

Pictured: Artwork created in an Alana House drop-in session

# Alana House Women's Community Project

## Annual Report 2023-2024





# **About Alana House**

Alana House is a community project run by PACT that uses a holistic and trauma-informed approach to support and empower women facing multiple disadvantages. We offer a confidential, women-only, non-judgemental space and welcome all self-identifying women who feel they need help, support, and advice. Alana House has a centre in Reading, but we also provide outreach services across Berkshire.

Alana House Reading opened in April 2010, adopting the recommendations from the Corston Report, which identified nine pathways of support and the trauma-informed approach needed to support women. Initially established to support women in the criminal justice system but who had often experienced trauma themselves, Alana House has developed over the years to support all women with multiple disadvantages who are looking for support to help make positive life changes.

#### The nine pathways

Women are offered information and support in line with the nine pathways to help empower them to make positive life changes, develop new skills and create new opportunities. The nine pathways are:



#### Accommodation



Attitudes, thinking and behaviour



Children, families and relationships



Domestic abuse, violence and rape



Drugs and alcohol



Education, training and employment

Finance, benefits and debt

Health and wellbeing

Sex working

#### Our aims

We explore these pathways to bring about positive change by:

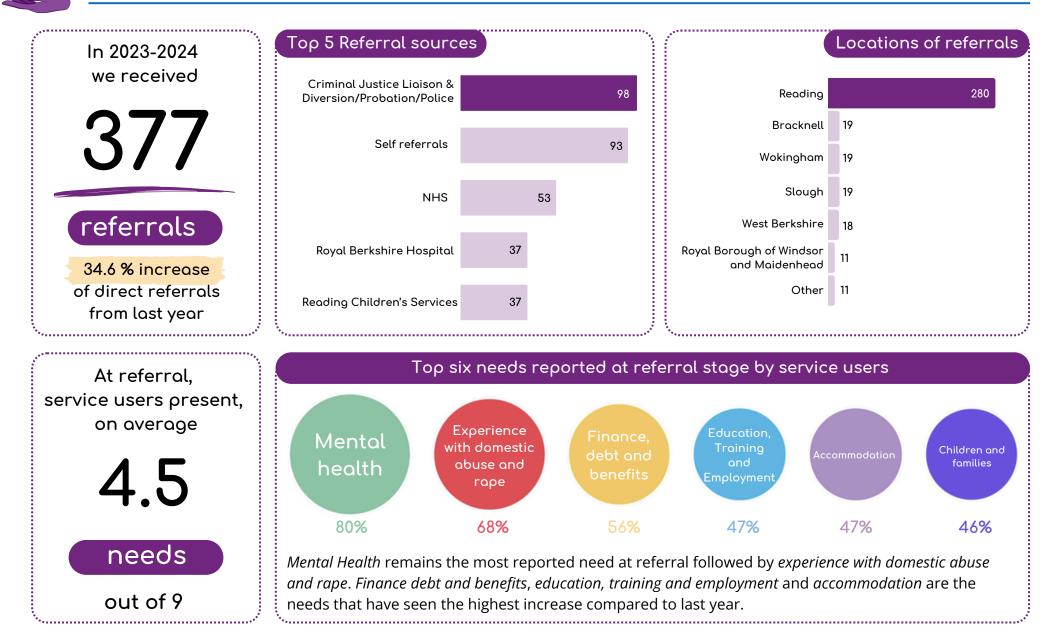
- Empowering women to reflect on their lives and make a plan to address their needs, increasing their independence and facilitating their access to mainstream services.
- Addressing the individual barriers to achieve positive and sustainable change.
- Diverting women from custody by addressing the causes of crime and therefore reducing the impact on the community.
- Providing opportunities to access benefit and welfare advice, NHS sexual health treatment, housing and specialist drug and alcohol advice, in one safe place.



