

## **Oral History Interview Transcript**

**Interviewee: Ruth Farquharson**

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**Time: 01:05:04**

**Interviewer: Mairi Hamilton**

**Time period: 2000s**

**Groups: Glasgow East Women's Aid**

**Roles: Board of Directors member, Company Secretary**

*So can you describe what your connection to Women's Aid was and why you decided to get involved with Women's Aid?*

Well, I was a director of the board for Glasgow East Women's Aid, eh, for five, five, six years, um, when they decided to move from making their own decisions as a collective and they needed a board and, um, so went from shadow board and I was with them from shadow board right the way to full board, uh, and I was the Company Secretary for them for five years but before that I'd been involved with the Women's Aid in terms of training the staff, excuse me [coughs], and before that I'd been involved on the fringes of the Women's Aid because of the employment projects I used to do with lone parents. And it, we, including myself, would take people to the Women's Aid because of, when they turned up to us they would trust us and they would turn up and, you know, you would have like one person who came to me and said she couldn't attend the class that day and she was with her baby and she had a black eye and a burst lip and I says, 'What's happened?', you know, knowing obviously with that, and the baby, you know, it had on a nappy and a coat, just a coat over that and I said, 'What's happened?' and her partner had come in that night drunk and wanted money and she didn't have any money so he took all the baby clothes, the baby milk, the pram, the buggy and he left and he sold it all. So she had nothing. Nothing to give that baby. So our priority was to get money for her and the baby and a) the baby could have some clothes, milk and the rest of it, but we talked, we tried to talk her into going to Women's Aid but she wouldn't do it. She said, 'I can't leave him, he needs me'. And that, some of the things with the women...

and you can't get frustrated because you may think they really need to go into a refuge, but you can't get frustrated because they've got to admit they need the help, they've got to admit the time's right to leave that person, and it can take years before they realise that. Um, I had another one, again trying to get them to go to the Women's Aid, and this was somebody phoned me on my mobile, it was near where I lived, it was Christmas. 'My husband had, uh, kidnapped the children, he said I'd take the children away' and after he'd battered her and she was screaming her head off and I was saying, 'Get the police, you've got to phone, if he's taken the children you need to phone the police' but she just wouldn't and she wanted me down there and she wouldn't trust anybody, and so I went down there. The face was a mess. Uh, I says, 'Right, we need to get the police, we need to get you seen', 'No, no, no, I want my children back'. I says, 'Right, I'll wait here with you' because we knew he would come back eventually because he was just high and he came back and I left but what I said to her was, before I left, 'Let me take you, let me give you the details of the Women's Aid' and I did, I gave the details of the Women's Aid and she did eventually go there. But she didn't want to give up her house you see, because her house was immaculate. It was, it was like she didn't want to do that but people have a perception of what it's like in a refuge and don't actually, they've never actually been to a refuge. And they don't see what the refuge is like and the flats are like there. Yeah, I mean we have the donations that GEWA receives is unbelievable, you know, for the women and for the children. So the flats are absolutely, you know, fantastic condition and equipped with everything, you know, so but it's about moving out of their own houses and things like that. So, that's how I started.

**00:04:24** *Okay, so through the work that you did at that point, was that your first recognition of the issue of domestic abuse going on or was that your first interaction with women who...?*

No, my first interaction was with a friend of mine when we were both Navy wives and we both lived in Plymouth. So this is back in the '80s. And she was getting, um, abused by her husband and she would come to my house and hide under my table to eat something, to eat toast or something like that. Now I managed to convince her to go and we would get the social worker but it had to be a naval social worker because we were naval wives and the social workers wouldn't touch us otherwise unless it was a naval social worker. So the naval social worker came to see us and she turned round and she said, 'Well, it's the man's house, it's not yours' and in the Navy that's the truth. If you're in naval accommodation the

man has all the rights because he's the one who's in the navy and it's his house, it's not yours. Same as the army, it's not yours, you've got to go. If anything happens in a split up or anything like that it's the women that goes with the kids and the man has the house. And that's kind of like what happened with **[name anonymised]**, so she wouldn't leave the house, she had nowhere to go. She had very, very bad relationships with her, um, parents. So she put up with it and she'd hide at our house and then she became pregnant with her third child and she was pregnant because he'd raped her. And I remember she had, we had flats backwards and forwards, so my kitchen window I could see out onto the next group of flats. And I heard the screams and it was **[name anonymised]**'s screams and she was... and so you had maisonette stairs going up to the next lot, so in the alcove of those stairs I could hear her screams. So I'm running out to go to get her and he's booting her in the stomach. You know, she was pregnant and he was booting her in the stomach. And my husband pulled him off and we pulled her up to our house and then he turned round and said, 'You'd better get her back tonight or otherwise she's going to get another doing'. Now you can't report them to the navy. They'll get, they'll get... You can report them to a naval officer and they'll get done for bringing the navy into disrepute but they get fined, it doesn't stop them coming back to the house. They can't do that because it's the man's house. So the women has to leave. So, so she's there with two children was **[name anonymised]**, two children and then another one on the way, she had nowhere to go, so she had to put up with it. We then got drafted up to Scotland and she stayed there. It was after we moved, maybe a few months after we moved, she left him. And I think because her... We were away and she had no-one to turn to after that. That's why she did it. And but her personality, everything just changed, totally changed from being this happy-go-lucky person to it was someone who was, um, very pessimistic about everything, um, it was even her kids. Her, her eldest son, he also turned out to be an abuser when he grew up because he'd seen all this. One of the things which his dad used to do which came out later, his dad used to do, was boot him in the back to make him more into a... toughen him up. He'd just sit there and kick him in the back. But **[name anonymised]** never told anybody that he was doing this [coughs]. So, um, he's turned out into an abuser with... He's got three children and they're all on the at-risk register for what he was like with both the woman and his children.

