



# 2019-2020 IMPACT REPORT



## **Welcome from our CEO - Nicky Panton**

This year has ended on a rather challenging note, with the outbreak of Covid-19 creating changes to our way of life, impacting on people's physical and mental health. But never more have I been so proud to be a part of Stepping Stones, the team continue to support the most vulnerable women in our community, whilst juggling their own personal challenges. But of course we shouldn't focus on Covid-19 as there were many other positives from 2019 – 2020. This year we spent some time reviewing who we are and it was a great opportunity to think about where we've come from and where we want to go. I am pleased that this year we have also worked hard to engage better with our service users, asking them about their experiences and what they'd like to see change. This is something we plan to continue next year. We pride ourselves in being responsive and we will continue to respond to changes in circumstances and need; ultimately we are still here for the women that need us and we will continue to help them be their best selves.

## **A message from our Chair - Sandra Brown**



I had been a Trustee with Stepping Stones for 18 months when I became Chair and I thought I understood the scope of the challenge facing the charity. Then the pandemic struck and changed the nature of the support the Stepping Stones team could offer to service users and their families. The women support practitioners quickly adapted to providing telephone support to service users whilst working from their own homes. The Board of Trustees is so proud that the team has continued to support the vulnerable women in the community and has been so proactive in identifying ways of improving what they offer and how it is provided, whilst juggling the personal demands on their time. Unfortunately the demand for the charity's services has continued to grow during this difficult time. We have been reviewing what services the charity offers and considering our future strategy via a series of review meetings over the last few months. Service users' views have been important in helping us plan for the future and continuously develop the support we can offer. We understand that the sector in which we operate will be facing even more challenges than previously, not least financial ones. We are confident that we will be able to meet the changing demands for support, not least due to the continued professionalism and dedication of our staff.

# Luton - a town of two halves

Luton is a diverse and multi-cultural town with around 130 languages spoken. Its population has grown by 13% since 2000 to 214,100. It is home to over 7000 businesses (120 employing 50 or more staff). It is incredibly well connected both to Europe and the rest of the UK, in particular London.

However, big challenges remain. Luton is the 59th most deprived Local Authority with more than 40% households living in relative poverty in some of the town's most deprived wards.


- 46% children living in poverty – second highest rate outside of London
- 26% working families living in relative poverty
- 90% of Children's Social Care services are linked to domestic abuse, substance misuse or mental health.

Labour market figures (Nomis 2020) show us that in Luton, the unemployment rate for women is double that of East of England, sitting at 5.9%.

## The issues facing the women we support

Most of the women we support have experienced domestic abuse (covering a range of emotional, physical and financial abuse). Many also have complex, multiple and interlinked needs including mental health, offending and substance misuse. Over the last few years, we can evidence increases in issues around mental health, accommodation, finance and debt, all affecting the ability of women to achieve independence. In many cases, the families we support have children on Child Protection registers or Children in Need Plans and often women are struggling to navigate the complexities of the family courts. We have also recently experienced a significant rise in the number of gang-affected young women accessing our support. These women are at a high risk from sexual violence, exploitation and abuse from their peer groups.

Our service is designed to target these high-risk individuals and address their needs through our holistic interventions and by collaborating with other agencies. Often women have difficult relationships with statutory agencies, who they consider to be authoritative or imposing restrictions and where they can sometimes “fall through the gaps”. We offer women an alternative source of support without the restrictions of mandatory services where they feel they are not judged and can build trust and we can facilitate collaborative working.



In 2019, we gathered the views of our team, trustees, partners and service users to review and confirm our vision, purpose, values and personality.

## **Our Vision**

*As a direct result of our work we will have built stronger communities, by putting systems in place that enable women to thrive and be their best selves.*

## **Our Purpose**

*To equip women who have suffered abuse or are vulnerable due to substance misuse, with the skills, hope and resources they need to make positive life changes.*

## **Our Values**

**Safety** : We believe everybody has the right to feel safe and secure to grow and make their own decisions

**Collaboration:** We work respectfully with women and with a breadth of partners to enable women to move forward with their lives

**Empowerment:** We support women to make changes by building and recognising their own strengths and skills

**Informed Choice:** We give women the information and support needed to enable them to make their own healthy choices



## Our Services



Our services and programme of support has been designed and shaped by our experts - the women who use our service and our Practitioners - in direct response to need. We deliver our support in a trauma-informed way; without judgement and in collaboration.

