



solace



# Solace Futures

**Safety, Support & Recovery  
from all Forms of Abuse  
2022-2027 Strategy**



[solacewomensaid.org](https://solacewomensaid.org)

Solace Women's Aid is a charity registered in England & Wales.  
Charity Number 1082450. Company Number 3376716.

# Executive Summary

Solace Futures is designed to deliver our strategic vision starting from today and for the next five years. We are building on Solace’s 46 years of providing specialist, holistic support services for women and children. We are ambitious and want to drive change at every level to ensure that everyone lives healthy lives free from violence, abuse and exploitation.

We will work together with our service users, staff, volunteers and the wider world to make a tangible difference to women and children’s lives, both individually and collectively, as a movement of women committed to jointly ending male violence against us.

We shall create lives based on our right to safety and freedom from oppression for all women, ensuring we can equally contribute to social justice and have respect for cultural understanding.



We have **three intersecting principles** that underpin our strategic objectives:

- 1 Intersectional Feminism
- 2 Partnerships & Collaboration
- 3 Service User & Evidence-led

We have identified **six key strategic objectives** to achieve our vision and mission:

Solace Futures	
<i>Safety, Support &amp; Recovery from all forms of abuse</i>	
<b>S</b>	Strategic Influencing, Partnerships & Leadership
<b>O</b>	Organisational Development & Growth
<b>L</b>	Long-term Recovery & Lasting Change
<b>A</b>	Accessibility, Education & Employment
<b>C</b>	Children & Young People
<b>E</b>	Empowerment, Engagement & Aspirations



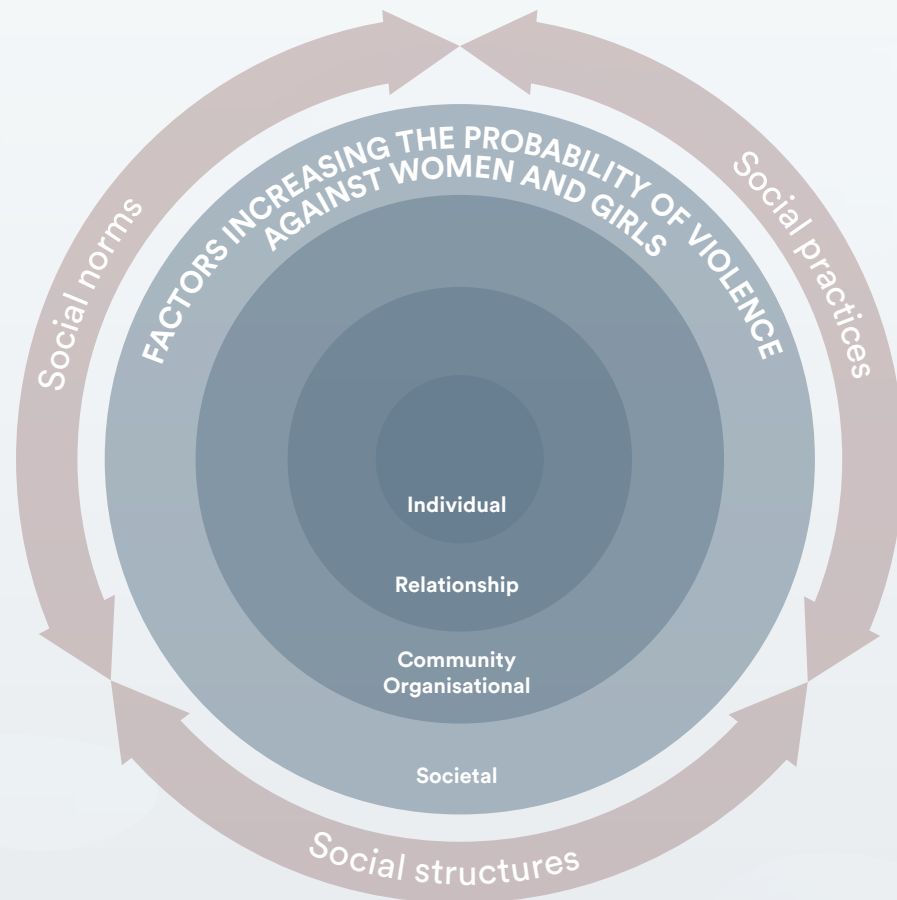
## Root Causes of VAWG

### Gender inequalities & discrimination in particular contexts shaped by:

Economic, political and social factors, systems and norms, including policy and legal frameworks and structures