**00: 08:42** So, at that point did **[name anonymised]** go to a Women's Aid refuge do you know?

She couldn't because in the navy, in the navy there is no such thing as women's refuge and the navy social workers wouldn't give her any information. So although we would say you need to go and find one, you need to leave him, you need to go somewhere, there was nowhere for her to go because you've got to think about women's refuge provision, you know. There was only a few people knew about it then in the '80s. It was there but it wasn't advertised. It wasn't like, now you can go into a library or doctors and there's posters there saying about domestic violence and a refuge and contact this person and that person. You didn't have that in the '80s. There was nothing. They were there but you were literally taken there in the dark. So, you know, it, it's for someone living in a Forces' accommodation and within the Forces community, whether it's navy, whether it's army, RAF, it didn't matter. You never got told these things. You just had to put up with it. So she never went to a refuge. But she did leave him in the end. And, as I say, that's because she didn't know of anything else and she ended up getting a flat, you know, with her children but even that, because she was in, um, Torquay, and even then she never talked about the Women's Aid, so the actual first time I came across the Women's Aid itself was when I moved to Scotland. So all the years in England, nothing. Only when I came to Scotland. That was in the '90s, that I began to get information on the Women's Aid, nowhere I could take some of my, um, candidates if you like. They were on an employability project for lone parents with one plus, I was working there. So we became not just a tutor but we became counsellors and the rest of it. And we had all that information to hand. We had these information packs. We knew that some of the women would need them. Yeah so, and since then, I mean, it's always been advertised and then I started working with, um, Glasgow East Women's Aid. It was a manager, who working as a collective and they needed to be registered with the SSSC [Scottish Social Services Council] so they had to do qualifications and through that you learnt about the work that they were doing because they had to write stuff about the women and the children. So you were reading case studies and things like that. It was horrific, absolutely horrific when you were reading it and then she says to me, 'Why don't you come on to our board?', so I did. And, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time. I only stopped because my health declined and I just couldn't do that. And we felt we were making a difference, you know [coughs].

**00:11:38** *What were some of the ideas connected to Women's Aid that were important to you at the time when you first started to work with them?*

It was the fact that they were there to support women and saying that it's not your fault. You know because a lot of the women believed it was their fault. So you had to get through that. And that for me was the, the... When I, I... Really, the naval social workers and stuff that was my experience where they were saying it's your fault and you've got to, um... It's not your house so he'll stay here and you'll just go out and be homeless, you know, when I've seen domestic violence happening and nothing being advertised to coming to Scotland and it being advertised and it's all there and, um, the work they did with the women around their self-esteem and the fact that they've got these children protected, um, and working with the children was another one. So it wasn't just focusing on the women's issues and saying, 'It's not your fault, please don't ever think it's your fault', also working with the children because the children are affected as much by domestic violence.

**00:12:55** *So can you tell me a bit more about Women's Aid's work with children?*

Well with GEWA – I can only talk about GEWA, and GEWA used to, well not used to, they still do – GEWA kind of, like, specialise, if you like, in sexual trauma. So you'll have children who have been sexually abused as well as the women who have suffered domestic violence so they kind of, like, specialise in that. And they do an awful lot of work... Now they used to have **[name anonymised]** but she retired and she was a psychologist, very well respected in the child psychology world, very well respected and she did an awful lot of work with the children and used to go teaching as well. So the other thing they tend to do is, they do playwork, um, and they did an awful lot around, um... Have you ever heard of 'A Wee Blether'?

No.