## We provide:

- One to one support
- Advocacy
- Group support programmes (Freedom from Abuse, Trauma and Anger)
- Free childcare & parenting support
- Employment, training & education
- Counselling
- Legal advice
- Peer support
- Internet access
- Access to donated food and clothing



And above all else, we provide safety, a friendly welcome and a listening ear.

# Our support in numbers

640 referrals  
received

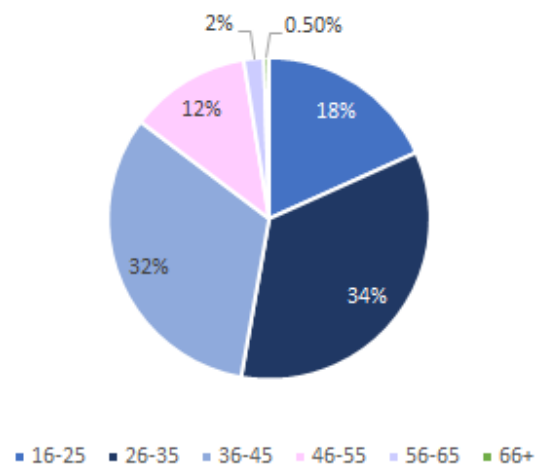
35% self-referrals

17% Luton Council

12% Bench CRC

520 women  
supported