Historical factors (e.g. deep rooted cultural practices, war, colonisation)

Structural distinctions on the basis of age, income, location, ethnicity, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation and other characteristics



Source : Hagemann White, Bronbrenner and Garcia Models

## Introduction

At Solace, we've just completed our 46th year and we have ambitions to support more women, children and men affected by all forms of male violence against women and girls (MVAWG). Solace Futures builds on the successful outcomes of our 2016-2021 Strategy, The Way Forward, building in increased technological and lasting change as well as our aspiration for long-term recovery for all survivors.

As we started to develop our new strategy, the COVID-19 pandemic, and all its devastating impacts, started to change the way that we worked and delivered services. At the same time, as an organisation working intersectionally, we take the time to review our approach to our feminism in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement and providing support to Trans Women, as well as focussing on recognising the intersectional impact of disability and class. This strategy has been developed in light of the lasting impacts of COVID-19 and our bold ambitions for change, equity and inclusion.

To achieve our key areas of growth outlined above, we have taken a five-year approach, 2022-2027, to achieving our vision, acknowledging that there will be some areas that will need a longer-term approach.

As we have grown as an organisation, we have become more visionary about what we want to do to support survivors of all forms of violence and abuse. We have diversified and strengthened our services to provide holistic support packages to women, children and men who need them. We have started to strengthen and build on our existing partnerships and develop our influencing work at all levels – amplifying the voices of the more than 20,000 women we work with each year.

**amplifying the voices of thousands of women**

*'We have taken the decision as an organisation to re-frame the term 'violence against women and girls' to 'male violence against women and girls' (abbreviated to MVAWG) acknowledging that men are the main perpetrators of this violence against women, and also against male survivors of VAWG. The term VAWG is a passive term which does not place the onus on the perpetrators of abuse to change their behaviour.'*





# Herstory, the Solace Story

## Herstory of the Organisation

Our herstory starts in the 1970s, our roots grounded in the women's movement not long after the first women's liberation march was held in London in 1971. We grew from small women's aid organisations set up in London and from the work of those feminist pioneers.

## Highlights of our story

### Our Roots

1974	1975	1984	1994	2005
Camden Women's Aid established	Islington Women's Aid and Lambeth Women's Aid established	Enfield Women's Aid established	Solas Anois for Irish & Irish Traveller women established	Solas Anois, the Irish women's refuge merges with Camden Women's Aid

### The start of the Solace Story

2007	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Camden, Enfield & Islington merge to form SOLACE	North London Rape Crisis starts	Lambeth Women's Aid merges with Solace	Barnet DVSS joins Solace	Solace deliver refuges in Haringey	The Ascent Partnership forms Find the Cost of Freedom report published	Started advocacy service in Waltham Forest Partnered with the Angelou Project Social Impact report published

### Growing Solace - developing our prevention and early intervention work

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
The Price of Safety Report published Amari project begins Started delivering services in Waltham Forest and Southwark	Hear2Change for Children and Young People VAWG Housing Group The Price of Safety report published	The Lighthouse Project Housing First - Islington Housing First - Westminster	Safe As Houses report published Begun new Refuge and Community Services in Bexley	Pandemic COVID-19 pandemic hit - set up Emergency Accommodation project	Started working in Tower Hamlets The Labyrinth Project, The Womens' Empowerment Fund and the National Centre for Excellence	Looking ahead - implementing the Solace Futures Strategy

Solace Women's Aid (Solace) was formed in 2007 following the merger of Camden, Enfield and Islington Women's Aid (Solace Anois, the Irish women's refuge, had merged with Camden Women's Aid in 2005). Lambeth Women's Aid joined us in 2011, Barnet Domestic Violence Support Service and Haringey Refuges in 2012 when we also began working in Southwark,

expanding our South London presence. In 2016, we began running services in Waltham Forest, followed by Bexley in 2019 and Tower Hamlets in 2021. Over the last 10 years, we have launched several pan-London partnerships for survivors, and in 2021 we started our first national project, The Labyrinth Project.



