THE HERSTORY OF WOMEN'S AID IN SCOTLAND

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This document has been compiled from transcripts of the Scottish Women's Aid National Conference in October 1984 and newsletter articles.

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December 1988

GLIMPSES INTO A VIOLENT PAST
BY
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On 27th May 1981, the 'Daily Record' reported on a case heard at Hamilton Sheriff Court. James Boyle, 16 years old, admitted stripping naked an 18 year old mentally handicapped girl in a wood in Belshill, and using her as target practice for his .22 rifle. He wounded her five times. What punishment did this little Ripper-in-the-making receive? Sheriff Lovat fined him £200, confiscated his rifle, and told him that he could end up in Borstal. The 'Record' did not see fit to make any comment.

Violence against women in Scotland, with the knowledge and tacit approval of the male power structure or hierarchy, and the cognisance of the judiciary, is nothing new. It is as old as recorded history. As a matter of fact, the first recorded instance of woman-battering in Scotland can be seen in the case of St Thenew, who lived in the 6th century A.D. Her life story was written in the 12th century by the monk Jocelin of Furness for liturgical use in Glasgow Cathedral. Thenew (also known as Tenew, Tanau, Tennoch - the name survives to the present day as St Enoch; St Enoch's Square, Glasgow, was formerly the site of the medieval St Tennoch's Chapel) was the daughter of Lothus, King of the Lothians. Of a holy disposition, she was unwilling to marry. She was attacked and raped by Eugenius, King of Scots. When her father discovered her extra-marital pregnancy he was outraged, and had her stoned and flung from the top of a mountain in accordance with ancient custom. Thenew survived, and was cast adrift in an open boat on the Firth of Forth. It landed at Culross in Fife, where it was met by St Serf. Thenew was delivered of a boy, baptised Kentigern, who was brought up by St Serf. St Kentigern - universally known by schoolchildren as St Mungo - was to become the patron saint of Glasgow.

It is perhaps fitting that a city, where there has always been so much violence and brutality against women, should have as its patron saint, a man who was conceived in rape, and whose mother was honoured by the medieval church on account of her purity and her perseverance in the face of persecution. St Thenew suffered a kind of 'Christian' martyrdom on account of her rape, beatings and unmarried motherhood, and it is in many respects surprising that the Catholic Church has forgotten such a woman. Until the Reformation, St Thenew was widely revered, and her annual feast day celebrated in Scotland every 18th July.

The Reformed Church in Scotland swept away such superstitions and idolatry - and replaced them with a set of superstitions of its own, which, as far as women were concerned, were lethal, and at certain periods, bordering on the genocidal. The Witchcraft Act was passed in 1563, giving an unprecedented opportunity for the sexual harassment, torture and judicial murder of women in the two centuries which followed. The last witch to be burned in Scotland was executed at Dornoch in 1727 for - among other things - having turned her daughter into a pony, which was shod by the Devil. The Witchcraft Act was repealed in 1736, only after much opposition from certain divines, who considered it to be the law of God. After all, it was only three years prior to that that William Forbes, Professor of Law at Glasgow University had published in his <u>Institutes of Scots Law</u>, details of how to investigate cases of witchcraft, taking into account whether or not an accused woman could shed tears, say the Lord's Prayer, or had the devil's marks upon her body. Such was the Scotland of the Englightenment (18th century).

The full blood-stained history of violence against women in Scotland is yet to be charted. Little concern on the subject was shown until the advent of the various women's rights movements in the mid 19th century. The full political economic and social disadvantages of their sex were recognised by those campaigners, and the first step towards redressing the balance was seen to be political. Nevertheless, many women considered that there were certain things that a vote could not cure, and wife-battering came into this category. Jessie Russell, a Partick carpenter's wife, who managed to publish a book of poems in 1877, outlined all the 'wrongs' suffered by women, in a poem entitled 'Women's Rights Versus Woman's Wrongs'. She listed low wages, oppressively hard work, widowhood, high rents, sweating and low-paid domestic work, bordering on slavery. Besides this,

"Many a one bears a greater wrong who is called by the name of wife

While the dogs which follow her brutal lord lead not such a wretched life

But a life for a life, and the murderer's hung, and we think not the law inhuman

They why not the lash for the man who kicks or strikes a
defenceless woman?"