Age of our clients



53%

56%  
*single or separated*

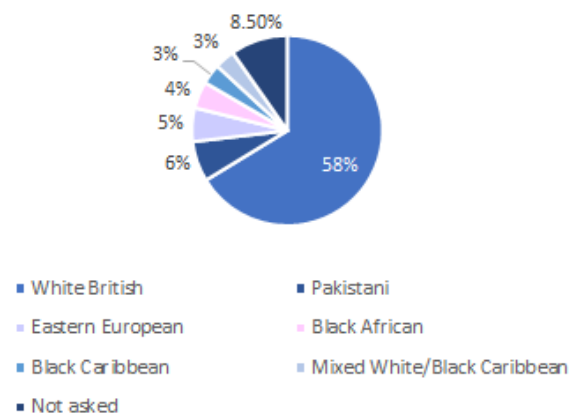
*have children*

78%

53%

*unemployed*

Ethnicity

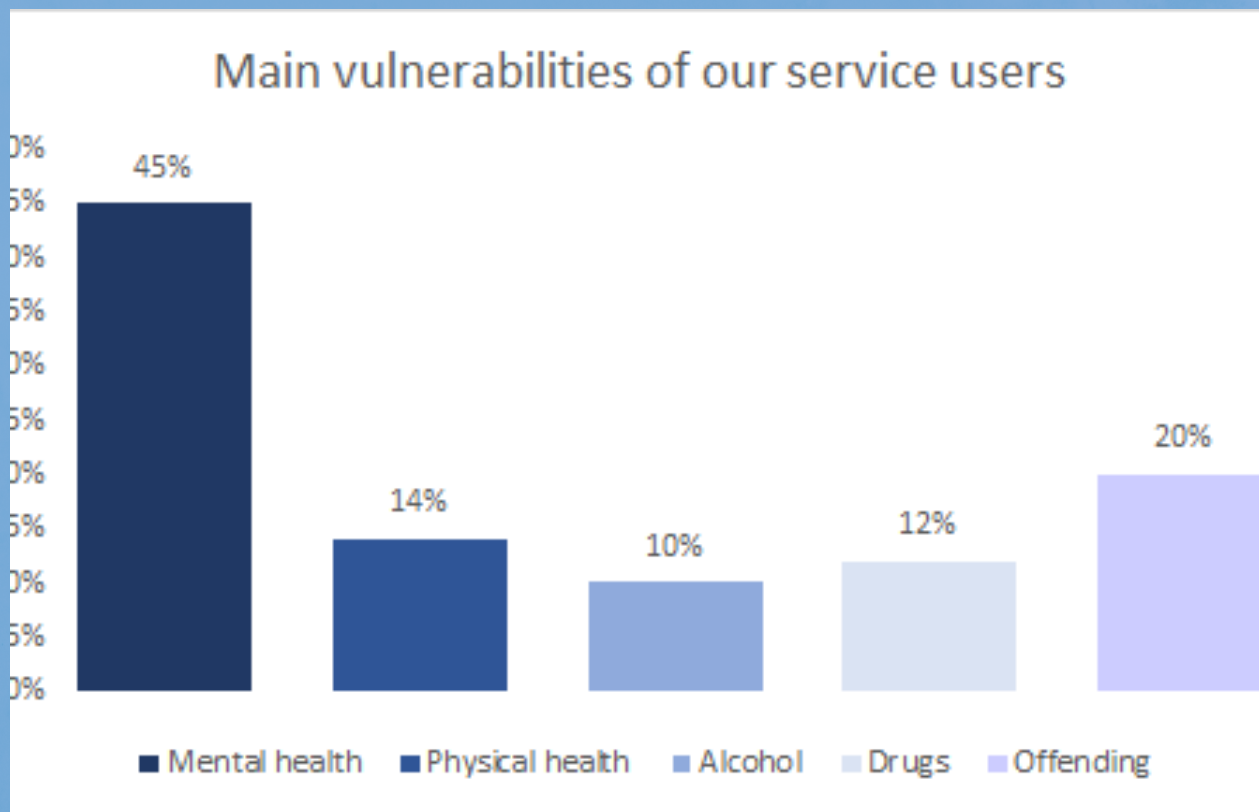




# Profile of need

81%

women had experienced current or historic domestic abuse



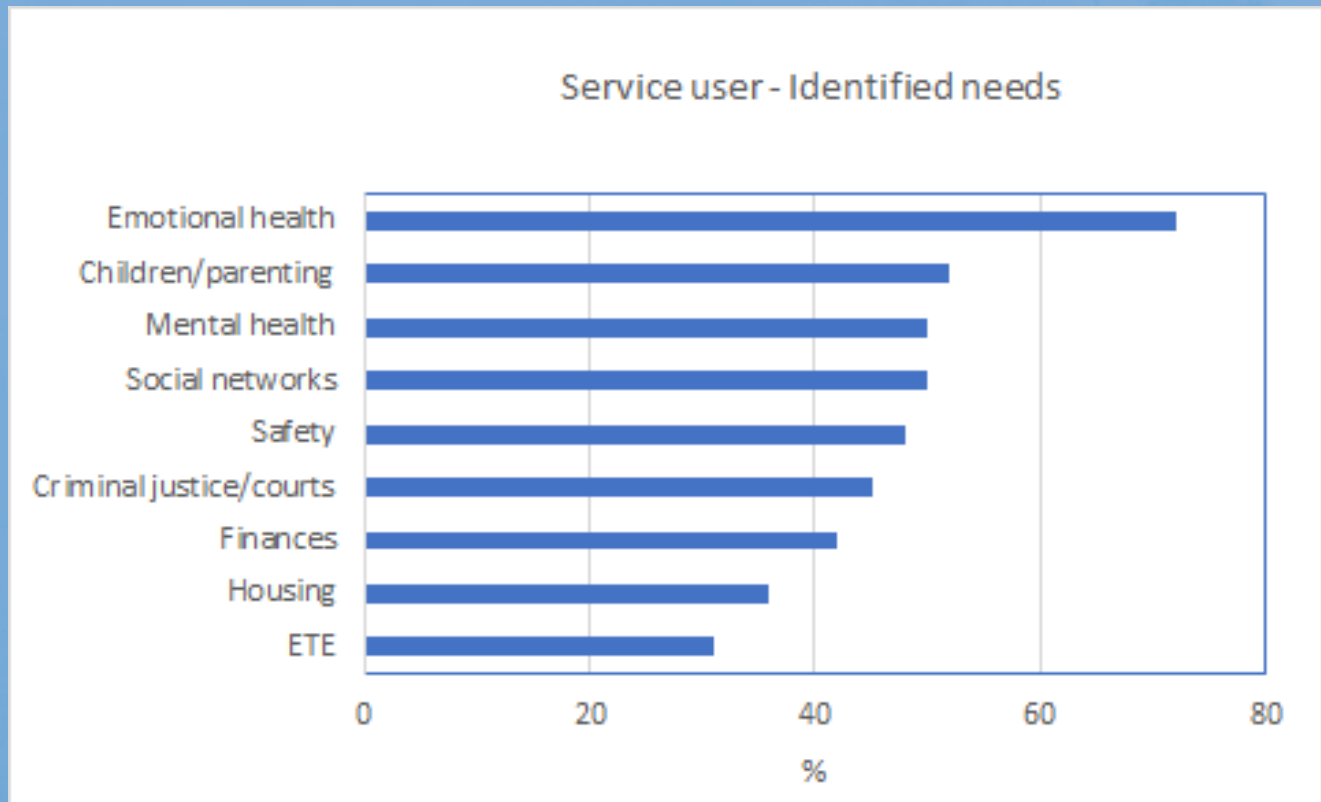
- After domestic abuse, mental health is the biggest issue facing our women.
- One fifth of women have an offending background and need rehabilitation support.
- Almost a third of women (29%) live with more than one vulnerability.



