WOMEN & GIRLS ALLIANCE LEEDS

Influence • Strengthen • Sustain

Strategy
2024 -2027

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Influence • Challenge • Support

About Women & Girls Alliance - Leeds

This Strategy sets out how the Women & Girls Alliance – Leeds (W&GAL) will increase its impact, influence strategy, and reach more women and girls in Leeds to help them improve their lives.

The W&GAL is a dynamic partnership comprising 12 organisations with the collective aim of improving the lives of women and girls in Leeds. The Alliance was initially formed in 2015 to promote the shared aims of enabling women and girls to lead healthy, safe, and full lives. Partners include:

- Asha Neighbourhood Centre
- Basis Yorkshire
- Behind Closed Doors
- Getaway Girls
- Joanna Project
- Leeds Women's Aid
- Nari Ekta
- SARSVL (Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds)
- Shantona Women's Centre
- Together Women
- Women's Counselling and Therapy Service
- Women's Health Matters

The W&GAL acknowledges the need for diversity within the Alliance to truly represent the voices of all women in Leeds as the Alliance takes an intersectional approach to their work to recognise how gender discrimination, racism and other forms of oppressions can have a unique impact on individual women.

Alliance members work in partnership to provide services to support women and girls across the city. The Alliance understands that collaboration between the third sector and statutory agencies is critical in bringing about change. The Alliance listens to women and girls and ensures their voices are heard by decision makers, and challenges and changes systems and cultures that do not put the diverse needs and interests of all women and girls at their heart and supports and encourages each other to thrive and grow.

This strategy is aligned with a range of city-wide priorities around achieving equity and will contribute to the delivery of other strategies in Leeds and across West Yorkshire including the:

- West Yorkshire Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021
- Leeds Domestic Violence & Abuse Strategy 2021
- Women's Mental Health Strategy 2020-2025
- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2021
- Inclusive Growth Strategy 2023
- Children & Young People's Strategy/Plan 2018-2023

Why the Alliance's work is important

> We owe it to every little girl growing up in our brilliant and diverse region to provide them with a future where they are safe from harm. Male violence against women and girls is a scourge that must be addressed.

Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire, 2022

Women experience gender-based discrimination such as domestic violence & abuse, sexual assault and exploitation, harassment and stalking, unequal access to employment opportunities and disproportionate responsibility for caring for children, disabled people and older people. As a result, women are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health, homelessness and poverty. Ending gender-based discrimination will require changes in laws, attitudes, policies and practices to promote, monitor and enforce gender equality across all areas of life.

- Worldwide women's representation across political and economic leadership remains far from equal. At the national level, women hold just 26.4 per cent of parliamentary seats globally—and under 10 per cent of seats in 23 countries. In the economic sector, as of 2020, they hold 28.3 per cent of managerial positions, up only 0.3 per cent from 2019
- The outlook is only slightly better in local politics, where women hold a little over one third of seats (34.3 per cent) in local decision-making bodies. - UN Women November 2022
- 97% of women said that simply 'being a woman' affects their personal safety in Leeds - Women Friendly Leeds Safety Survey 2021
- 84% of women in Leeds have experienced sexual harassment or assault in Leeds City Centre - Women Friendly Leeds Safety Survey 2021

The Alliance believes that the huge and pervasive issue of gender-based violence against women and girls is underpinned by gender inequality.

Examples of this type of violence include domestic violence & abuse, rape, sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour-based abuse. The W&GAL believes that violence against women and girls is entirely unacceptable and is committed to making Leeds a safer city for women and girls. Despite progress in some areas such as increases in reporting to the police, access to training and more stable commissioning of specialist services, levels of violence and abuse against women remain a problem. For example:

- Women are more likely to experience repeat victimisation, be physically injured or killed and to experience sexual violence. - Home Office, July 2022
- In West Yorkshire, 84,282 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes were recorded in the year ending March 2022, as well as 17,486 domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment. - West Yorkshire Police, 2022
- Women are much more likely than men to be the victims of high risk or severe domestic abuse: 95% of those going to MARAC or accessing an IDVA service are women. - Safelives, 2022
- 81% of women in Leeds feel that the thing that makes them feel most unsafe when out and about is men's behaviour towards women: "I've been spat at, my bag taken and emptied all over the ground with the contents rifled and mocked before my money and anything valuable was stolen. I've been surrounded by men threatening to rape me if I didn't go with them willingly." - Women Friendly Leeds Safety Survey, 2021

In Leeds, the problem of domestic violence & abuse against women and girls is visible in Alliance organisations' work, all working with women and girls who have a range of experiences.