(The Blinking of the Fire and Other Poems, Glasgow 1877)

This point of view - that the punishment never fitted the crimes against women - was reiterated again and again by the Suffrage campaigners of the next generation. Even so, to gain political sympathy within a male hierarchical structure, certain suffragettes seem to have found it advantageous to concentrate more on crimes against children. During 1913, Janie Allan, who wrote for the socialist newspaper FORWARD reported constantly on crimes of sex and violence. During one week in July, for example, 6 out of 14 cases at Glasgow High Court concerned assaults on women and children, and three of those were against children between the ages of 5 and 12. She cited the instance of one man sentenced to 2 years penal servitude for child rape - one year less than another conviction for attempted theft in the same court. One man was jailed for 5 years for 'serious assaults' on his daughter aged 11, and another aged 9. These crimes like many others came to light only when the children were found to have advanced venereal disease - it was a common belief that a man could cure himeself of V.D. by having intercourse with a virgin, and many children, some of them even too young to speak, suffered because of this.

Some of these crimes make horrifying reading. We may think we have progressed ..... until we pick up tomorrow's paper.

We need to know our past, bloody though it may be. There are many reasons for women's oppression which are peculiar to Scotland, and these we need to discover. If we do not know our roots, we cannot grow. Women's history is often ignored by professional historians, and it is up to us to uncover it. Often, the best place to start is a local newspaper - most reported on crimes against or by women. The records of many Scottish Burghs are available in printed form, as are Kirk Session records - both rich sources on the treatment of women. It would be interesting to hear of material uncovered in other areas. I only ever have the opportunity to work from Glasgow sources.

Reprinted from Scottish Women's Aid Newsletter, July 1981.

Elspeth King is the Keeper of the People's Palace in Glasgow.

Three women talked about the part they played in the earlier work of Women's Aid and how their groups got going. The following is transcribed from a tape we made.

Kathryn Kerr, Edinburgh Women's Aid

"I am not very sure I like being converted into a historical personage as I still feel most of my good life is yet to come. I am taking that with a pinch of salt, but I think I am probably the person who has been around the longest who is here today. And it is a daunting thought because I am quite sure those of us who were involved in the early days, had we known what we were taking on would have run a mile rather than still, twelve years on, be involved in the same kind of problems. But in many ways it is very, very encouraging to see the number of women that are here today and recognise the number of groups that are around in Scotland because when I got involved there was nothing of Women's Aid at all.

In 1972 the Edinburgh Women's Liberation Workshop, which had a room down in Fountainbridge, was getting a bit dissatisfied by the way they seemed to be doing a lot of talking and no action. And a group of them went down from the workshop to Chiswick to see what Erin Pizzey was doing. She had started a Women's workshop that was campaigning about prices in the high street, and childcare facilities in Chiswick and that kind of thing. One day a woman who had been badly beaten came to her and said "Can I stay in your club?" - they had rehabilitated an old house - "because I've nowhere to go". And because Erin Pizzey was a fighting kind of woman she would not accept that there was no help for this family - I think there were three children. So they went to the Housing Department and they said "Sorry, no help for you, you've got a house, it is there with your husband". They went to the Social Work Department who said "Sorry, can't help. We will take your children into care if you want but there's nothing we can do". So that is how the Chiswick refuge started because the woman was put up. And by word of mouth, the place was filled up in a very short time.

So the women from Edinburgh were very impressed by the spirit of Chiswick and they thought "Well, if they can do it down there, we can certainly do it up here", and the particular group who were involved had no first hand knowledge at all of family violence. They kind of assumed that because there was a problem in London, there was likely to be a problem here and probably a greater one because of the high incidence of alcoholism here. That was the limit of their knowledge at that time. We have learned an awful lot since then. They liked the 'open door' policy that Chiswick was running and resolved that if we ever got a house ours would be run along that principle. They started campaigning to get a house and inevitably, as every one of you will recognise, they got the same reaction. "In Edinburgh? No of course that doesn't happen here, maybe in Glasgow or Dundee or anywhere like that but of course it doesn't happen in Edinburgh". A bit daunted they went round social work departments for reports and the RSSPCC and fortunately got a good response from them, heartily recommending that there was a need. There was a great debate which went on in Edinburgh at the time and a great resistence to this group of women who were labelled 'marriage breakers'.

But, there was also a lot of good support and on the swell of this support an application went into the Edinburgh Town Council applying for a house to run as a centre for women and children. We were given a three-bedroomed flat in a block of four but with a proviso stating that if we hadn't got off the ground within six months the place would be closed. We got a blaze of publicity and that is when I joined the group.