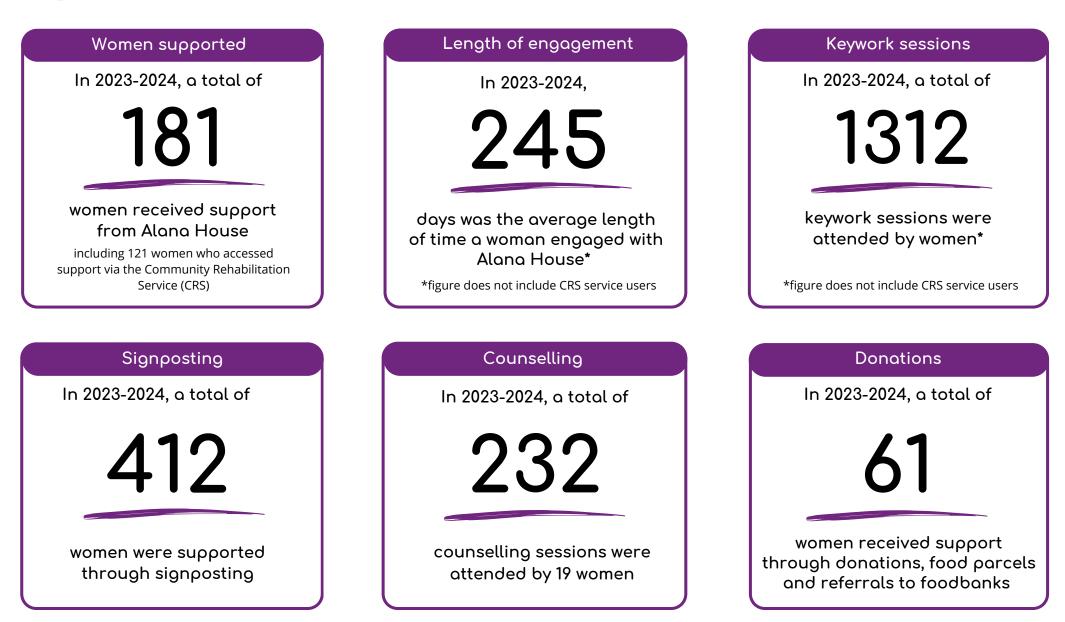
# Alana House projects

- **Custody Diversion Service**: Our work has developed with funding from the Ministry of Justice. Our established service at the custody suite at Loddon has been replicated at the custody suite in Maidenhead. Our goal is to continue to have a presence in both custody suites each day to maximise the 'reachable/teachable' moments, promote early intervention, avoid continued involvement with the criminal justice system and support desistance approaches. On average 150 females are entering custody in Berkshire each month. Many women need assistance to deal with the root causes of offending behaviours to break the cycle of offending. We have been able to develop an additional route for engagement for women who have been in police custody through a data sharing agreement where Alana House can contact a woman who has been detained in police custody once she has been released to offer a further opportunity for support.
- **Court Service**: Alana House staff and volunteers have been offering support to women who are due to be sentenced in Courts in Berkshire. We have been able to have an input into pre-sentence reports (with permission from clients) to share our assessment of the client's needs and outline how holistic and trauma-informed interventions from Alana House can support desistance from further offending, and compliance with sentences passed by the Court. This service has ensured that factors such as abuse, and trauma are considered when females are sentenced. We aim to support 180 women per year (100 accessing one-to-one support and groupwork and 80 accessing triage and signposting support) though both the court and custody pathway.
- **Core Funded Work**: Alana House continues to offer support to women who reside in Reading who are experiencing multiple disadvantages. Women can self-refer or be referred by other professionals. Alana House can support a woman either by allocating a Keyworker for 121 support, or, by offering referred women access to our range of groupwork activities depending on each women's individual needs and circumstances.
- **Project with Royal Berkshire Hospital & Alana House**: This work has continued and created an ongoing referral pathway for people in hospital who disclose that they are victims of domestic abuse. The project enables staff at the hospital to refer by phone or online. Where domestic abuse is suspected or disclosed, Alana House can respond and offer specialist support and signposting. Our shared aim is to support victims to a place of safety, reducing the physical and psychological harm that victims of abuse experience, and therefore reduce hospital admissions which are linked directly or indirectly to someone suffering abuse within an intimate relationship.