The Femicide Census 2020 shows that 2-3 women are murdered by a current or former partner each week. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence.

Worldwide, almost one third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

The Alliance Successes

A significant achievement of the Alliance includes establishing and delivering services including Women Friendly Leeds, the Women's Hub, and the Culturally Diverse Women's Hub, the Complex Needs Service, Women's Night Safe Space, and other city-wide services to promote the safety and health of women and girls. The need for these services has been documented widely. In addition, the Alliance has brought funding into Leeds to consult with women and girls around a range of issues, including safer streets and parks, and to introduce additional support into the night time economy, such as Ask for Angela, and worked with stakeholders to introduce a women friendly recruitment checklist. The Alliance has become the go-to specialist for consultation with women and girls.

> Women with extensive experience of physical and sexual violence are far more likely to experience disadvantage in many other areas of their lives, including disability, ill health and substance dependence; poverty, housing and debt; childhood adversity and discrimination... In addition, they are also more likely to experience indicators of chronic disadvantage spanning ill health, disability and poverty.

Sustainable Funding for Women's Centres, 2020

Recommendations from women and girls in the Women Friendly Leeds Safety Survey were:

1. Develop and implement a Women and Girls Safety Campaign
2. Prioritise programmes of education and awareness
3. Develop a night-time city centre safety plan
4. Promote safer transport including additional staff on buses, an audit of bus stops to identify and address poor lighting and other unsafe features, and the commissioning of a women-only taxi offer
5. Create more accessible mechanisms for women to report incidents of abuse and harassment
6. Involve Women and Girls in decisions

Women Friendly Leeds Safety Survey, 2021

How the Alliance Works Together

The Alliance centres strong partnership work as key to supporting the needs of women and girls in our city and beyond. Alliance organisations are experts in providing specialist services to support women and girls in specific areas of need, including counselling and mental and physical health needs.

The Alliance benefits from the direct involvement of women with lived experiences by drawing the expertise of an advisory group called Women Speak. This is made up of women who have used our services and who inform the Alliance's decision making and discussions.

Alliance members work together to empower women and girls through delivering a range of specialist projects through the Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) project work. The Alliance also works with the people, services, and structures that support women and girls to provide a holistic response to meet their clients' needs and enable them to reach their potential.

The Alliance helps shape strategic conversations related to gender specific approaches, including challenging and changing current systems, and working in partnership to secure much-needed funds for services to support the women, young women and girls facing multiple disadvantages and vulnerabilities.

Alliance projects delivered jointly through WLL include the following:

- Empowering Systems Change (ESC)
- VOICES project, including Women Friendly Leeds
- Women's Night Safe Space
- Ask for Angela
- Safer Parks

Funders include:

- National Lottery Community Fund
- Comic Relief
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Home Office
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority

More information can be found on our website www.womenandgirlsallianceleeds.org.uk:

Benefits of Our Alliance

The Alliance has already delivered multiple benefits. These include:

- Ability to use economies of scale to increase funding opportunities, maximize efficiency and value for money as well as increasing social return on investment
- Women Speak (Advisory Board of women who have used one of the member services) which has impacted citywide and showcased best practice in co-production, empowerment, and ensuring women and girl-centred services
- Shared opportunities to address collective problems facing women and girls and challenge and change local and national policy

- Creating a unique blend of specialism and expertise in the women's sector, which is both collective whilst strengthening individual specialisms and also amplifies each other's work
- Established strong partnerships and effective joint working
- Strengthening our shared and individual service offers with well-established, engaged, experienced, and innovating staff
- Solution-focused approach that sees challenge, adversity and constraints as opportunities
- Sharing data and contributing to research locally and nationally

The Alliance's shared commitment to implementing this strategy will maximise and build on the impact of these benefits to women and girls, Alliance members and communities across Leeds.