I had never ever opened my mouth in public at all. I had never done anything unconventional. I had lived a totally conventional women's life. The only thing that was beginning to bug me was that my children were getting older and I wasn't needed any more and I had to look for something to do. So I thought that I could go down to the refuge and help with the children. I had no idea there was any thing more I could do.

In the very first group that was Fran Wasoff, Ruth Adler, Marion Blythman and her daughter Margot Galloway and Lorraine Redhall. That was all the women who were around when Women's Aid started. So we got this house, we had a small grant to last us six months so we begged and we borrowed and though we didn't actually steal I gained the reputation of totting in my neighbourhood because we had nowhere to get the equipment that was needed. We were very, very green and when I tell you that we actually installed a 'phone without a paybox you will understand how green we were!

In this blaze of publicity we declared ourselves open. And I, as the only member of the group without a paid job, sat by the 'phone waiting for it to ring. Nothing happened, and nothing happened - and for two whole weeks nobody 'phoned us and nobody wanted to come, and we began to think "Oh, maybe they're right, maybe it doesn't happen in Edinburgh. And then one wonderful morning there came a bang on the door and there was a lassie who had travelled all the way down from Wick with her three children and we were in business. It was a terrific relief.

After the first fortnight we had 35 bodies in that three-bedroomed flat and we were very unpopular with our neighbours I can tell you. So that was how Edinburgh got started.

We had in the meantime acquired a very racy kind of reputation for ourselves and I was quite transfixed by this sudden change from a conventional role to one as being wicked. And me that was beginning to feel angry at the stories I was hearing and me that was feeling - yes I am going to support this woman, I am going to do something about it. As the neighbours complaints grew in number we realised we were grossly overcrowded and applied for a second house. We had plenty of evidence that we were needed. At that time none of the other groups had started and we were getting women from all over - from Newcastle, from Glasgow, from Aberdeen, from anywhere you can think of.

We had a very simple way of dealing with our financial difficulties. The rent for our council flat was £11.50 a fortnight, so we divided it by the number of families who came into the house and that was how our finances were dealt with. It was lovely. Halcyon days of no problems, or so we thought. We sometimes ran out of coal, or there was no food, or somebody decamped with the coffee money, but things were very, very simple. We had no paid workers, and everything was done on a voluntary basis and there was plenty of spirit and enthusiasm.

Because we were the first group to get started others who had not yet got a house would come to us and ask "What do you do in this circumstance? What do you do in that circumstance?" Dundee was early off the ground, Glasgow and Central next. We were all kind of picking each others brains and passing round helpful hints. And we decided there was too much going on for us not to use one another to pool our knowledge and help one another along and develop a policy that would be common within Scotland so in 1974 we had a kind of informal get-together. We had our first Scottish Women's Aid Executive. It was in my sitting room - there must have been about 15 or 16 there because I supplied the soup and rolls for lunch and that is how the tradition of soup and rolls at meetings was established. We decided that we were going to be independent of, but affiliated to, National Women's Aid because of the different legal systems and it did not seem practical to affiliate ourselves to London which was so far away.

At our first Executive we had this classic excuse from a lady from Dundee, who shall remain nameless, who said she was very sorry she couldn't come that day as she had to look after the children as her husband was going to his anti-sexist men's group. I don't think anyone in Women's Aid would ever send in an excuse like that now. Our meeting was fairly simple and we decided that each group would contribute a sum to cover postage, paper, etc and we discussed the approaches we would make to housing departments and what our attitudes should be to women who would insist they went back to their husbands. Very basic simple things that continually came up in Women's Aid.

In 1975 there was the famous National Women's Aid Conference down in London where the crunch came about the ideas of what kind of policies Women's Aid was going to establish and Erin Pizzey retired from the fray having contributed a great deal to the original fighting spirit of Women's Aid but having parted ways at that point and it was then that I realised how many different sources Women's Aid groups came from. They were not all feminist groups like Edinburgh. There were church groups, there were groups just of interested women, there were women from all over. And this kind of tolerance and acceptance for women fighting for other women, wherever they come from was always the thing I have enjoyed very much about Scottish Women's Aid.

Amazingly enough Scottish Women's Aid was encouraged to apply for funding by the Social Work Services Group and Fran and Ruth put in that application. We were given a fairly generous grant for that time to establish ourselves as the umbrella organisation for Scotland. Since then Scottish Women's Aid has gone from strength to strength."