# Support needs

48%

women needed our help to stay and feel safe



- Women need our help with an incredibly diverse range of issues as shown above.
- After emotional health; help to manage children and parenting support is highlighted by over half the women who access the service.
- Almost half need support to deal with and navigate the justice system (45%). This includes both the criminal justice system ; family law and injunctions.
- 42% of women had financial needs including managing their debt and benefits. As part of efforts to tackle these issues, we introduced an ETE specialist to the service.



# Our Women's Support Services

We delivered **6755** hours of support including face to face, accompanying women to appointments, phone support, support at court and liaising with other professionals.

Numbers of women attending our group and support programmes:

**82**

Domestic Abuse  
programme

**24**

Trauma Programme

**8**

Art Therapy

**35**

ETE

**33**

Counselling

**17**

Managing Anger  
programme



# Our Childcare and Parenting Services

**52%** of our service users have a parenting or child-related need.

We provided **1458** hours of childcare support to **114** children.

**28** women attended a Parenting group including Nurture, Mellow and Strengthening Families.

*I am very happy with staff, very friendly girls. Childcare is brilliant, always there to go the extra mile to help, even just to talk*

*Childcare is a god send*

*I think by the time you finish the groups you're all sisters.*





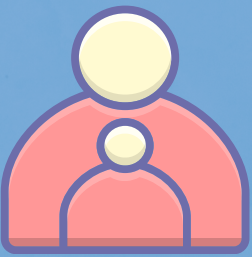
# Our impact



52 women supported to meet their accommodation goals

93 women reported positive health outcomes

79 reported visiting A&E less often and 52 visited their GP less often



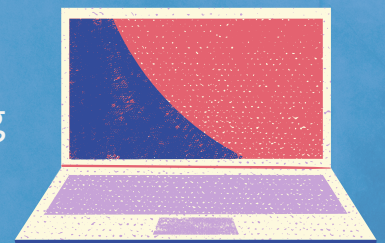
83 women reported improvements in their parenting skills and knowledge

49 women better able to manage their finances



54 women report stronger social and community links

32 women reported improvements in education, training and employment





# Distance travelled ...

83% felt we met their needs effectively and 71% of women felt better after our support including:

## Recognising abuse

**67% women better able recognise abusive behaviour**

**56% clear that the abuse was not their fault**

## Self esteem

**51% feeling better about themselves**

**49% dealing with problems better**

## Confidence

**49% women feeling more confident**

**49% more confident to ask for help when need it**

## Future

**52% feeling more optimistic about the future**

**42% feel safer**



# Service User Feedback

Our services have been shaped and developed by listening to our experts by experience -the women who use our services. As well as a service user panel, we gather feedback through bi-annual user surveys. This year it told us that:

89% thought the service was very good or good  
97% felt supported by their key worker  
83% felt supported to make their own choices  
100% felt safe and comfortable

My life would of been a mess.  
I was struggling a lot but now  
I am able to try and keep calm  
and move forwards.