Over the past decade, we have grown as an organisation – both in terms of income and in the number of survivors we support each year. **We currently work across London with an average of 15,500 survivors each year and support another 8,000 through prevention, early intervention and other services, with a dedicated staff team of 290 and 100 volunteers.**

With over 46 years' experience of running innovative and high-quality services, we know what makes a difference to the lives of women and children living with MVAWG.

We deliver a range of specialist projects across the VAWG sector and uniquely have experience of leading a range of projects from small-scale pilot projects with key partners to now national multi-agency projects. We have grown but our focus remains on adhering to our grassroots values, providing services that are trauma-informed and focus on long-term recovery. We offer a high-quality service, raise additional funds to support survivors and engage people in active prevention and early intervention initiatives.

## 2016-2021 Strategy & Achievements

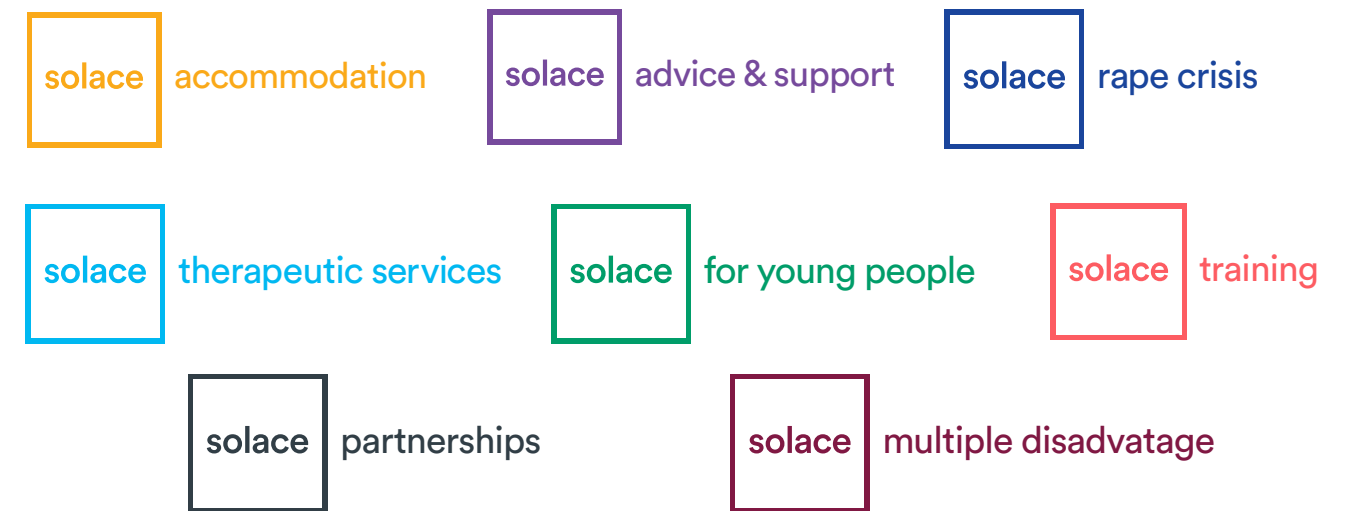
The past five years have seen Solace grow services, partnerships and holistic support packages. We have become experts in different areas of housing and homelessness, running projects like the first Housing First tailored to women living with MVAWG; opening refuges tailored to women with specific needs; homelessness hubs and move-on accommodation. We have developed and grown innovative approaches to support women living with multiple disadvantage and we have re-focussed efforts on supporting older women and women living with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

We have continued to develop our core services – which have increased to delivering community services and refuges in 10 London boroughs, enabling us to support more survivors and expand geographically as well as into new areas of support.

