over a month, you know? We also ... The situation, it's down to each individual group, have they got the reserves to do that? Is it something that they can use their reserves for? Or do they take that loss in the short term? Do they cut that down, do they ask the woman to pay half the difference? What do you do? And then the other thing is, women with no recourse to public funds when you're starting to go down that road to find out about what their, their status is going to be, you know, living in this country. Now that's a process, again. You know some Women's Aid groups, it's just impossible for them to take on women with no recourse, they can't afford it.

Yeah.

'Cause they're not getting the income.

01:08:45 *So some people can't be helped, you mean?*

It's very, very difficult to, to do that.

Yeah, that would be a really big thing then, to be free at the point of entry.

I think that, I think it's a dilemma for quite a number of Women's Aid groups.

Right, ok.

You know that they come across this. Working women especially, we don't want ... And there again, there you go, me starting again about students as well! You know, depending on their circumstances they don't get housing benefit, so you've got that problem. And you've got ... Well what happens to a student? Ok, well you, eh, you stay with the abuser till you finish your course, finish your education, and then leave him. Or do you give up your course and come into refuge.

So really difficult situations.

It can be extremely difficult situations when it comes down to the criteria for housing benefit. So I would love to see it free at point of contact.

How do you think that would come about? Is that something you...

I have actually said that in meetings and raised it with Scottish Women's Aid.

01:09:58 *Yeah, is that something you discuss with Scottish Women's Aid?*

Yes, I have. I don't ... We were talking about universal credit and housing benefit recently. There's been a subgroup set up, and I certainly did flag that up at that point. Ehm, I think it's something for the future to consider. I think at the moment because of the changes in the universal credit, there's so much lobbying done about this, so much in ... You know, that's a thing for the future. Can it happen in the future? You're asking me that. What do you think it holds? I think there'll be more recognition of the issue, domestic abuse. I would like to think that there'd be less incidences because of the educational type work we're doing. I can't see it being eradicated any time soon. But I definitely think we could be looking at an attitudinal change and people will look at it differently. And see it for what it is, very serious issue. And be supportive, you know, of family and friends. And never to say, you know, just because someone, a male has been brought up in an abusive relationship that they are going to be an abuser, 'Oh, it's just inevitable he will be just like his father'. I hate that kind of thing. So I'd like to see these sorts of comments done away with. But the future for me, saying that, would be great, and I think having enough facilities, and the core and cluster model, of a woman having her own home within a safe secure building, with support and other communal areas in it. Because I think that's important for healing and to move on. And I think within those communal areas as well there should be, there must be a separate room where women can go and do their support plans and meet social workers or whatever, and keep that home that they've

got in there as a sanctuary, a place of safety that they really feel they can move on from. And it's more like, ehm, the way people live. Women with families don't live communally, you know, it's not student accommodation. And that is the shift we're hoping to do, and certainly to that end we, here, have a communal refuge and we have just applied and been successful to get a feasibility study done, which yesterday I've actually written to the chief exec and heads of service [about], so let's see what happens, if we can make, if we can convert our existing property into a core and cluster.

Fantastic. Well good luck with that.

I hope it works. And I hope that – you're talking about the future – I'll actually retire in three years next month. I'm counting the months but I will retire! And I would love to see that, that would be a goal of mine.

Yeah! Before you retire.

Before I'm retired I'd love to see that. As I say, I had the privilege of being so involved in East Ayrshire's refuge, and to be able to accomplish something like that in South Ayrshire, it's a lovely building we've got. It's a ... Outside it's a beautiful building and it's communal. So I'd like to see that happening.

I hope that works out.

I hope so. Well we've taken ... We've put the toe in the water and hopefully it will come. But again, I don't know. I hope that's...

Yes, that's brilliant, thank you so much!

End interview