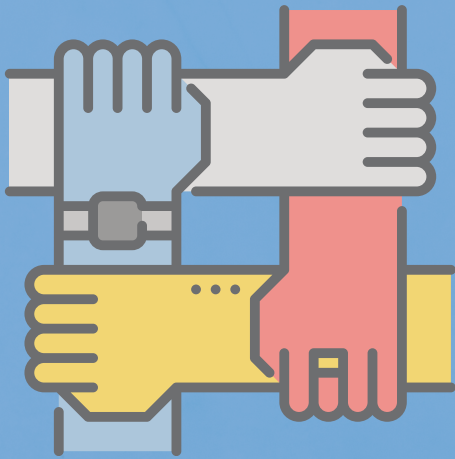
Where I was to where I am now-  
I've come a long way. It's encouraging.  
They've been brilliant all the way through  
since the word go. I needed to see someone  
and they've been there. Couldn't have done it  
without them

I've been able to build  
my confidence and get  
back to work.



# Our Partnerships

Working in partnership and collaborating is critical to our success and ensuring the women we support receive the best from local services. We work with around 30 statutory and non statutory partners including Luton and Central Bedfordshire Local Authorities, Criminal Justice, Family Courts and health services.



We continue to be the only provider in Luton offering support to women on statutory orders/licences and receive referrals from Probation for women who are involved in the Criminal Justice System helping them to resettlement and move forward. We are also involved in the Bedfordshire Community Sentence Treatment Requirements pilot, working actively with the courts, NHS Liaison & Diversion team and Probation services to provide more appropriate psychological support to female offenders in place of a prison sentence.

*“Our staff work side by side with Stepping Stones to achieve better outcomes through the excellent variety of interventions and support services available and is a working model of best practice in achieving desistance in women.” Deputy Director Bench CRC*



# Jane's story



## **The issue**

Jane was referred to us by social services when she was still married to her perpetrator. However, he lived away and would travel to Bedfordshire at weekends to visit her and their newborn baby.

Jane shared how she had been forced to have sex with her husband whilst he used instruments to conduct these acts. She was also put on a strict diet and was only allowed to eat food approved by her husband.

Jane had a still birth and her husband froze the fetus. This severely impacted on her mental health. She also lost her mother to cancer and was given no time to grieve.

## **Our help**

After meeting with Jane it was suggested that she complete the 11 week Freedom Programme and work with Change project as she still wanted to continue her relationship with her husband.

During the course of this group programme, Jane learnt the tactics of an abuser and listened intently to other women share their stories and the impact abuse was having on their lives and that of their children.

Once the Freedom programme was completed it became clear that this client needed further assistance and she was referred to one of our in-house counsellors who helped her address her past traumas. Her 15 year old daughter was also referred for youth counselling through Sorted Bedfordshire.

## **The outcome**

Jane now feels less isolated and has a positive outlook of her life and future.

She now has a part-time job in a cafe and is also taking driving lessons.

Her whole perspective on life has been turned from negative to positive and she feels she has a life worth living.

She has been on holiday with her children and her father and her relationship with her family and friends is being re-established.



# Plans for 2020-21

The start of our 2020-21 year has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. We have adapted quickly to deliver our services digitally and by phone and are keeping in regular contact with our current service users. We have spoken to our service user group to help shape our on line programmes including support to manage anxiety and stress. Once we are able to open our doors again we hope to introduce more provision with a focus on health and being active

THANK  
YOU

And finally ... a big thank you to all our amazing funders and supporters - we really couldn't do it without you!

London Luton Airport Ltd  
Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation  
BeNCH CRC  
Flying Start  
Change Grow Live (Resolutions)  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (Tampon Tax)  
Tudor Trust  
Lloyds Foundation  
Pilgrim Trust  
Ministry of Justice  
VERU

9 Group  
Silvertoad

And special thanks to Shilen Mantri for agreeing to be our first ever London Marathon runner.



# Supporting us

Due to Covid-19, 2020-21 will be a challenging year for Stepping Stones. Not only have many fundraising opportunities been cancelled or postponed but we are starting to see a significant increase in the number of women being referred for our help, many in urgent and desperate need. Many have young children.

To help safeguard our services, you can donate in a number of ways including:

[Give as you Live](#)

[Amazon Smile](#)



Or if you would just like to learn more about us, please have a look at our website by clicking [here](#).