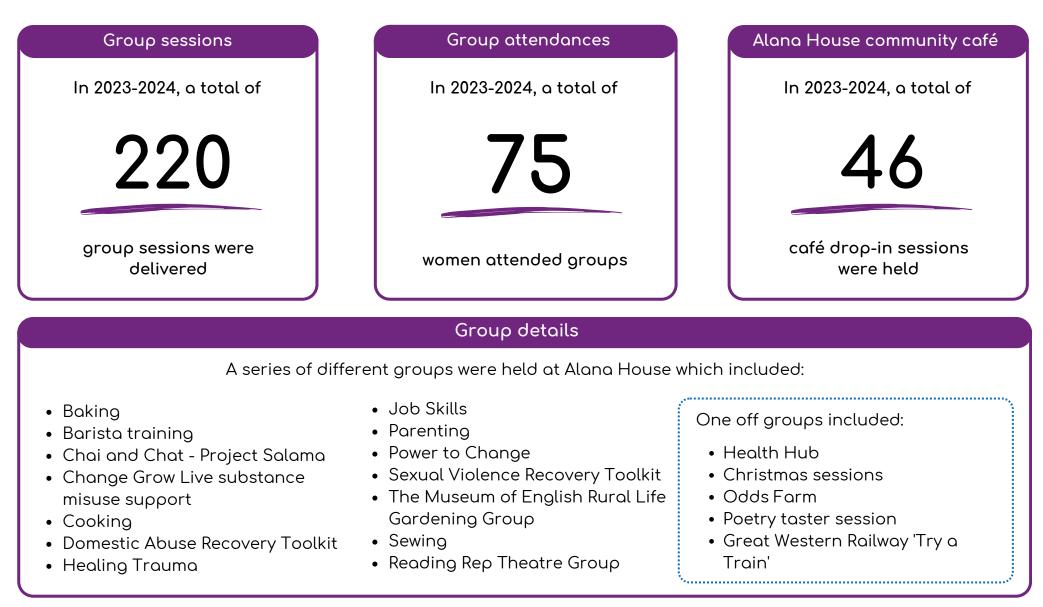
## Referrals



## Key achievements

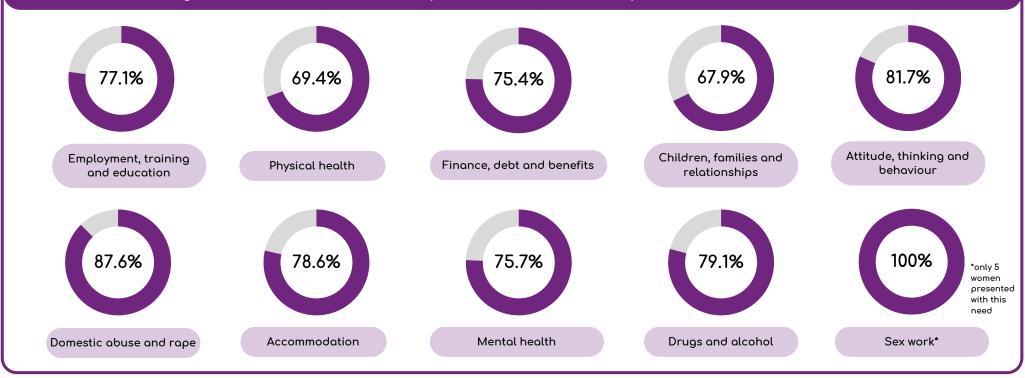


# Groups



### Outcomes

Percentage of women that recorded a positive or sustained improvement in each outcome area



Number of hours given to one-to-one and group support in 2023-2024





### Alana House volunteers

#### Alana House Volunteers

Alana House group sessions have been supported by volunteers

As a Counsellor at Alana House I have the privilege of working with women who have experienced trauma, abuse and mistreatment. By providing a supportive, safe and consistent space week after week, the process of healing can begin.

Clients can experience a trusting and safe relationship which fundamentally strengthens their ability to form these relationships outside of the counselling room.

