

AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH GROUP (AWHG)

2024-25 Annual Report

We continue to aspire and grow, working to:

- Reduce isolation, stigma towards single parenthood and discrimination by helping affected women strengthen social networks and confidence to become better integrated and active into their locality;
- Reach out, empower and equip disadvantaged women with advocacy, awareness, interpreting support, health, legal and practical tools to take action and make informed decisions;
- Address high levels of unemployment by providing basic skills, literacy, vocational training, childcare, as well as a homework support for a further generation of young people. Our aim is to enable isolated women and families living in, or at risk of poverty, with skills to achieve their full social, emotional, civic and employment potential.

Who are we? What do we do?

Set up and led by women from hard-to-reach communities in the deprived ward of Darnall in Sheffield who clubbed together three decades ago to formalise a self-help women's group where women were constantly asking for help, AWHG is a constituted voluntary sector charity governed by a voluntary Management Committee team composed of local women who themselves have faced challenges in finding their way through life.

Our geographic reach has expanded as isolated and disadvantaged BAME heritage women, refugees and asylum-seekers who disproportionately experience poor health, housing issues, poverty and increasingly, anxiety, continue to find their ways to our door. Our aim is to provide much-needed health, welfare advice & advocacy, English, IT and vocational training alongside health & wellbeing services at a time of increasing poverty, depression and strife.

Building and sharing skills is at the core of our work. When three Somali-heritage mums took an initial step thirty years ago to set up a self-help group and help women showing up at their doorstep at all hours of the day and night, we had no notion of the steps which would organically follow to shape our expanding services which at their core, continue to meet each newcomer in whatever circumstances they find themselves to begin with. Our strength lies in our understanding of what it is to arrive in a new environment, with or without language skills, social networks, work experience and degrees to build a new life – particularly where women juggle

to guide and support young children in circumstances around which they themselves are learning to survive.

Our work continues to be informed by the experiences of local women, including those governing our work via a voluntary Management Committee, who have themselves been challenged in accessing much-needed services. Working from our community centre in Darnall, Sheffield which experiences some of Britain's highest indices of deprivation, we continue to support services-users, a majority who are displaced from Pakistani, Yemeni, Somali, Kurdish, Iraqi, Bangladeshi, Sudanese, Syrian, African, Afghani and Eritrean heritage, to find their feet and thrive.

Where we once primarily catered to women within walking distance, women from across Sheffield have begun to arrive. As our geographic reach grows, the profile of service-users is also widening, with more women of Iraqi Kurdish heritage now asking to join ESOL, IT and vocational training. Our waiting lists grow as civic funding cuts bite, local provisions disappear and local groups struggle to find volunteers.

Deep bonds of trust help us reach BAME women who struggle to access mainstream services. While sharing skills, learning and empathy, we try to help each newcomer become more resilient, then build skills to improve their family's health, mental outlooks and finances. As each moves out of crisis, maybe joining ESOL and exercise classes, craft activities, celebrations and outings according to need, age and aspirations, friendships develop and networks help us find our way. Volunteers, most of whom are former service-users, take steps towards improved self-sufficiency, become role models just as young people attending our Homework Club might also begin to achieve and become peer role models too.

A Word from our Chair: A Year of Change and Growth!

So many who joined our Pre-Entry Level ESOL classes seven years ago, moving up after achieving end-of-year exams, working their way towards fluency, then attending vocational courses at Sheffield College and qualifying for jobs as Teacher Assistants, Nursery Workers, Passenger Assistants (PATs) on special needs school buses or carers with *Health & Social Care* have proved cynics wrong. No one imagined this was possible - yet fifteen low-income women in this year alone have achieved in the face of challenges, caring their families, often alone, as they find their feet with determination and hard work. Some were labelled as being 'lazy'.

So many stories to tell! Just recently, a woman applied for a job as a cleaner at a local school. While the team was supportive, they told her to go back to study English and apply again when her English language skills had improved.

Where once we had very limited role models showing the way, women simply didn't think they could achieve, self-belief is thriving! Access to free education is key.

Staff, Management Committee members and volunteers don't count the hours spent trying to make a difference. After a very long day, we might well ask ourselves why

we do it. But with news of each small step comes joy and reminders of a steady journey we have taken together. It reinvigorates and reminds us of what we set out to do, all those years ago, opening our doors for each new woman knocking.