Our achievements could not have been so successful without building our partnerships – not just with other organisations in the sector but across the voluntary and statutory sectors. Our partnership approach has meant we have grown services to be pan-London. We have worked in partnership with survivors to design services that work for them and that give them back an element of choice.



## Solace Services



## Direction of Travel for The Organisation

As we move forward into the future, we have six strategic objectives to drive forward our ambitions of supporting more survivors on their journeys to recovery and beyond. We have developed this strategy to be bold as we feel this is what is necessary to really tackle MVAWG now and in the future.

We will continue to build on our partnerships and our service user-led projects and ensure survivors are at the heart of all our work. To support survivors to achieve long-term recovery and lasting change, we are also ensuring our staff team feel supported and empowered.

**93% of service users rated there was a continued need for Solace services**



## Our Vision



A world where everyone is able to live **safe and independent lives** which are free from gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation.

## Mission

Solace exists to end the harm done through gender-based violence. Our aim is to work to prevent violence and abuse as well as providing services to meet the individual needs of survivors, particularly women and children<sup>3</sup>. Our work is holistic and empowering, working alongside survivors to help them achieve independent lives free from abuse.

## Values

Solace's core values reflect our history and were developed in consultation with staff and service users. We are working to be:

1. Feminist and intersectional in our understanding of MVAWG

2. Diverse, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory to create a fully inclusive environment for staff and service users

3. Survivor led, trauma informed and empowering

4. We are committed to:

- Social justice and human rights
- Service users having a central voice within the organisation
- Working in collaboration with other agencies
- Continuous improvement

<sup>3</sup> Solace has an inclusive definition of women including trans women. Our services seek to support and represent trans women and non-binary people. We understand that trans women and non-binary people are affected by misogyny and the patriarchal frameworks that cause harm to cis women and girls.

## Our Principles

We have identified three key principles which underpin our strategic approach, and all our specialist work at Solace. The principles are interlinked and interdependent and work towards driving forward our ambitions of a world that is free from all forms of violence and abuse. The principles drive how we work as an organisation but also everything we do.

### 1 Intersectional Feminist Approach

To be a truly feminist organisation, we have to understand that there are many different, intersecting, forms of inequality. When someone experiences multiple forms of inequality, this creates compounding experiences of discrimination and trauma.

### 2 Partnerships & Collaboration

MVAWG is complex, and partnerships and collaborative working are crucial to ensure nuanced approaches are taken to work towards ending it. We acknowledge that we are only one organisation and so should work collaboratively with partners to greater effect change in the lives of survivors of all forms of MVAWG, developing a robust coordinated community response. By working together, we can harness our joint and complementary expertise to support our staff, volunteers, partners and, most importantly, the survivors we work with.

### 3 Service User and Evidence Based-Led

After 45 years of working with survivors of VAWG, we know that the best way for our services to improve is to hear from the women and children we support. We are committed to listening and engaging with our service users, using that feedback to continually better our services. We also recognise that in collecting data and evidence from our services, we will be able to better influence the Government and policy makers on matters relating to VAWG, ensuring that our research and practice is driven through an intersectional feminist lens.





# Strategic Objectives

## Solace

## Strategic Influencing, Partnerships & Leadership

Since Solace began, we have worked in partnership with other organisations but have always tried to influence specific issues within the sector rather than influence agendas for change. As the largest specialist service MVAWG organisation in London and one of the largest in the country, Solace should also have an independent voice in national and pan-London decision making. We recently developed our public affairs function, acknowledging that strategic influencing feeds into everything we do as an organisation and allows us to represent our service users at the highest levels.

