



For women and children.  
Against domestic violence.

**2022-2025**

**OUR  
STRATEGY**

Every single day, a woman realises she doesn't need to put up with abuse, or is safer, or able to escape, or still alive, because of what we do. ”

## Message from our Chief Executive

Recently I met with a survivor who told me about the moment she knew she could no longer tolerate her partner's abusive behaviour. Her conversation with the woman on our Helpline was that moment. And it was our opportunity to help her get out and get safe.

This is what matters most to us. Every single day, our frontline staff, our volunteers, everyone in our organisation are there for the women who need us. Every day we support many thousands of women and children. Every single day, a woman realises she doesn't need to put up with abuse, or is safer, or able to escape, or still alive, because of what we do.

Violence against women and girls is rising up the public agenda. And we work hard to keep it there. But the humanitarian crisis hidden behind closed doors is relentless.

- The 2019-20 Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated 2.3 million people experienced domestic abuse in the previous year. Over two-thirds of these (1.6 million) were women.

- Domestic abuse is the context of many other crimes against women and girls, including 36% of stalking and harassment cases and 19% of sexual offences.

- Domestic abuse is the most prevalent form of violence against women and girls, relating to around one in five homicides. In England and Wales 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Two women a week will die.
- Yet only 8% of recorded domestic abuse crimes were charged or summonsed in 2020-21.



The debate needs to change. It's time to stop thinking about domestic abuse as something that happens within the home.

We have to recognise violence against women and girls as one of the UK's biggest domestic crises.

Most of the people we support are children. They are two out of three residents in our refuges. Recognising the huge and disproportionate impact domestic abuse has on children's lives – and doing more to respond to their needs as individuals – is a priority for us. The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act recognised, for the first time, that children are also victims, not just witnesses to abuse or bystanders. Now we need to show what it looks like to support children and report the difference it can make in their lives.

Refuge has also become the leader in combating tech abuse. We are the only organisation with a specialist tech team. But the threat is growing faster than we can respond to.

During the pandemic, more of our lives moved online. Domestic abuse did too. And it's growing in its complexity and pervasiveness. Our 2021 survey estimate that one in three UK women have experienced online abuse at some point in their lives, with women from a minority ethnic background, young women, and LGBTQ+ women disproportionately affected. And tech abuse doesn't stand alone, rarely occurring in isolation.

We now see very few cases of domestic abuse that don't include some technological element. And we know there's a direct link between online stalking, the control of devices and physical attacks. Ultimately, robust regulation is needed to ensure a strong response from tech companies and the criminal justice system. But, for now, we need to grow our tech abuse services. We're changing the debate.

Our work with supporters and policy makers is raising awareness of domestic abuse and how to access support. As a society, we're more ready to call out abusive behaviour and support victims to become survivors. That's important. Public awareness changes public policy. The Government's 'Enough' campaign helped shift the dialogue from victim blaming to challenging perpetrators' behaviour.

The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act acknowledged that abuse is not a one-off incident but a complex pattern of behaviour, reflected in the extension of the six-month time limit for bringing charges of common assault. However, the current failure of the Online Safety Bill to reference women and girls misses a huge opportunity to help women experiencing tech abuse. And until misogyny is recognised as a form of hate crime, judges are limited in their sentencing powers, and crime data cannot be recorded in a way that informs and changes practice.

The Government's Domestic Abuse Plan recognises that the gendered nature of domestic abuse demands a response from the whole of society, not just domestic abuse services. How will we know this response is happening? And making a real difference? When every woman can recognise domestic abuse sooner. When she can access support the moment she needs it. When her perpetrator is held to account. When she is helped to recover and get her life back quickly. When we, as a society, make it unacceptable to experience domestic abuse. We need to keep the pressure on.

WE, AS A SOCIETY SHOULD MAKE IT UNACCEPTABLE TO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC ABUSE

I am immensely proud of the way our frontline staff, our volunteers, our supporters and our funders work to support survivors. We're in it together. But we're facing a national challenge. We need even greater recognition of the extent of domestic abuse and the harm it causes.

We as a society should make it unacceptable to experience domestic abuse. We need the will to stop it. We need a full public response. This is the time to work together to prevent domestic abuse happening in our society.