Right. So, you know, the child, the child commissioning officer, I think it's Tam, is it Tam Baillie? And he's the child commissioning officer [Commissioner for Children and Young People] for Scotland. And he did a study with children in around domestic violence. And he produced a report and it's called 'A Wee Blether'. And he interviewed children from the ages of, like, three up to seven or eight and he's got

these little things in there about, you know, and so it's very colourful, very pictorial and the quotes from the kids. I mean, some of it's funny because of what they think because you know what kids are like when they come out and say something and you just think, 'Oh God!' [laughs]. And some of it is just heartbreaking. The other thing they used to do was they used to put on plays and the kids would be the ones who'd direct them and they'd help them write it and they'd put it on at the, the conferences that we had. And we didn't just focus on, uh, physical violence because one of the, the ones... I mean, you should have a look at it, one of the ones we did a couple of years ago was 'But he doesn't hit me' and that was the title of the conference, 'But he doesn't hit me', and it was around the emotional side of it. So Tam Baillie's report 'A Wee Blether', you should have a look at and even the conference 'But he doesn't hit me', you know, because we had a lot round that and the children actually did a play at that conference. They also got taken away for, um, like a holiday. So some of them had never seen the sea, you know, so they got taken away down to, I think it was Ayr or something like that, and they did a lot of outside activities. But it was maddening with the funding to do that, so you'd apply for the funding, the funding to take the children away, if the children had been away the year before they weren't allowed to go that year.

*Really?*

Yeah. So it had to be for children who had never been away. Never been on holiday. You're not thinking these children need to have a holiday to you know get away from just even mum recovering from her trauma and has she made the right decision? Because that was another thing. There's a number of parents, of mums, who went back because they missed them. They couldn't cope with not having that life. And it was about control. Trying to break that cycle of control. And you couldn't always do it, you weren't always successful in doing it. And you'd have to wait until they came to you again which they would. Yeah, so.

**00: 16:43** *So did women often come back?*

Yes.

*Repeatedly?*

Yeah. Women came back and, and everyone just worked with them again.

*And was that often starting from scratch...?*

Yeah, you would always start from scratch. Because there would have been something else would have happened. And my own opinion, which I'd voiced, was I know they start from scratch but it's like they're getting drawn deeper and deeper into something and it, it's harder and harder to get that self-belief back, get that self-esteem back because the amount of times you went back to somebody, back again, and they were drawn deeper and deeper into what we call the dark web, you know. It's harder to pull them back again once they go back again and if they fall under the spell and fall under the mind control and it is mind control. The little tricks that the men play, you know, and, and isolation from the family and walking with them to see their friends, so they're always there, they're being monitored, if you like. And, um, it's harder to bring them back.

**00:17:57** *So following on from that, could you describe what a day in the life was like in GEWA for you? Is there one typical day? Is that a thing to say?*

No. No there wasn't. And I have been... Remember I was on the Board, but I had to go in and go in and interact with the staff, so, you know, I could go into the, where the office was, which was across from the police station, but the refuge was away, it wasn't near the office, um, and that was... You'll find that with the other ones as well. Although Hemat Gryffe I don't know, no I think that's just an office there and they've got flats outside as well. I don't know about Glasgow Women's Aid whether they've got the same. Um, their office's one place and then their refuge flats are in another place. And I think that's to protect the women because everyone knows where the main office is, Glasgow Women's Aid or Hemat Gryffe and so the men could Google that and come up with an address but they haven't got the address of the refuge. So a typical day I could go in and anything from, you know, they could have somebody who has moved out and somebody else moving in, um, the changes with the SSSC which was annoying the women, uh, the staff, because the SSSC said every time that somebody made a complaint against a worker, a notification had to be raised straight away about that worker but when you're working with

women who are traumatised you could have all sorts said to you, 'I'm not speaking to her, I want another key worker'. And that poor worker's saying, 'Why?' and they're making a complaint. So you have to flag it up to the SSSC that there's a worker who has got a complaint made against her. And I'm thinking that was their bugbear and that was wrong. And I do too because when you're working with people, um, where they're not coping with their own trauma they will lay out all sorts of allegations. And as long as you investigate it that's fine if you investigate it. Um, and so then I could go in and there's one day I went and **[name anonymised]** says to me, 'Ruth I need to speak to you about this reporter'. Have you ever heard of *The Digger*? Right, so *The Digger* is a pamphlet, magazine, if you like, for a loose word, it's a magazine, it's sold in some of the shops in Glasgow. It's mainly... It started off in up the road there, can't remember what it's called that place up there. It's because my head's all fuzzy. Um, anyway it started up in Possil, Possilpark and that way. And there's a reporter that would get into the courts when these cases were being heard. And he would report and he would say, report on the women, give their names, give their addresses and it was even disclosing some details. Details which the women had never even told their own family. So the women were all of a sudden afraid. Now, we were in touch with the police, um, and we were in touch with our MP. Absolutely nothing that could be done to stop *The Digger* because the Commissioner, the Police Commissioner had already tried three court cases and lost. And it was, 'What can we do, we can't have this? Women are now refusing to speak, they're not going to do this because someone's going to go and report on them and maybe say all about the sexual violence and the family doesn't even know they've been sexually abused. And their friends and it's getting published in a rag'. And that's what it is, it's a rag. If you ever get a copy of *The Digger*...