Partnerships is one of our three key principles, and we seek to develop equitable partnerships with specialists in the MVAWG and other sectors. We will always prioritise partnerships with others who work within diverse communities to strengthen our intersectional feminist approach and ensure our work is informed by diverse practice expertise as well as the lived experience of all women. By working together and collaborating we can ensure that the specialist sector can continue to provide life-saving support to all survivors.

- By developing our public affairs function, Solace can influence decision makers on the policy and funding decisions they make as well as living our wider mission and values of seeking to end MVAWG.
- We will also amplify the voices and the experiences of our service users which can be used to shape decisions and to identify trends and patterns. We will use this to influence at all levels to create and design specialist services that work for survivors. We will seek to improve our reputation as a specialist service provider with national government and across England to support any future bids as well as shaping the national conversation about priorities for funding.
- We will work to influence the Government agenda on specific issues such as salaries in the sector, contract costs, competitive tendering and caseloads which would improve the wellbeing of our staff and therefore the support we can offer service users.
- We will highlight the voices and experiences of survivors at a political level – from the grassroots to central government, identifying opportunities for change from the ground up. We also seek to ensure those VAWG organisations representing marginalised women have a seat at the table with decision makers.
- To develop our strategic approach we will continue to work in partnership, seek equity within our partnerships and showcase other organisations' excellence, especially Black and Minoritised Women's organisations. Specifically, we commit not to bid for tenders for specific services for Black and minoritised women or for other groups such as Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors, unless to support a 'by and for' service as part of a partnership or where a 'by and for' service does not yet exist for a community where we have been commissioned to deliver the service.



- Partnering with other specialist organisations allows us to collectively learn from survivors who have experienced violence about their intersecting forms of oppression and needs, providing women with a choice of services that reflects the diversity of survivors.
- As part of The Labyrinth Project, we have developed a National Centre for Excellence and will seek to maintain this

after the project ends. The overall aim of our National Centre for Excellence is to improve women's lives through a programme of capacity building, learning and empowerment across a network of partners.

## Organisational Development & Growth

### Internal Organisational Development

The difficult and emotive combination of COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter movement and a national spotlight on the abuse women face daily that emerged during the development of this strategy highlighted the need for us to focus on our own organisational development. We recognise that we need to do more to support our growing staff team and ensure foster an inclusive work environment. As part of fulfilling this objective, Solace has a distinct internal equity, diversity and inclusion plan and will also create and implement a new People Strategy.

- At Solace, we are committed to visibility and transparency and will work to ensure all staff feel able to bring their authentic selves to work and that this is how we can best support survivors. We want to remove the siloed working culture and remove the disconnect between individual teams and between staff, senior leadership and trustees. We are committed to open communication and transparent decision making to enable this.
- We want to ensure that voices of staff across Solace are heard in decision making. We will set up an Employee Engagement Forum to ensure that strategic management decisions are informed by staff perspectives, to consult on new initiatives and as a mechanism to gather ideas for improvements.
- We are committed to an annual ethnicity pay gap report from 2022 and to work to create career progression and development opportunities for Black and minoritised women.
- We aim to embed inclusive leadership across the organisation and will commission an independent organisational culture review so that everyone is able to recognise and contribute to a positive and respectful organisational culture.
- We are embedding a trauma-informed approach in our internal culture and at every level of the organisation, as well as maintaining our trauma-informed approach with service users.

- We will complete a review of our staff equality monitoring data to identify any barriers to recruitment, retention and promotion experienced by those with protected characteristics, and opportunities will be created for staff to feedback their views on ways to improve inclusivity.
- We will improve the internal communication between teams and create spaces where members of staff can share learning and understand more what the others do.
- We are committed to the personal and professional development of our staff and are implementing peer support and mentoring services. We will enhance the offering for internal staff development, creating pathways for career progression with suitable training, apprenticeships and leadership programmes.
- We know that the pandemic has had a huge impact, from the way our staff work to their wellbeing. We are committed to ensuring agile working will continue, finding a balance for each staff member between home and office working. We will also

actively explore the potential for flexible working arrangements when creating new roles and development opportunities.