Sue Robertson, Central Region Women's Aid

"I first got involved in February 1975 when a friend and I went to a Women's Action Group at the University of Stirling and we had a local solicitor who came along and talked about the problems of battered women. This friend and I had both been in various women's groups and had talked about all the various issues which women did talk about in the late 60s early 70s. We were both a bit fed up with this because it seemed to be an endless round of talking and when any new women joined you talked about the same issues and you never seemed to really get anywhere. We were also aware that there were a lot of women out there whom we weren't talking to at all. We were quite attracted to something practical, something connected to Women's Liberation which would help other women as well. When this solicitor said women were needing refuge space and a few refuges were starting to be set up then we thought this was something we would like to try and work on.

So she and I and somebody else - three of us - did some preparatory work and interestingly we discovered that at that time in Central Region where we were, that Falkirk District had been interested in setting up a refuge for battered women and setting it up as a local authority thing. So we decided the first target should be Falkirk since the local authority there was interested and sympathetic. We had various small meetings and went along to see the Edinburgh refuge and I have very vivid memories of going along to the Broomhouse refuge late at night and meeting the women there and a volunteer who was there involved in supporting the refuge; and having great difficulties as an English woman who had only recently come to Scotland in understanding what anybody was saying in the refuge was clearly going to be a bit of a problem!

We had an exhibition on Women's Liberation in Falkirk in May 1975 and my one abiding memory of that is an old guy wandering into this exhibition, looking around and then saying "I just came to tell you that I'm agin you" and walked out again. And we thought, "this is really encouraging!"

Despite that we had a public meeting in June 1975 and amazingly sixty people turned up to that meeting. I've seen so many where the platform's as big as your audience that I think we were really lucky to have such a big response locally. We collected about twenty names and from my notes there were two ministers wives, two

Samaritans and two social workers there. I think that shows the very broad base of women we were starting off with. A lot of lobbying went on after that - I was working during the day so a lot of other people were doing most of the day to day wor, meetings, seeing the council. In November 1975 Falkirk had its first house allocated for a refuge. We also managed to get an Urban Aid grant of £3500 spread over three years. The thing gradually spread in Central Region.

Between January and June 1976 preparatory work was being done with some interested people in Clackmannan District and in February the Falkirk refuge actually opened. An interesting point there is that in the first year 27 women were admitted and 32 turned away so nothing much as changed - we are still turning away more than we admit. Later in 1976 Clackmannan were allocated a house and at the end of that year we got funding from the MSC Job Creation project for two workers in each area.

In 1976 we had the third National Conference of Scottish Women's Aid and again things have changed quite a bit. I can remember being involved in organising that one and the 1977 Conference and I can remember sitting in my front room with the registration forms. This was me as a volunteer in a local group doing this. It was all on a very much more manageable scale. It was feasible then to have two of us doing the work - it certainly wouldn't be so now.

At that 1976 Conference there were quite a few groups. Only Edinburgh had a paid worker so all the other groups were operating on a wholely volunteer basis. We discussed the role of men in Women's Aid then as the first members of the Clackmannan group were a male councillor and his wife and he was at this small group discussion. I've recorded that he did feel strongly that men shouldn't be involved as members of Women's Aid - that they should be involved in helping with the kids or maintaining the house but not as full members. He actually gave us a lot of support as he'd been brought up in a house where his father had been violent to his mother and he did not want anyone to go through what he had gone through as a kid.

Between 1976 and 1978 Scottish Women's Aid was operating as well. So the local groups were springing up as well as the national dimension. From 1979 - 83 I was working with Scottish Women's Aid so seeing much more of the overall picture of the development of groups throughout Scotland and also the lobbying that went on at that time to get the Matrimonial Homes Act on the statute books. It is depressing in the light of all the work that went on in that period to see how little the legislation has achieved."

Ingrid Muir, Dundee

"The group started in 1974, two years before I joined it. Those two years were spent campaigning for a refuge and, contrary to what Kathryn thinks, women didn't get battered in Dundee. We were told time and time again that it just did not happen, it wasn't a problem. Even social workers who later became one of our main sources of referrals would say it wasn't a serious problem.