*I don't think I've ever seen it before in the shops.*

Oh I've seen it in some of the shops in Glasgow but if you see it around, for research purposes, I would get a copy of *The Digger*. Many people have tried to take this man to court.

*So it's still...*

It's still, yeah, and he's had death threats made against him and everything because he isn't just about the women, he reports on all sorts of crimes and gives addresses out for people doing drugs and things, a dangerous, dangerous thing to do. But he's still doing it.

*It's amazing that the court cases weren't successful.*

Nothing, nothing they could do. No. So my, my role really in terms of the Women's Aid was I would be going in for the staff not for the service users, for the women. But then when I used to go around to the refuge, because I would call into the refuge to see the refuge manager and they'd be there and we'd talk to some of the women. We'd also all go out at Christmas, you know, all of us there at Christmas, Board, women, um, children, workers. We tried to encourage women, ex-service users, once they'd left to come onto the Board because we wanted to have that input but we did have somebody, um, but I think they felt overshadowed by some of the, some of the Board members at the time. And I think it's about getting the right person, if a person doesn't have the confidence to speak up then, yeah, they're going to get overshadowed by some people. There's a lot of women out there who will speak up and they're vocal about it and that's who we should be targeting. So I know we're working with Scottish Women's Aid at the moment. Um, it's to do with, about the Board don't want to move into more management structure because collectives don't work not in the grand scheme of things in terms of the SSSC. If you didn't have the SSSC to answer to then yeah. But with all the reports you have to do now, funders don't like collectives, um, because there's no one to answer to. You know, if you've ever been to a meeting with a collective you know you've got decisions being carried over for five weeks, six weeks because no one will make a decision on it. So that's why funders, it's SSSC, it's everything that now in this day and age you need to be more of there's a manager, Board, manager for that, team leaders or whatever.

**00:25:05** *And what are your views on that do you think? That's a positive change that...*

I think that collectives had their day. I think there was a time for them but not now. It's... When you've got more accountability that you have to answer to the SSSC and then they come out and do the inspections and everything else and you have got to make the decisions and you've got to show that you're making the decisions, you can't keep faffing around just bringing something, just carrying

something forward, forward, forward. We as the Board had to make the decisions, some of the managers had to do that too but because they were all managers and when you get a group of what, twelve women you're not all going to think the same [laughter]. So yeah, collectives have had their day. I think they have to have, with the accountability, you have to have that structure, someone to answer.

**00:26:10** *Okay. You did mention there, very briefly, working with the police, so if you want to speak about the police specifically or other external organisations that...*

The police were good. Yeah. Yeah. Um, we wanted the police to be on our Board. To work more closely with them so they could be on our Board and help make decisions. Um, unfortunately we couldn't because Scottish Women's Aid said it went against the ethos to have males on the Board. So couldn't do that. We wanted to but...

*So what were your views to the response, like how do you feel about having men on the Board?*

Everyone on our Board was split fifty-fifty because, you know, you had a couple Board members who they were working in Women's Aid or on projects but they'd also been through the domestic violence themselves. And it was fifty-fifty where some saying, 'No, definitely no men' and I'm saying, 'Why, you've got domestic violence in men too?'. No one talks about that because, you know, that's not what we're here to do, um, but I says the police, I thought the police should be on the Board to help us make those decisions and policies and procedures because then they know and if they know what our procedure is and they can pass that around to the other police and... I have to admit with GEWA the police were excellent. They used to respond. If we had meetings they would be in there. They were very, very, they were proactive rather than just hands off. And it's not the same everywhere but I have to say my experiences have been really good, positive.

*That's really good.*

And, as I say, I do realise it's not the same everywhere.

*So do you think if Scottish Women's Aid had been supportive of having men on the Board or if generally people had been, do you think the police would have been happy to do that?*

Yeah.

*Yeah, okay.*

Yeah I think they do.

*This might be an obvious question but was there no option of having female police officers?*

There was an option but there was no female police officers who wanted to do it.

*Right, okay.*

But again it was this thing of, um, no men and I sometimes think, you know, if you've got... I understand you have all females working in a female-only project but they also go to their GP who is a man and they might be dealing with teachers who are men, they, the police, most of the police who come round there's a woman and man or just two men, very rarely do you get two female police officers, you know. Nine times out of ten you get a female social worker. You know, you go into hospital most of the doctors are male. Um, so interaction ways, that way I didn't see what the problem was having a man on the Board. I understood the fact that we couldn't have the men interacting with the women, one to one service delivery level because the women are at different stages but I also think, and I know we're not there for Women's Aid that domestic violence is on the increase for men. You have gay partnerships where they're suffering from domestic violence, you have men who are being abused by women, and it could be that they suffer from a condition where there's rage associated with it. Women have stabbed and killed men. But that's not what we're here to talk about and I just think I like equality. That's... When I talk about domestic violence I talk about domestic violence as a whole and not just with women and I know we're doing this for Women's Aid but for me domestic violence affects all aspects of society.