- Wellbeing is a priority at Solace and we are committed to supporting our staff. We have appointed a Staff Wellbeing Lead for one year to provide the expertise to support our staff in the long term by creating a wellbeing toolkit tailored for our needs. We undertake to regularly review our employee support, including clinical supervision, debrief, provisions and our employee assistance programme. We will continue to review and develop staff wellbeing activities coordinated by our Staff Wellbeing Group.
- We also recognise that there are women in our staff team who are survivors and we will continue to review how we can best support them and ensure this is a core element within our new People Strategy.



Finding a balance between home and office working



# Organisational Development & Growth

## Growth

As an organisation, growth has always been part of our mission as it allows us to provide more services to those in need of support. Our ambitions for 2022-2027 are for the organisation to grow to achieve the dual aim of supporting more survivors but also to support the frontline staff working for the organisation. As we grow, we will continue to have service users at the heart of everything we do. We recognise the need to grow our infrastructure side (our central services) to support the frontline delivery and our strategic influencing.

- Our growth strategy sits alongside our strategic influencing side. As local authorities continue to experience funding shortfalls, we will work together with partners across the statutory and voluntary sector to work on reducing caseloads of frontline staff, whilst campaigning for funding to support increasing salaries across the sector.
- We also know that as part of our growth, we must continue to work in partnership with other specialists across the sectors we work in to increase the support choices for survivors.
- We will focus on new ways of income generation, removing our reliance on statutory contracts. This may include social enterprise, training and consultancy and continuing to galvanise our new partnerships with corporates, individual giving and our supporter series.
- We will further build on our award-winning communications work to continue to gain increased levels of public awareness of MVAWG and recognition of our brand values and positioning.
- We have watched, like others in the sector, as some generic housing providers take on contracts to support vulnerable women, exploiting exempt accommodation rates. To provide women with specialist move-on accommodation and support, as well as continuing our innovative move-on projects, we aim to grow our property portfolio and consider the merits of becoming a registered social landlord.
- We will harness technological advances that enable us to grow and develop. Technology cuts across all our objectives and will support us to develop new, innovative and time-saving approaches across our internal and external services.

88% rated the service met or exceeded their expectation



# Long-term Recovery & Lasting Change

At Solace, for women and children to truly recover from the effects of violence and abuse, we need to take a holistic approach leading to lasting change. Due to the time-bound nature of many of our services and commissioned services' frameworks, our advocates do not have the time or capacity to develop longer-term, meaningful relationships with service users. Where we have the scope to do this work, the outcomes are evidently more robust than short-term work allows. We want every service user to have the element of choice in their services – we will be led by them in what will support their long-term recovery and lasting change.

- We will work with specialist VAWG partners to make the case for moving away from a strict risk focus as this is not the best way to support survivors to the point of recovery. We will develop a more nuanced, needs-led model aimed at looking at survivors' whole needs rather than risk alone.
- We will work with others in the sector to reduce caseload levels, recognising that lower caseloads, and longer time to work with survivors, will also reduce the 'revolving door' effect where women end up back in the service as they have not been given the time and space to fully recover.
- We will expand our offer of therapeutic services so that our service users are supported past the crisis point. Our therapeutic offer will be diverse, ensuring there are methods aside from talking therapy so that the method fits the client and not the other way around.
- We will use our evidence-based approach to work with commissioners to support them to get more funding for long-term and needs-based solutions. We will outline the true costs of services and support commissioners with costed models and cost-benefit analyses for services.
- We will expand our work with perpetrators, acknowledging that it is an essential element in making women safer and aims to create lasting change. We will continue to expand our perpetrator services to proactively stop further abuse being committed.
- We recognise that many of our service users experience multiple forms of MVAWG and believe a false separation of MVAWG and domestic violence and abuse(DVA) / sexual violence(SV) ignores the overlapping experiences of survivors. We will continue to support the 'whole survivor' and their intersecting and overlapping experiences.