Alana House volunteer



I find everyone at Alana House very nice and friendly but also professional and keen to do the right thing for the service users. I've always felt included as part of the team and think staff are very flexible and open to new ideas.

In terms of what a volunteer can do; I think one of the main things we can give is time. Not only in hands on work but also time to think outside the box and action new ideas if appropriate. This saves staff time and so they can give full attention to their clients. It's nice for the volunteers to give extra, "icing on the cake" things rather than just having to stick to the basics of the service.

Alana House volunteer

650 hours worked by volunteers

Volunteering for Alana house is very rewarding. They have so many ways o

rewarding. They have so many ways of supporting the women who use the service and as a volunteer it means a lot to be part of the community.

I always feel appreciated by the staff and the service users.

Alana House volunteer

22

volunteers have supported Alana House activities

Within every session lies a story of courage, vulnerability, and resilience. As a volunteer counsellor, I am honoured to be a part of these narratives, guiding with empathy and nurturing with compassion.

Alana House volunteer

# Case study



Alana House explained her high anxiety around men after being sexually abused in the past, therefore requested she completed her community order at the Alana House café (unbeknown to the other women) where she would feel safe and would be significantly less likely to breech the order. The judge agreed. requirement, Emilka has completed an education, training and employment group and learnt new skills at Alana House. She is due to start a Healing Trauma shortly.

As part of her unpaid work

She remains unable to work in the UK or access benefits until the Home Office decides on her status – but they have allowed her to access education.

Therefore Alana House is facilitating access to food, toiletries, vouchers and clothes until she is able to work again, and supported her to register for a suitable college course to build new skills.

Emilka was charged with 15 years of using false documentation and illegally working as an adult carer and faced deportation and prison



She was referred to Alana House by Probation (Courts team) to support her presentencing report

Within 48 hours, an Alana

House Support Worker

had made contact with

Emilka and arranged a

circumstances and actions

meeting to fully

understand her

Emilka was living in fear for her life if deported back to South Africa due to her sexuality and being a single mother – both of which have high risk of honour killings.

Alana House was able to share this information with the Court, and advocated for rehabilitation days and community hours as opposed to a custodial sentence.

# Case study

### Lucia\*

Threats increased significantly as the relationship broke down. The result being that Lucia was scared to leave her flat with her son.

Lucia's mental health deteriorated, and following a fall was left immobilised for the summer. She was self-medicating, had very low mood and was isolated.

Alana House and Brighter Futures for Children supported Lucia following concerns around their safety. Lucia moved to temporary, safe accommodation and was later rehoused permanently. Lucia 's son changed schools and both felt much happier. House, Lucia attended groups, such as: Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit, Healing Trauma, Emotional Intelligence and counselling. Lucia was also supported with translation of Alana House leaflets for other non-English speaking women.

Throughout her engagement with Alana

Family bereavements resulted in an emergency passport being issued for her son. Lucia is now reestablishing family relationships, setting healthy boundaries and maintaining sobriety. Using strategies learnt during attendance at programmes to help manage wellbeing. Attending regular

appointments with her GP.

Lucia is now engaging with alternative community agencies and beginning to research part time work opportunities.

Lucia had come to live in Reading via a refuge placement with her son having left her husband. English is not Lucia's first language.

Lucia had begun a new relationship here which was also unhealthy.

Lucia began to receive racist abuse from local community, including neighbours. Alana House supported Lucia to make homelessness referral as ex-partner continued to attend the property. She was supported with a legal aid application to begin the process of applying for a passport for her son.

Alana House also supported Lucia to make a referral to Citizens Advice for debt support. I didn't feel alone, I knew you were there. I also realise that every problem is temporary.

I came with a set of problems and then life happened and I had more problems and you continued to support me to find solutions.

You didn't leave me alone.