**00:30:28** *Yeah, um, what about other external organisations whether that's social workers or...*

The social workers', lawyers, we had a particularly nasty situation I was involved in and this was we'd had to write a report to the courts because there was an adoption procedure going on. The foster parents wanted to adopt the two children and we had to give report on mum's capabilities and the rest of it and the report actually did say mum would never be able to cope with the children, which is rare to do that but when you've been assessing this woman and working with this woman for a while you do have to look at child protection issues as well, so mum was never going to be able to look after the children. So that report went and mum didn't like it, for obvious reasons, so we ended up having these three solicitors involved for mum, four solicitors, one for mum, one for biological dad, one for the foster parents, and one acting for the children. You try and coordinate four solicitors and answer them.

*[Laughter]*

You know, and I was the Company Secretary and I'm the one with all this paperwork thinking, 'Well, they're saying that and they're saying that, it's all the same thing, the children need to be protected'. You know, you've got to look at that and there's a report clearly defining it, it wasn't just our decision, it was everyone's decision. It was the social worker's, it was the school's, it was the doctor's, you know, the psychologist's. It wasn't just our decision that the woman was incapable of looking after the children and will never be capable of looking after the children. It was after intense support over a significant period of time so no-one makes that decision lightly.

No.

Especially Women's Aid because you feel, you feel you're a failure, you've let a woman down, you're a failure, you've not been able to help them, support them [to] grow, develop, they've gone backwards.

*Yeah, so how is that situation resolved then...?*

Well, the children were adopted, the children were adopted in the end, yeah.

*And how did the lawyers engage with GEWA at the time?*

Just through letters, they wouldn't even meet us [laughs]. It was just through letters. And then I was just having to sift through all these letters and it's me who is doing the letter writing back because if you phoned them they were always busy. Yeah. They didn't... Lawyers don't like talking to people. They just, if it's on letter, you know... Because lawyers think if they talk on the phone, and I'm sure they're aware of their own, in case I slip up and say something. So it's always on letter.

**[Section removed at request of interviewee]**

**00:34:56** *What was it like working with the other people on the Board?*

Well, they all came from different backgrounds.

*Yeah, it must have been quite interesting.*

**[Name anonymised]** was representing the traveler community and so she did a lot with the traveler community. She was a traveler herself and then you had **[name anonymised]**, who was Chair at the time, and she worked for a Women's Aid as a manager but she, she also had personal experience of a Women's Aid. And then we had a couple of solicitors on there. **[Name anonymised]** was the ex-service user but she just, she just walked in the end. She was just overshadowed by everything. Um, we had somebody who worked from the schools. We had **[name anonymised]**, she was a head teacher of a school that worked a lot with GEWA. So she's actually the Chair now. Okay. Yeah. So yeah, we had different backgrounds and experiences and it was good because I could say things from one perspective and **[name anonymised]** could come at it from another then you had our lawyers who would come at it from a legal head all the time. Um, so yeah, it was different. It could be challenging at times but then again it's when you've got people with different views and you don't necessarily agree and you have to vote on something you know four of you've got to, you know, it's quorate so you've got to have that minimum, um, yeah.

**[Section removed at request of interviewee]**

**00:40:46** *So what was your relationship like with the workers then because it sounds as if they came to you?*

They did. Often they would, they would come to me rather than go to anybody else, even the Chair. They'd come to me and I think it was because they knew me and they'd all got to know me very well because they'd been doing their SVQs through me so I would assess them and I was the person who got one to one and I'd listen to the problems they were having and would say well you could do this, you could do that, you know, and they knew that I wouldn't say anything to anybody else. So they all had different, different problems with each other and I never, ever, ever disclosed that that person had been talking to me about that person or whatever or the work that we're doing with that child or that worker or you know that mother. Never disclose that. Just getting things off of their chest. But they knew when I came on the Board, they knew when they phoned me that I would do something. So if somebody said we need you to phone the police for this, okay and I'd phone them and get back straight away. We need you to come in here and sign this because I can't get hold of anybody else, right fine. Because I was literally... Because it was just in Easterhouse so I would get in the car from here and say, 'I'm going out for an hour' and I'd go over there and do what needed to be done and be back again. And that's why they used to trust me because I'd let them, because they were used to getting things off their chest on an individual basis and me saying, 'Do you want me to do something about it?'. No. Fine.

*So a lot of the time it was just them having somebody to listen?*

Yes. They did have external, um, counselling. They needed it so there was, um, **[name anonymised]** who did a lot of work around sexual trauma and **[name anonymised]** and they needed the external counselling more than say someone that, like, worked mainly doing the office work and processing a lot of the wages and stuff like that [coughs]. Their contact with the women was limited. So they would have contact with them because they all took turns on the crisis line and things like that but some of the other workers were very much like that and they needed to have formal, uh, counselling outside. They needed it for their mental health, you know, if you're hearing horror stories all the time, you can't do that.