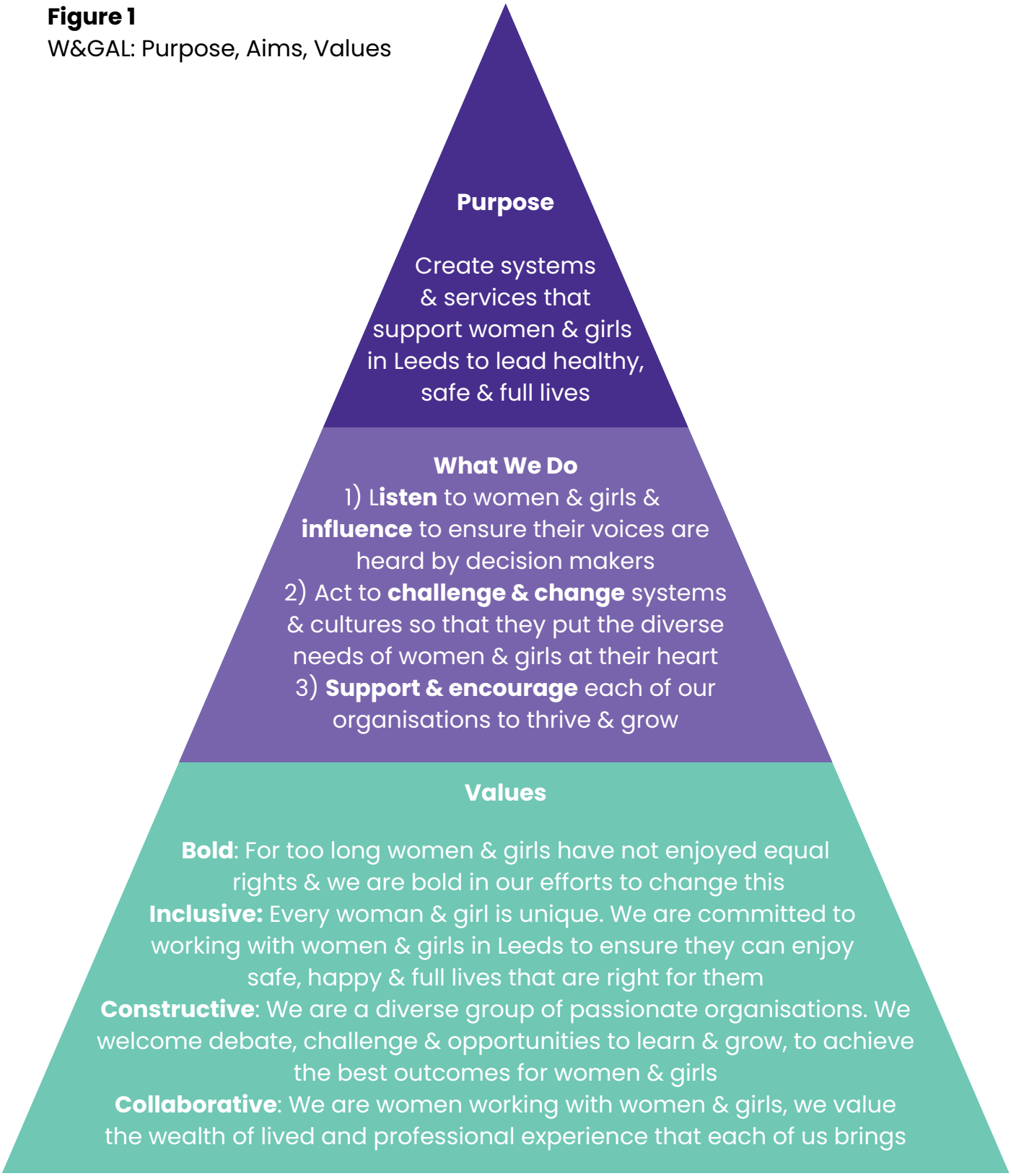
The following statistics are from the Alliance's ESC funded projects which increase capacity across services to respond effectively to women with complex needs:

- 66% of women said that they felt safer in their home in the community because of the work of the service
- 78% said that they felt more confident about the future
- 89% of the women felt that they were more confident using support services such as GPs
- 89% said that they now felt good about themselves

The Alliance's strategy has 3 strategic goals, each with objectives and deliverables which are outlined in this document:

These goals and the objectives aligned to each will be continually reviewed using our on-going self-assessment, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), and PESTLE (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analyses.