PROVISION

PROTECTION

PREVENTION



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### Natasha's story

**Refuge saved my life. When I called the National Domestic Abuse Helpline in January 2015, I didn't know how I was going to be able to flee my abusive partner. I'd lived in fear for years, not knowing who to turn to.**

I experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, and coercive control. It was a textbook case of my life being turned upside down by my abusive partner. I'd been isolated from my family and friends, and my support networks. I couldn't see a way out.

Then I called the Helpline. The woman I spoke to saved my life. I don't say that lightly. She helped me to understand that what I was experiencing wasn't ok, that it wasn't my fault. She believed me. I felt listened to, and I felt heard.

I knew I had to escape my abuser and I fled to a refuge with my children. I remember looking out of the window and wondering how I was going to cope. But with the support of Refuge, I did cope. I survived. I was finally free.

I know lots of people don't know what to expect when they arrive in a refuge, but I can tell reassure them: it's safe, and when you close the door behind you, you stop looking over your shoulder. I was finally able to sleep at night and start the slow process of transition from victim to survivor.

The women I met in the refuge are still in my life. It doesn't matter what sort of life other people have led, when you're there together, you've lived through horrors that only you understand, you form a connection, a bond, that you cannot shake off.

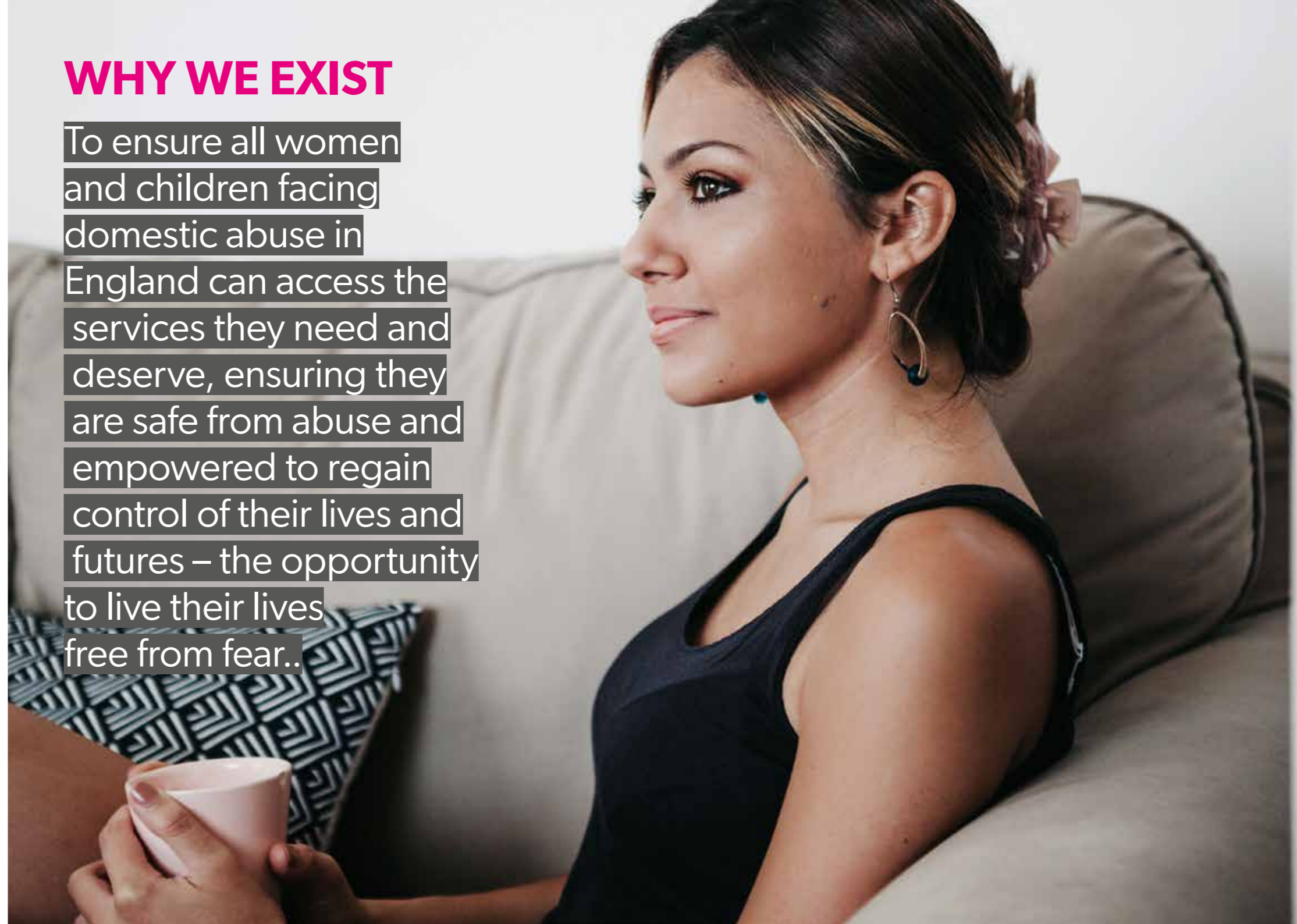
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**Going into a refuge saved my life. It provided safety for me when I needed it most.**