**00:43:26** *And did you say that you're still in touch with some of the...?*

Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There's, the SSSC has now put another little thing on everybody because I've had Glasgow Women's Aid at me as well. So because they're all collective managers they have to have a certain qualification so they did that, they are very proactive, same as Glasgow Women's Aid did that. And now the SSSC have put another strapline on by saying that not only do you have to have this at a level 4 for a manager you also need to have these units from, uh, as a practitioner so that's level 3 so it's like taking a step down to what you were doing. You cannot have that and do that and you can't be registered as a manager until you've done this and they're saying, 'Well, we thought we did everything' and I'm like, you know, I've got one of them I'm in contact with at the moment and she says, 'It's baby brain Ruth, it's baby brain' and I says, 'You'll be fine. It's a scoosh for you, you know'. She had, uh, three children boom, boom, boom one after the other and I'm like [exhales]. I couldn't do that, no! I need a few years to get over mine before I had another one, before the trauma of that again! But hers were only, she had one at maybe under a year after the other. And then she [had] another one a year after that.

*Mhm, quick succession.*

So she had one under a year and then all quite quickly. So it was like she was on permanent maternity leave, you know, and then she's back again.

*Yeah. So that's a long term baby brain then!*

Yeah. Yeah, that's not good.

No.

I couldn't have done that, no.

**00:45:16** *[Laughter] So you mentioned as well earlier about, uh, having Scottish Women's Aid sort of referring or advising...*

Yes.

*...you. So could you tell me a bit more about GEWA's relationship with Scottish Women's Aid?*

GEWA's relationship with Scottish Women's Aid [is] not great. Because GEWA feels they don't get anything out of it. Because as far as Scottish Women's Aid's concerned they are the political arm, the campaigning arm, um, and they'll maybe do consultations for the government and it'll say that we've consulted with our member Women's Aids and GEWA go absolutely nuts and say, 'No, they never'. They never consulted with us. It's like GCVS [Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector] and SCVO [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations]. So GCVS is a council for the voluntary sector, um, third sector interface. We've all been changed so the Volunteer Centres and the Councils for the Voluntary Sector, which I don't know why people think because we've got the word council in it, it means we are part of the council. We're not. The council bit means all them little members who come in and we do a lot of stuff for them so we collectively, you know, we have members and we call ourselves a council for the voluntary sector. So we filter everything out. So we're the largest one you've got in Scotland then you've got Edinburgh behind that. Anyway, so the political arm if you like is SCVO, Scottish Voluntary, Scottish Council for the Voluntary Organisations. So they're the political arm with the government and they do a lot of campaigning and we equally get upset when they say [they] consulted with local CVS. And we're thinking, 'No, you haven't, I've heard nothing off you for a couple of years'. So there's a pulling if you like between the Women's Aids and SWA. Because the Women's Aids are doing the work, they're doing local campaigning, you know, they're, they're identifying issues within local councillors, they're meeting with their local councils, with the police and they're getting things sorted. And they report things to SWA and then nothing gets done. So they're a political advisory group, so yeah GEWA doesn't have a great relationship with SWA. Um, although I do know they put on a lot of training so I've been on some of them [laughter]. And I know that, I know that when I, I don't know whether Motherwell Women's Aid has been closed now because you know when they were shutting some Women's Aids down and amalgamating others? Um, so I don't know whether Motherwell Women's Aid's separate but they also didn't have a good relationship with Scottish Women's Aid and neither did Monklands Women's Aid,

they didn't have a good relationship. Because I worked with quite a few of them, uh, with their staff. Yeah, so I don't know about Hemat Gryffe, you'd have to talk to them about their relationship.

**00:48:49** *But generally, um, like, what would you want to see happen with that relationship in the future or do you think that's....?*

Well I think if SWA changed a bit to be more approaching, more approachable and do something, do something for the Women's Aids. Do something for the campaigning on the issues for the local Women's Aids rather than, um, domestic violence in general.

*Mhm, within society?*

Yeah. They need to do something on the issues of the Women's Aids in the local area. If, if there's, there's Women's Aids in danger of being shut, now Monklands, God forbid, Monklands was having all their refuge provision taken off them. Now I don't know whether that happened, but that was the plan was their refuge provision was going to be taken off them. Um, it's **[name anonymised]** who's the manager there. And there was going to be a signposting mechanism, signposting for Cumbernauld and Airdrie and Coatbridge. It is a massive, massive area, geographical area and nowhere, nowhere for women to go in that area.