In 1976 one battle was won in that the council conceded the need for a refuge and we were given the present refuge which we called Rainbow House. Before that we were given a temporary refuge in a scheme - a council house in Kirkton and when I joined we were operating that refuge and trying to get the real refuge up to scratch to get women in. One difference Dundee has is that once we got the refuge we were never an all volunteer group. The Job Creation scheme came to our rescue and we got three workers funded. We were all appointed very shortly after the temporary refuge opened and so always had a refuge worker, a children's worker and a follow-up worker at least. When we opened the refuge with room for ten families it was quite important to have these workers. Even at that we were very hard worked.

The main things I remember about the early days were hostility from the neighbours, problems with money and problems with repairs. The refuge we had was an old house and I think getting it up to scratch and keeping it in good repair is still a problem. We had to scratch around to get furnishings and it was a constant battle with the council to get repairs done. Sometimes even when things were done the strangest things would happen. We got community industry in the early days to decorate the place before we moved in and I arrived at work one morning to see how things were going to find that they'd painted the kitchen lilac and purple!

The other bugbear was money. We had to collect the rents from women in the refuge as well as being care workers and we found there was quite a conflict with those two roles. The main thing that stuck in those years was the problem with the neighbours because nobody wants a refuge on their doorstep unfortunately.

We encountered very serious resistance in the new refuge and looking back at my log book almost every week there is something about fending off the neighbours' complaints. We had a whole spate of press reports. It started off with complaints in the spring and summer about the numbers and the children and so on with reports in the Evening Telegraph which culminated in the autumn with a News of the World reporter coming round to the refuge. Our first instinct was to send the guy away but we thought if we did that he'll just speak to all the neighbours and get their side of the story, so we spoke to him, gave what was our side and we thought he was listening. However, that Sunday what should appear in the News of the World but a photograph of me that I didn't know they had taken under a banner headline which read -

"Saucy frolics rumpus at battered wives hostel!"

And I think on that note I'll stop.

* The complete tape of the above can be borrowed from the S.W.A. Office.

THE HERSTORY OF GLASGOW WOMEN'S AID

- an interview with 2 founding members

(Maureen Whitelaw and Mary O'Donnell were two of the sixteen women who came together in the spring of 1973 to form Glasgow Women's Aid. Together they look back on how the group survived those early days.)

Glasgow Women's was born out of the consciousnessraising sessions and Women's Liberation workshops of the early 1970's. Maureen Whitelaw remembers one such meeting, held in the spring of 1973: "A group of us went to a workshop on 'Women's Place in Literature'. The meeting itself was not very successful, but at the end of that workshop, one woman mentioned that another group was formed. This new group had agreed to setting up some sort of centre for women who'd been victims of domestic."

It was this new group that eventually became Glasgow Women's Aid - which Maureen and Mary argue was the first Women's Aid organised in Scotland. "Edinburgh (Women's Aid) says they were first, but actually Glasgow was first. It just took us one year to get a refuge." said Mary O'Donnell.

Although a few of the women had been involved in the Women's Aid developing in Chiswick, England in the fall of 1972, most members of the new group joined simply through a common interest in the cause. "I wanted to do something practical and not just sit in talk-shops," said Maureen. "I think a lot of women felt like that."

In their first meetings, the group began forming what Maureen called their "campaign strategy". They decided the first step would be acquiring a refuge. "We started writing letters," Maureen remembers. "We wrote to Councillors, church leaders, the press..." They presented their case to as many influential people as possible.

For many of the women, it was their first direct involvement in local politics, and their experience of public speaking. "One of us was a social worker. She had some speaking skills." Maureen remembers. "The rest of us were just volunteers. We developed skills!"

She remembers one of the earliest discussions with local officials. "I was in one of the first meetings in the City Chambers in Glasgow and I remember two Councillors met us. They took us very light-heartedly. We got sniggering comments (about battered women) such as "They like it." The Councillors also accused Women's Aid of breaking up families. They told Maureen they were certain that the Church would oppose Women's Aid as well. Mary encountered equally strong opposition. "I remember going to a health centre on our first Flag Day, and asking if the doctors would give some money. They thought it was quite funny, even though they were in an area where there must've been many, many women getting beaten." The doctors made tongue-in-cheek accusations of wifeabuse to one another. Others turned the questions around and asked Mary: "What about the men who get beaten-up? Why don't you build a shelter for them?"

"I think people felt self-conscious," Mary explained. For many of the people Women's Aid approached, it was the first time they had been confronted with wife-abuse as a serious problem. Many reacted by either joking about it, or by refusing to believe it existed. "I had lots of people tell me it didn't happen in their area," she said.