**It provided me the first step to the rest of my life. I am forever thankful.**

## WHY WE EXIST

To ensure all women and children facing domestic abuse in England can access the services they need and deserve, ensuring they are safe from abuse and empowered to regain control of their lives and futures – the opportunity to live their lives free from fear..



## VISION

Refuge is committed to a world where domestic abuse and violence against women and girls is not tolerated and where women and children can live in safety

Refuge believes that domestic abuse and violence against women and girls will only end when we create gender equality.



## MISSION

We aim to empower women and children to rebuild their lives, free from violence and fear.

We provide a range of life saving and life changing services. We put the experiences of survivors at the heart of our work and help amplify their voices.



# TRANSFORM EMPOWER FEMINIST EXPERT

## Our values

Our greatest assets are our people, their dedication, energy and creativity.



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### Amy's story

**I hadn't thought about how technology could be used to harm. How it could be used to intimidate and harass women. We use it every day, and it is supposed to make our lives easier.**

In my case, it was used to facilitate abuse. It was used to harass and harm me, and it's thanks to Refuge that I've been able to move forward.

I met a man through an online dating site. We went on one date, which I thought went well, and planned to meet up again. Following the date, the situation changed.

I started receiving very sinister and hurtful messages from him. He accused me of giving him a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI), he even accused me of giving him HIV. I take my sexual health seriously and knew that this was not true. But the volume of messages, and the anger and aggression in them, increased. It became unbearable. He started contacting my family and friends via social media. He started harassing them instead of me.

I didn't use my surname on social media, yet he found me and used Facebook, Instagram, the dating app, as well as text messages, to harass me and my family. I didn't know if the abuse would stem into the offline world.

I was afraid to walk to and from work, never knowing if he'd be waiting somewhere for me. It caused me significant anxiety and distress, which I needed medication for.

I secured a restraining order against this man, and he pled guilty to two counts of harassment. He received a community order in addition to the restraining order I was able to get.

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**Refuge helped me so much, their tech team were brilliant, they helped me to understand tech abuse, and to secure my devices. I'm so grateful for the support I received.**

**Women should not be forced offline, but empowered to use our tech safely, and free from abuse.**

# Our theory of change and strategic priorities

Refuge’s theory of change has been co-created to ensure it reflects the goals and objectives of the organisation.

This means that all our work is driven by the ambition to deliver top-quality services, such as emergency accommodation (refuges), and community-based and specialist support services, to all who need them. Refuge believes that domestic abuse is a gendered crime and that it will not end until we have radical culture change which addresses gender inequality.

We know that radical culture change will take time, and we must take a long term approach.

We strive to

- drive policy change (influencing policy and practice, including legislative change which ensures sustainable services) supported by strategic research;
- prevent domestic abuse through awareness raising and attitudinal change;
- and through partnerships that grow our expertise.

When we combine our policy work together with our public engagement work, we have the best chance of achieving real change for women and girls. We know that we need to challenge and change public attitudes, and we need to raise awareness of the different forms domestic abuse can take.

## Our strategic priorities

**1.To provide emergency specialist accommodation, community-based and specialist support services.**

By 2025 we will:

- Build foundations that allow us deliver, and measure, high quality, high impact services.
- Continue to respond to emergent need, and to pioneer new services where they are required.
- Develop services that support children and young people.

**2.Deliver high quality services and set quality standards for domestic abuse services.**

By 2025 we will:

- Remain the leading specialist organisation addressing domestic abuse.
- Increase the quality, scale, and range of properties we are able to offer survivors.
- Continue to develop and evolve our sector-leading specialist tech and economic abuse services.
- Review and develop quality standards that allow us to improve how we measure our impact.