### Royal Berkshire Hospital project case study

### Zahra\*

He was released on bail with conditions to have no contact with her. However, by this stage Zahra was living full-time with him and had given up her former tenancy rendering her homeless. Alana house received the referral as a crisis referral from the Royal Berkshire Hospital midwife. Within 48hrs of receiving it, Zahra had been met at the Alana House trauma-informed centre, a food parcel arranged and emergency accommodation secured via referral into and extensive negotiations with children's social services to house under duty for unborn baby. Alana House was also able to negotiate a weekly allowance from children's social services. Alana House supported Zahra to access legal advice for her immigration status and apply to the Home Office for asylum. Alana House also assisted her to travel to London via paid for train tickets.

> To date, Zahra has had no further contact with her ex-fiancé, has remained financially stable and safely accommodated and has an active asylum claim in with the Home Office.

She has also attended all her maternity and health care appointments.

current fiancé here whilst studying and had fallen unexpectedly pregnant. As a result of the pregnancy and due to her Muslim religion and Moroccan culture back home it was agreed with her partner to be wed.

Zohro hod met her



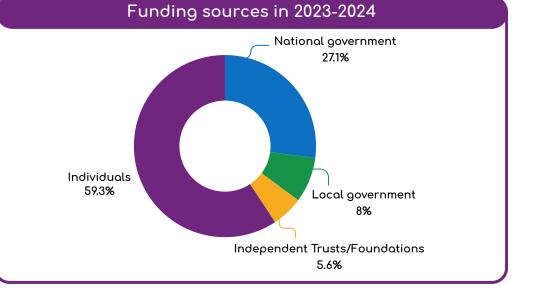
At the Register Office her fiancé was drunk and physically assaulted her alongside significant emotional abuse. The police were called. Zahra's student visa was 3 weeks away from expiry; with no rights to an extension this meant that Zahra would have to return home as she would be unable to work in this country or claim benefits as she had no recourse to public funds. Children's social services completed Claire's Law with Thames Valley Police and in doing so Zahra agreed that returning to the relationship/ pursuing the relationship/ pursuing the relationship was not safe or something she wanted to consider.

> "I want to thank you for all your help, I don't know what I would have done without your help and support.

Thank you for giving me and my baby hope."

# Funding and future plans

- We thank the following organisations who continue to support Alana House - Berkshire Community Foundation, Nationwide, the Ministry of Justice, Reading Borough Council, and the Kidani Memorial Trust.
- With Ministry of Justice funding, we were able to expand Alana House diversion scheme to courts. This model should guide other organisations to make lasting, positive impacts on vulnerable women and their families.



#### Key priorities for 2024-2025

- Maintain and enhance our Criminal Justice System work through partnerships whilst actively seeking to expand our presence in Courts in Berkshire.
- Grow our volunteer base sufficiently, particularly seeking volunteers who have lived experience, to enable a timely and impactful response to meet and engage women detained in police custody in support or signposting to reduce further arrests and increase stability in the community.
- Upskill our frontline staff pursue training for support workers to complete IDVA and ISVA training to enable specialist support for our service users whilst identifying other training relevant to the increasing needs of service users.
- To further expand and develop our counselling service through recruiting two further counselling students and secure funding for a support group for women experiencing maternal separation.



# Funding and future plans

- Further develop the Community Café running regular Barista Training and continue to seek referrals from Unpaid Work department of the Probation Service.
- Continue to prioritise the Health and Wellbeing of staff and service users, sustaining an environment of resilience and developing further tools to strengthen support for the increasing number of women presenting with poor mental health (including clinical supervision for staff).
- Develop our knowledge and understanding of acquired brain injury and how we can assess, and support women impacted by this; exploring partnership with academics to develop toolkit (funding dependent)
- Explore and seek to understand the needs of teenage girls and pilot (funding dependent) a service to support girls at risk of being swept into the criminal justice system.







- Website: www.alanahouse.org
- Address: 2 Southern Court, South Street, Reading, RG1 4QS.



The Oxford Diocesan Council for Social Work Inc., whose working name is Parents And Children Together, is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England (no.1636098) and a Registered Charity (no.285214), whose registered office is: 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading, RG1 4QS



Pictured: Coffee and baked goods made by women at the Alana House Community Café