Figure 1
W&GAL: Purpose, Aims, Values



Strategic Goals & Objectives

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Strategic Goal 1: Strong External Influence

A key element of the Alliance is that it maintains a strong external influence, which elevates the voices of women and girls across Leeds. This will focus on centring the needs of women and girls, ensuring local and national policies are informed by experiences of those growing up young and female, giving insights, evidence and lived experiences from girls' and women's perspectives.

Objective 1

Challenge and change the systemic issues the Alliance organisations and women and girls they work with face, while promoting positive options for change

Outcomes

- Alliance members commit to considering the dual interests of their own organisation and the Alliance as a whole at external meetings and sharing information accordingly
- Tools and support networks are created to ensure sexism, racism and other systemic injustices are routinely addressed

Objective 2

Communicate effectively, and with an increasingly unified voice

Outcomes

- A cohesive approach to communications is developed and established, including shared messaging and a social media strategy
- The visibility and connectivity of the Alliance is increased at local, regional and national levels

Objective 3

Influence commissioners and other key decision-makers to ensure gendered approaches are protected and further embedded

Outcomes

- Gendered commissioning is embedded in Leeds
- Women's and girls' organisations are recognised as important sources of data, knowledge, and expertise
- The origins, principles, and importance of feminist co-production are understood and valued

Strategic Goal 2: Strengthen the Alliance

The Alliance aims to build and grow, to ensure membership from an even more diverse range of organisations, and to deliver together on its ambitions. Within this goal, the Alliance is committed to ensuring that the cross-cutting themes of equity, diversity and inclusion, along with our Alliance values, run through everything we do. All of the Alliance individual organisations are working to maximum capacity and building collective, united strength through the Alliance is one way to manage this challenge.

Objective 4

Build capacity across member organisations

Outcomes

- Smaller organisations are supported to engage more fully
- Women and girls with lived experience are integral within the Alliance and its decision-making

Objective 5

Share power and embed mutually supportive member relationships

Outcomes

- The Alliance and all its members benefit from strong

communications, trusting relationships, and a positive, collaborative working culture which values individuality and difference

Objective 6

Establish inclusive, diverse and equitable membership and practices

Outcomes

- The Alliance membership is more representative of the diversity of women and girls in Leeds, including organisations run by and for minoritized and marginalised groups
- Inclusive and equitable resources, expertise, and good practice are shared between Alliance members to enable continuous learning and improvement

Strategic Goal 3: Sustainable Alliance

Alongside the immediate work of strengthening the Alliance and external influencing, the Alliance is addressing its sustainability over the medium and long term. This includes the sustainability of its membership.

Objective 7

Identify and secure flexible, diverse funding sources for the Alliance

Outcomes:

- The Alliance is financially sustainable into the future, with the support of an effective fundraising strategy and plan

Objective 8

Support the sustainability of Alliance members

Outcomes

- Membership of the Alliance is a source of support, information and increased profile and capacity for members of all sizes

Next Steps

The Alliance aims to influence change and support women and girls in Leeds by:

- Publicising and disseminating the strategy including presenting it to key partners, boards and partnerships

- Monitoring progress on the delivery of the strategy and action plan through a performance management framework. This will involve assessing how effectively the Alliance is meeting key performance indicators and targets at quarterly Alliance Strategy meetings

- Promoting the Alliance's strategy successes and achievements through its website and to key partnerships

- Securing further funding to continue and develop the Alliance's work

Our funders

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Getaway Girls

LEEDS WOMEN'S AID

Basis yorkshire

ASIAN WOMEN TRAINING INITIATIVE

Support After Rape & Sexual Violence Leeds

JOANNA PROJECT

Women's Counselling and Therapy Service

together women

WHM Women's Health Matters

ASHA NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT

Shantona Women's Centre
Building confidence & independence in the community

Behind Closed Doors

https://womenandgirlsallianceleeds.org.uk/

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