One of the group's first goals was to prove that there was a need for a refuge for battered women in Glasgow. This became "a bit of a catch-22," Maureen remembers: "You can't get a refuge without proving there's a need. But you can't prove the need without the refuge. And Councillors want numbers."

Other local officials were also generally of little help in the campaign, Maureen said. "The police were extremely unsympathetic. The attitude was very much that (wife-abuse) was just domestic disputes." She said the police felt there was 'no point' in doing anything about reportings of domestic violence, because they held the mistaken and erroneous view that in nearly all cases, the woman dropped her charges. Later, the group learned to counter this argument, backed with facts from research and information about 'correct' police procedure. But it took time to learn to react effectively.

"I must admit, in those early days, we were very naive and very indignant," remembered Maureen.

Without experience in politics or public speaking, the volunteers had to rely on their belief in what they were doing to keep from getting frustrated. "I don't know if we really thought it through in those days. Our common ground was that we all firmly believed in what we were doing. We knew that there was a tremendous problem, based on hundreds of thousands of women who had literally nowhere else to go," said Maureen.

In 1973 in Glasgow, there was no place where an abused woman could go to stay away from her partner for any length of time. The only places available to women were bed and breakfast accommodation (which required women to leave the building during the day), the Salvation Army (which only provided shelter for two nights), or Forest Hall Hospital (which took in entire families as a unit only).

"There was no conception of women's rights at that time. There was no Homeless Person's Act or Matrimonial Homes Act, so the woman had no right to a home," said Mary. "Unless we stressed the welfare of the children, there was not a lot of sympathy for the woman."

Women were also getting very little help from police when they reported abuse. Often, the only action the police would take would be to jail the man for "breach of the peace' Maureen explained. "He'd be released again the next morning with no follow-up. And the police felt they'd done their bit by removing the man at the crisis moment."

Despite the opposition, Glasgow Women's Aid finally acquired a refuge, and on February 6 1974, Interval House opened its doors. Maureen describes the 5-bedroom flat: "After campaigning for over one year, we were given this horrendous first-floor flat in the Gorbals. It had a big kitchen where women cooked and ate, four bedrooms, a communal living room and one horrible toilet." The building was located underneath a railway line and on top of a haulage contractor. It had rats.

"It wasn't just a hard-to-let flat," remembered Mary. "It was due for demolition, except there were two other families who were still living there!"

There was a family across the landing and an extended family in the two flats upstairs. "They had twelve children and three dogs," Maureen remembered. "We had a very mixed relationship with that family upstairs." At the worst time, the family was using the refuge's washer and lifting the donated clothing. They called the volunteers continually with complaints, and, on several occasions even called the press with stories about the women.

There were plenty of problems within the refuge itself in the first year. For one thing, the group had decided the refuge would shelter as many women as needed it - with no limit to the number of women living there. "In the beginning, we had an 'open door' policy. We really packed them in," remembered Maureen. Almost from the day Interval House was open, it was over-crowded. At one point in the first year, there were 10 women and 29 children sharing the 4 bedrooms, single kitchen, and single toilet.

This caused lots of friction between the women and 'constant battles over house keeping," Maureen remembers. "It was very difficult to keep it looking welcoming. It was terribly depressing for any woman walking into that flat. It was dark. It was dingy. And we didn't have the money to carry out repairs."

"Women were actually leaving because they couldn't stand the conditions, they couldn't stand the overcrowding." said Mary. The group finally established a basic housekeeping standard, and set a limit to the number of women that could come in. However, through that first year, increasing numbers of women continued to call Women's Aid.

In its first twelve months, 62 women contacted Glasgow Women's Aid. The group still did not have a phone line. Volunteers with home phones were receiving calls day and night. Together with working and raising families of their own, some volunteers were also taking battered women into their own homes when the refuge was full.

"There were so many crises in the beginning that we got blase," said Mary. "You just learned to laugh at things and keep going."

"I think we were kind of motivated by one crisis after another," remembered Maureen. "There was a core who were absolutely committed and there was nothing that put us off. Whenever we had an argument or anything, we had to all pull together because we were determined to keep the group going in one form or another."

Looking back on those first years, despite the struggles and the slow progress, Maureen was sure Glasgow Women's Aid made an impact right from the start. "The one thing I'm absolutely positive about is that we changed a hell of a lot of attitudes about domestic violence."

LAURIE UNDERWOOD