# Aspirations, Education & Employment

At Solace we are all too aware of the impact that MVAWG has on women's employment but also that it can have on young people's aspirations and education.

- We will support and facilitate our service users to pursue education, vocational courses and qualifications that will help them to get back into employment.
- We will continue to develop specialist projects, working with employment specialists and the Department for Work and Pensions as well as employers to support our service users back to (or into) work.
- We will re-frame all our support plans, changing the 'employment, education and training' section to 'aspirations', recognising that women need to lead their own support plan.
- We will work to try to break stereotypes around certain careers and, with the work of our children and young people (CYP) team, encourage more girls from a young age (especially from Black and minoritised ethnicities) to go into STEM subjects and careers typically seen as "masculine".
- We will scope the creation of a mentoring scheme for young people where a member of staff from Solace will mentor them to support and empower them in their aspirations.
- We will re-focus attention on supporting survivors with education about MVAWG and the impacts. We know that many of our service users face pressure to return to abusive relationships due to family coercion.
- We will prioritise supporting our service users to understand how they can access support, particularly for women who have NRPF who we support to regularise their status. We will help to show women to what support is available.

# Children & Young people

For too long, CYP experience of MVAWG have been minimised or reduced to 'witnesses of domestic abuse'. Our work with CYP is crucial to support them on their journeys to recovery and support them into the future. As with adult survivors, we will support CYP holistically, tailoring services to their needs and addressing the multiple forms of MVAWG CYP experience.

- We will continue and seek to expand our work in schools, building up to developing a 'whole school approach', building on the opportunities that statutory relationships and sex education (RSE) brings.
- We will identify and support CYP who have missed school due to domestic abuse before they become a lost generation with learning gaps.
- We will work with the local education sector and build into our public affairs a campaign and policy for CYP in refuges to be given priority access to schools.
- We have recognised a gap in support for young people aged between 13-15 who do not receive MVAWG services. We will scope the development of dedicated young people advocacy for this age group.
- We will continue to roll-out, evaluate and further develop our parallel programmes for CYP and non-abusive parents.
- We will harness technological means to provide tailored and discrete services for young people considering that they may prefer text or app-based support on age-appropriate platforms.
- We will work with commissioners and health services to be able to provide CYP with access to a diverse offer of therapeutic services, led by the CYP themselves.
- Building on best practice with adult men, we will explore different options for perpetrator work with young men, building programmes based on authenticity and empathy and supporting young men to identify the impacts of 'toxic masculinity' on their behaviour.



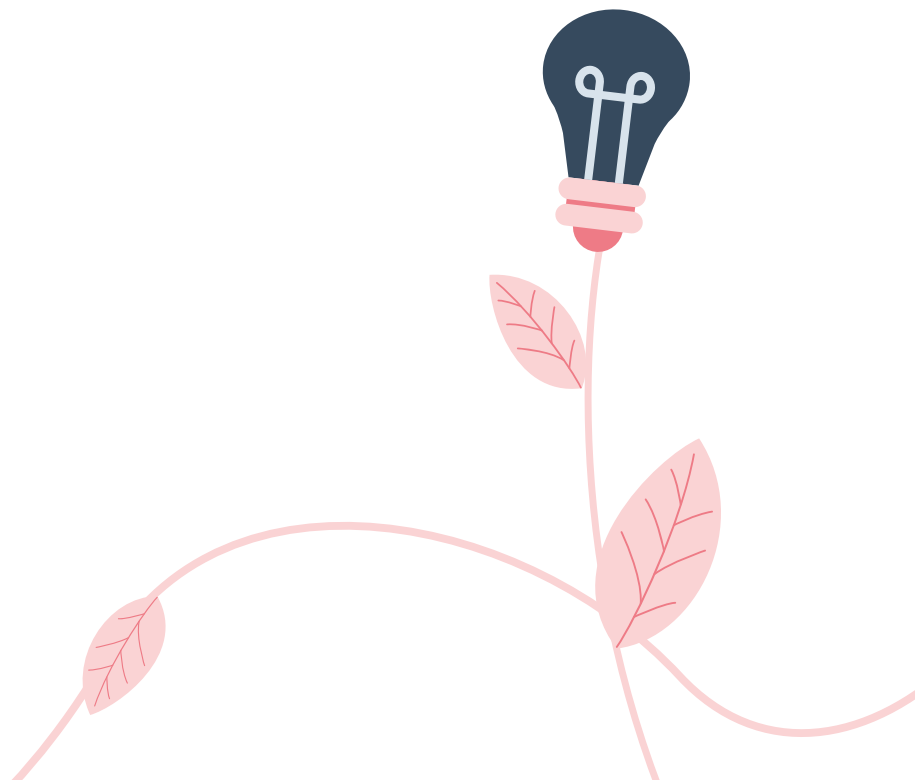
Solace provided 1,087 women & children with refuge accommodation