*What's the signposting mechanism?*

They would just be an information centre. So there would be no, they do have or they did have refuge provision in terms of flats for women to go to but the plan was a couple of years ago – and I haven't spoken to **[name anonymised]** for a couple of years – uh, was that the local authority wanted to take the refuge provision off them. So there was going to be no refuge provision in the, um, Monklands district. And that included Cumbernauld, which is massive.

*Yeah.*

An absolutely sad state of affairs if that's the case. So where, where were these women going to go? Because they didn't fit into any catchment area. Um, I don't know whether Motherwell's providing

refuge anymore. And if that's the case that's all of North Lanarkshire with no refuge provision. That's shocking.

*Mhm.*

And statistically that's what's happening. Women's Aid were a political, um, how do we put this? There are times in politics when the government says we're going to be going down that road, that's what we're going to be championing this year, next year whatever. So women's refuge and Women's Aids were a political champion a few years ago but now they've shifted because you've got the reshaping care for older people's services then you've got the Everyone's Children and then you've got the Road to Recovery documents. So the political agendas now is where they want to throw money into is addiction services, children's services, education and the one I was at the other day, uh, by the Scottish Government, um, is at the moment you get six hundred hours, um, free childcare, they want to double it by 2020 so we were there one half of the Women's Aid and well I was on GVS but I was also Women's Aids and there was people there saying, 'Well, it's not working at the moment, there's not enough places to fill the 600 hours of free childcare, you haven't got enough nurseries in local authorities' and there was loads and loads of issues identified to the Scottish Government at the last consultation so that was last week and so how are they going to fix that? That's their priority. Women's Aids are not a priority, you are not a political champion.

*And how do you feel about that?*

I think it's terrible, you should always be there. It's, it's... If you're going to look at everyone's children and children's services and looking at the children's agenda well, of course, how can children, a child thrive in a toxic environment which is what they are?

**00:53:08** *So, what do you think the future holds then if, if given that domestic abuse has fallen off the political agenda?*

I think it's going to be tough. I truly think it's going to be tough. Um, Women's Aids are struggling now to get funding and it's, it's a sin because the work that they do is fabulous. And sometimes I think if they

called themselves something other than the Women's Aids, they'd get the funding. Like, uh, you've got places like the Glasgow Simon Community where women's projects and those women's projects are in Women's Aid but they may have addiction issues. Now a lot of the women who come to GEWA have addiction issues. So, but, so if you re-registered as something else like a women's service, all of a sudden you're opening that out to addiction and alcohol problems which 90% of them have that. But you're, you're, you become part of that political champion bit then. It's the Women's Aid bit they don't like and I think it's to do with equalities. When you look at equalities, as I said before I am a believer in domestic violence is domestic violence whichever gender that we're talking of and I think that the problem that the government don't like and funders don't like a) the collective bit, they don't like that at all and it's women, Women's Aid, it's that, there's a stigma because, as I told you, it used to be, you know, years ago it was like under the cover of darkness and in you went and then there wasn't a stigma but then I think there is a stigma again.

*Yeah and do you think that's specifically attached to the fact that it's a women's only service?*

Yes, I do. I do. Whereas with the other services that I work with such as Glasgow Simon Community have got women's only projects and men only projects, um, that's because they're dealing with the addiction issues and one of the problems that you can get in addictions, especially when someone's still using or they're on meth, is that the relationships are very intense relationships. So if you have male and female and they can't handle a relationship and it just sets them right back. So they need to focus on their own recovery rather than building a relationship with somebody, like trying to have a fulfilling relationship because they can't do it yet. They need to be able to have a relationship with themselves before they can have a relationship with anybody else. But it's very common. So that, that's where they get their funding from. It's addiction services, having money thrown at it like that with the Road to Recovery agenda. It's all about addiction services and they're having tonnes of money thrown at them. So if the Women's Aid looked at it from an addiction point of view they'd get the money. I think it's the word Women's Aid in terms of equalities that they don't like and I don't see, and I don't see them surviving in the way that they run at the moment for long and it's a shame because they do provide a valuable service so they need to either [sigh] call themselves something else or diversify, I don't know.

*Yeah. So do you think... How long a time frame do you expect that they won't be existing anymore?*

I think within ten years you'll see Women's Aids being information only centres, sites rather than anywhere for refuge provision. It's the refuge provision that's being taken off them, uh, and that's what's desperately needed. We can all give information but we need them to go somewhere safe and secure. And if we don't have that safety then they're not going to engage with the Women's Aid. It's pessimistic I know, but it's because I've seen it going like that for the past few years and talking to people out there and they're panicking because... You know, like **[name anonymised]** with this refuge provision being taken off her and only being able to signpost and lobbying governments. East Dunbartonshire Women's Aid's shut. Nothing. So you're already seeing movement from the government and the local authority not funding them.