**3.Drive policy change to ensure sustainability of domestic abuse services.**

By 2025 we will:

- Amplify the voices of our survivors and use our data and expertise to advocate for changes to policy, practice, and legislation that will better address domestic abuse.
- Help prevent domestic abuse by raising awareness of the different manifestations.

**4.Prevent violence against women and girls through awareness raising and changing harmful and pervasive societal attitudes.**

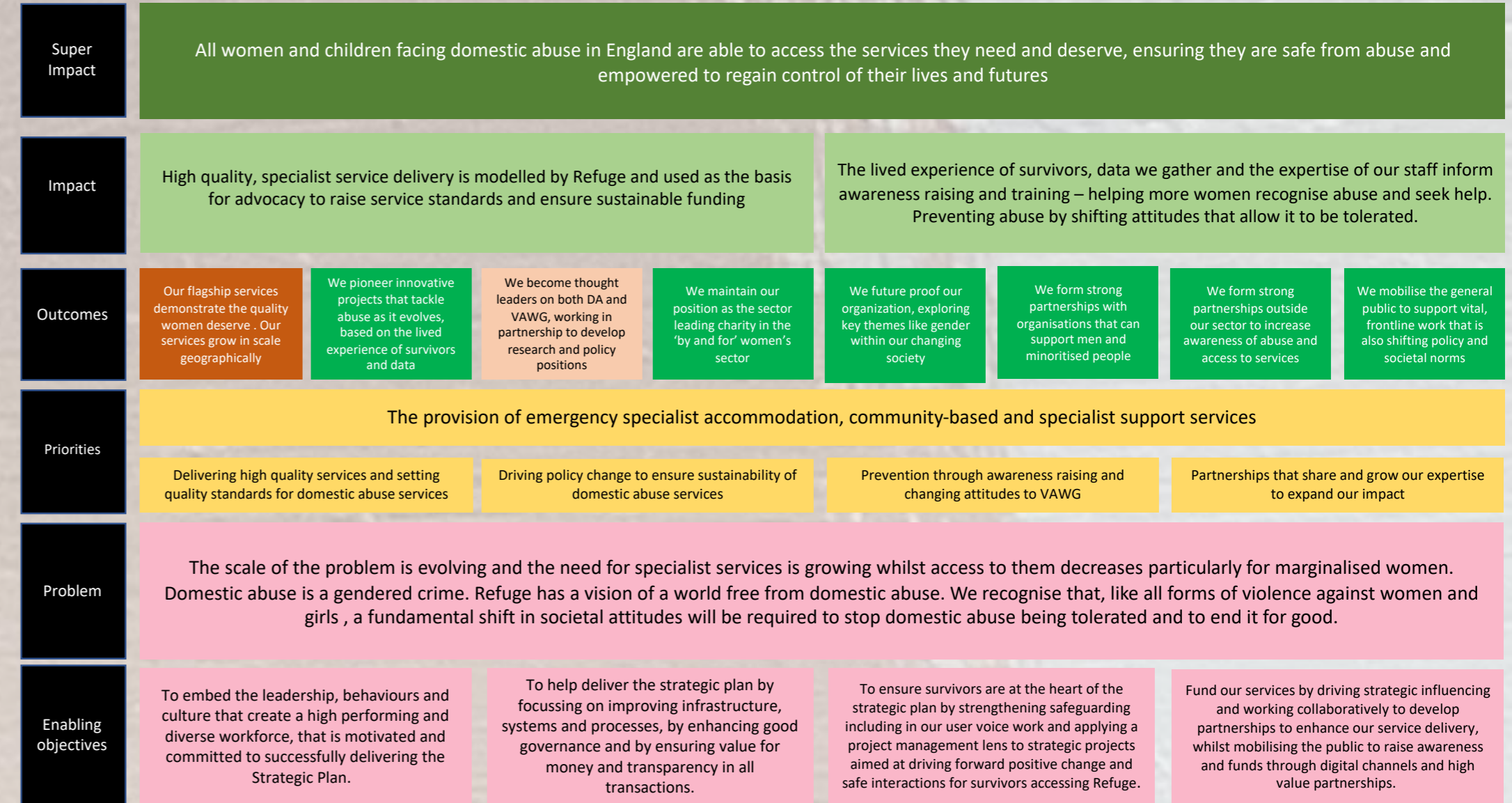
By 2025 we will:

- Mobilise the public to raise awareness, financial resources, and create real change through public campaigns
- Challenge and change societal norms by growing our feminist movement
- Drive culture change which in turn leads to policy change
- Ensure as many women as possible know how to access our specialist services

**5.Build partnerships to share and grow our expertise and expand our impact.**

By 2025 we will:

- Work with local commissioners to support commissioning practice and expand our service offer.
- Form national and local partnerships and alliances to upscale our impact and provide thought leadership to develop and improve sector responses in emerging areas of work
- Advocate for sustainable, ringfenced funding for long term service provision.



## Enabling objectives

### To achieve our strategic priorities, we will:

1. Demonstrate and deliver the leadership, behaviours, and culture that create a high performing and diverse workforce who are motivated and committed to successfully delivering the strategic plan.

2. Deliver the strategic plan by focussing on improving infrastructure, systems, and processes, by ensuring good governance, impact and transparency.

3. Ensure survivors are at the heart of the strategic plan by strengthening safeguarding including in our user voice work and applying a project management lens to strategic projects aimed at driving forward positive change and safe interactions for survivors accessing Refuge services.

4. Fund our services by driving strategic influencing and working collaboratively to develop partnerships to enhance our service delivery, whilst mobilising the public to raise awareness and funds through digital channels and high value partnerships.

**No one told me being in a relationship would be the end of my mind, my independence, my ability to think, my self-worth. That it would be like being put into an open jail that you can't get out of and then faced by people who ignorantly ask.... 'Why did you not just leave?'**

**To those I ask if they know what it feels to live in constant fear? To constantly be watched, monitored, and stripped of all means to escape? Until you have walked that path, never try to understand a woman who has been disempowered, because sometimes she herself does not know that she is being abused. Women, like me, normalise the abuse to SURVIVE until you can't distinguish between abuse or normality anymore because to you, in that black hole... there is no way out.**

**Anna**

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## Erica's story

**I changed the law with Refuge. It's an incredible feeling and something I couldn't imagine doing as quickly as we did.**

I changed the law with Refuge. It's an incredible feeling and something I couldn't imagine doing as quickly as we did. As a younger woman, I experienced domestic abuse. My ex-partner physically abused me.

For a long time I didn't recognise that what I was experiencing was abuse, and I didn't want to admit to myself that it was. I didn't want to be a statistic, another woman experiencing abuse. I know in England and Wales 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime, but that didn't make it any easier to acknowledge that what I was experiencing was abuse.

Eventually I found the courage I knew was within me and reported my assault to the police.

By the time they got around to processing my case, the time limit for reporting and charging for common assault (6 months) had expired. I was told there was nothing more they could do.

There are so many reasons women don't feel able to report within this arbitrary time limit, and I went home that evening and decided I was going to change the law to ensure no other women had to go through the same thing; finding the courage to report their abuse and then being told 'times up'.

Fast forward a few months, and together with Refuge, the centre for women's justice and women's aid, I've changed the law. Women experiencing abuse now have a total of two years to report common assault and for the police to secure a prosecution.

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**I never wanted to be seen as a victim, I'm a survivor, and now I'm a law changer. I'm so proud of my journey and was delighted to work with Refuge, as well as so many brave survivors. Together, we are more powerful, our voices are louder, and we can bring about real change for women and girls.**







Refuge  
3rd Floor  
One America Square 17 Crosswall London  
EC3N 2LB  
020 7395 7700  
Contact us  
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I went into a refuge when I was 7 years old. Over the next few years, my mum and I returned to our abuser several times. Finally, when I was 12, we fled for good.

My mum experienced physical abuse at the hands of her perpetrator; there were also 'unspoken rules', for example I was not allowed to speak in front of him. I spent a lot of time writing as a child, as an alternative to speaking aloud.

I felt a lot of shame growing up, I didn't have a stable home, I felt different from other people my age. But the refuge offered a community feel, everyone looked out for one another. Although I was an only child, I felt part of an extended family, like a younger sister to other people in the refuge

I know that the refuge helped my mum and I to get back on our feet. It was a safe place away from the violence and abuse we experienced. I'm grateful we were able to find safety.

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