# Empowerment, Engagement & Accessibility

At Solace, we want to foster an environment of empowerment and women supporting women. To empower our service users, that empowerment needs to start from within Solace with our staff, which is part of our organisational growth plans outlined above.

- We will work with partners to ensure that our services are accessible to all women. Intersectionality is a key principle of the work that we do at Solace and underpins this strategy and we will recognise the multiple and intersecting barriers that women face.
- We will ensure that the most hidden women, including those with learning disabilities, are homeless, older or disabled are supported through tailored approaches delivered in partnership with other specialist organisations.
- We will ensure that our service approaches are informed by the service users we work with and that they take account of additional complexities within abusive relationships.
- Through partnership working and creative approaches, we will work to engage more members of the public to engage on our work to ensure that MVAWG remains high on the agenda for everyone.
- We will continue to re-develop our communications – social media, website and online channels - to ensure that they are accessible to all, and that they 'speak' to all survivors, ensuring provision for those whose first language is not English, or survivors with learning disabilities.
- We will continue to ensure that our communications encourage survivors from intersectional backgrounds by making our service users see themselves reflected in our media.



## What Does This Strategy Mean for Me?





# What Does This Strategy Mean for Me?

## As a survivor

I know that I will receive support services that are individually tailored to me, building on my own strengths and advocacy supporting me to long-term recovery and independence.

## As an employee

I know that the organisation I work for cares and invests in my wellbeing and supports me to develop and grow. I am proud to work for my organisation as they are an intersectional feminist organisation living to their values.

## As a volunteer

I know that the organisation I volunteer for supports me to develop new skills and give back to my local community. My volunteering contributes to life-saving services and allows women and children to recover from violence and abuse.

## As a commissioner

I know that the services I have commissioned are robust, specialist and tailored to the needs of the service users in my area. The services are value for money and save additional funds across my statutory area.

## As a funder

I know that the funding I give goes directly to service users, building robust specialist services that cater to service users' holistic needs. I know that the services are rigorously evaluated, and the learning is disseminated widely, building best practice.

## As a donor

I know that I am contributing to life-changing and life-saving services that support women and children who really need the extra help I can give.

## As a member of the public

I know that Solace as an organisation exists to support the needs of service users through providing excellent services, pushing for positive changes at a local level and at a national level with government. I know Solace is an organisation that exists to build a future world free from violence through working in partnership.

## As a partner organisation

I know that Solace focuses on developing partnerships across the VAWG and other sectors. Solace supports partners to sustain and grow their own operations and services and provides capacity building support where needed.







**Solace Women's Aid**

United House  
39-41 North Road  
London  
N7 9DP

**Website** | [www.solacewomensaid.org](http://www.solacewomensaid.org)

**Twitter** | @SolaceWomensAid

**Facebook** | /SolaceWomensAid

**Helpline Freephone** | 0808 802 5565

[info@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:info@solacewomensaid.org)

0207 619 1350

**Media Contacts:**

[media@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:media@solacewomensaid.org)

**Fundraising Contacts:**

[fundraising@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:fundraising@solacewomensaid.org)

**solace**

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