*Do you think there's a chance that it might come back round in a way eventually...?*

You have a big circle of, you know, okay that was a political champion last year and for the next five years we'll be a political champion because we've got it in our manifesto so we'll do a manifesto for the next three or four years and somebody else will be in it. So, I don't know. Maybe. I don't know.

**00:58:10** *Um, and do you remember any media stories on domestic abuse that were in the news when you were Director of the Board?*

There were a few. We did actually deal with a few high profile cases anyway.

*In GEWA. Right.*

Yeah. We did deal with them.

*And then they became big press stories across the country or...?*

No we tried not to have any press releases with women because of the women we were dealing with. And it was like these were the women who the other women despised because they were in prison for child murder. And these were the ones who didn't... Well, there was one, so we had the two within a couple of weeks of each other. So the woman was coming out of prison and it, and we had to make the decision as a Board, and the woman was coming out of prison and technically she made the criteria for Women's Aid because she had been abused. But she had, she had murdered her child. And the other women were like, 'We couldn't do that', you know, so it came to us and it was, the decision was no. Although they met the criteria for Women's Aid, you couldn't ask that of anybody, of the other women some of them who'd lost their children to all of a sudden interact and have this person in refuge. Then the other one that came, came it was only a couple of weeks after and the local women knew everybody in the area and we were asked to take a woman had been referred to us from the social workers, been referred to us with a child. So that was fine, everything on paper met the criteria and the next thing we found out that the woman was pimping the daughter around the East End and she was only ten and she was pimping her out. Well, the women wanted to claw her limb from limb. You can imagine. So we had to intervene in that case. And there was no way any other Women's Aids would take her because of what she'd done and she did ended up being convicted of it and the child was put into care. But you can't, you've got to watch the other women as well. You've got to listen to them and because they have a knowledge, far more knowledge sometimes of a certain area than you do. But, yeah, that was a bit of a tough one. Because you think, you automatically think a woman, a woman does that to her own child?

*Yeah. It's hard to get your head around it.*

Yeah. Can't get your head around it.

*So they were reported or did you try to keep those out of the press? How did it...*

No, the one with the, they were coming out of the prison that was never in the press but she had been in the press because of the murder.

*Yeah.*

Um, and then the one with the, who pimped her daughter out that was in the press but nothing was said about her ever being at GEWA.

*Right.*

So we, we would have press stuff but not without GEWA being mentioned. And sometimes GEWA was mentioned in other things, you know, if we were doing, like, conferences. Our conferences were very, very well attended, um, because we were to the point, we made sure it was relevant, and there were a lot of work that went in to it. So the old, you know, um, I think there were two conferences a year and they were very well attended on that score. And we'd get the right speakers and Tam Baillie usually comes.

**01:02:06** *So what would you say has been the impact of GEWA, as your Women's Aid group, on society and then for you at a personal level?*

Oh, for me on a personal level it's, uh... I've been more of a champion, if you like, of Women's Aid. I want to go out and find more, I'm that type of person who wants to go and find more and more knowledge and what's this person doing, what's that person doing, bringing ideas back and that's me, um, so I've become more of a champion of women's rights. Uh, so that's the impact that GEWA has on me. And I can get very, very annoyed when people... I can shout at the television when they go on about certain statistics and don't even get me started on Donald Trump.

*Oh, I know.*

You know.

*Let's not go there.*

We're not even going to go down that road. But, um, that's for me personally. And then GEWA in the community, it's actually viewed positively by, because of the willingness of the workers to interact. They

don't just say no, no, yeah, this is right for mum, you will do this, you will do that. They're willing to look at all, all sides of the coin. They're willing to work with people so that... And that's the thing and you don't get, considering where, where the refuge is based, you know, with all the other houses, the local area, they don't complain about them, the refuge. They know it's a refuge but they don't, you know, you can get some complaints around, 'I'm living by a refuge and I don't want these people round me' and you get it. Um no, never had any complaints.

*That's really good. It shows that the community's supportive of what's going on.*

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they are. And we have, uh, fundraising at, um, Asda, you know, with little boxes and that go to GEWA. And we're up there sometimes at the Asda, up at the Fort and I'll go shopping and then but I would happen to be at the Fort and I'm like, 'Put your change in there' to my husband'. He says, 'What?', 'Put your change in there right now, it's GEWA!'.

*[Laughter]*

So yeah, he knew all about GEWA! [laughter]

*Before you met?*

No when I was, you know, because I would get really mad sometimes and I'd say this has happened, that's happened, whatever. So he knew all about it and the Women's Aid. In the end he'd go, 'Don't, my heads bustin' Ruth'. He says with women's rights! [laughter]

*[Laughter] Yeah.*

He says, 'What about my rights?' [laughter].

*[Laughter] Um, what else? I think, yeah, I mean, is there anything else you want to add because I think we've maybe covered all of the questions. Is there anything else you wanted to say?*

No. No.

*Shall we call it a day then?*

Yeah, I'm fine, yeah.

**End interview**