None of this could have been possible without the financial and practical support from *Comic Relief*. While giving us tools, guidance and support to strengthen our organisation, they also demonstrate flexibility enabling us to adapt to work plans to effectively meet hidden need in a changing environment.

A lot of our clients are still isolated, however, unsure of how systems work and, struggling with limited English language skills to make themselves understood, are at the mercy of a doctor, a housing, a social worker when seeking help. In the absence of peer guidance, knowledge of their rights, social standing and skills to articulate their needs, each becomes dependent on an authority understanding their situations, giving them accurate information and demonstrating good will.

As costs of food and utility continue to rise, a shortage of affordable housing and more, AWHG has begun to intervene to help families in crisis, signposting women to foodbanks, supporting families facing homelessness and addressing family challenges. Better communication, support and listening skills allowing for earlier interventions would save lives, health care costs and all the hidden costs of women unable to work or care for their children effectively.

Each time a woman, vulnerable to whoever she turns to for guidance, falls into crisis she turns to peers who, increasingly, have come to us for help. Thanks to the help of our locally elected Councillor, Mary Lea, women are supported in working their way through school places appeals, housing, health and Social Services systems to access services to which they are entitled but to which often denied. Having Mary by our side has changed everything. Where officers might once have dismissed our explanations, failed to return calls or take action, then now listen and act. We help women in dozens of ways, as illustrated below:

Homeless and Abused

We are fortunate to be helped by our dedicated elected Councillor, Mary Lea, a down-to-earth, no-nonsense woman. she comes without delay, often visiting clients in their homes and giving her number, just in case. People like her are hard to find.

A Sudanese-heritage woman and her two children, one disabled, were thrown out by her husband. She approached Sheffield's Housing Dept., was put on the housing waiting list, then sent away. No interpreter was provided. Her English skills are still limited and she had no idea what her rights are. A friend let them stay but as it was overcrowded, they could not stay long. Luckily, she turned to us for help.

Our advocates, supported by Mary, accompanied our client to Shelter who liaised with Sheffield's Housing team to place the woman and her children in safe, temporary accommodation. They stayed for several months but were then given a

fifth floor property with no working lift. She was told she would be considered 'intentionally homeless' if she refused the offer. She and her disabled son struggled.

Thanks to Cllr. Mary Lea's letter-writing, we managed to secure the family a ground floor home within six months. She is a special person for whom very special thanks is always on our mind for her dedication, empathy and hard work!

Losing a Child ...

A woman came to us who's one-year-old breastfeeding baby had rolled and fallen from her sofa. She took him to the doctor but was told he was fine. Back home, he vomited repeatedly and was clearly not well. We accompanied her to the hospital for further checks. Examinations indicated that he did indeed have a head injury which, to her astonishment, led to her child being taken away.

Two months have passed and, though she pleaded for the child to at least be placed with a Kurdish family who, sharing her cultural traditions, applied willingly to become foster parents and care for the child as such. At the last minute, they were refused.

She is due in court shortly. We have found her a solicitor to represent her but are concerned accusations of negligence will override witness statements describing a capable and caring mother who's child was injured by an unforeseen accident ...

A Climate of Fear

Strangers now look at us with anger in their eyes. While our neighbourhood feels safer, there are neighbourhoods where we hesitate to go. A shortage doesn't help and clients find themselves in the middle of nowhere or in neighbourhoods where they definitely don't feel welcome.

One of our clients showed up with bruises on her arm, head and side. *What happened?* We asked?

A man had run down the road and knocked her over. A shopkeeper ran out to help, offered her a glass of water and called for an ambulance. It's been three weeks now since her assault, and we are waiting for her to return when she recovers from her injuries, physical and otherwise.

Other such incidents come up on trams, where men come up and abuse women to their face, where thankfully, women have stood their ground until their perpetrators have walked away. All of us, however, now watch over our shoulders while we walk down the streets...

Our Service Users

A majority of women coming through our doors are unemployed or from low-income households in a district experiencing some of Britain's highest indices of deprivation. Most are from migrant or refugee communities and of Pakistani, Yemeni, Somali, Bangladeshi, Sudanese, Syrian, Ethiopian and increasingly, Kurdish heritage. Some women have limited educational and employment experiences, English language, IT and qualifications to navigate statutory services and gain work.

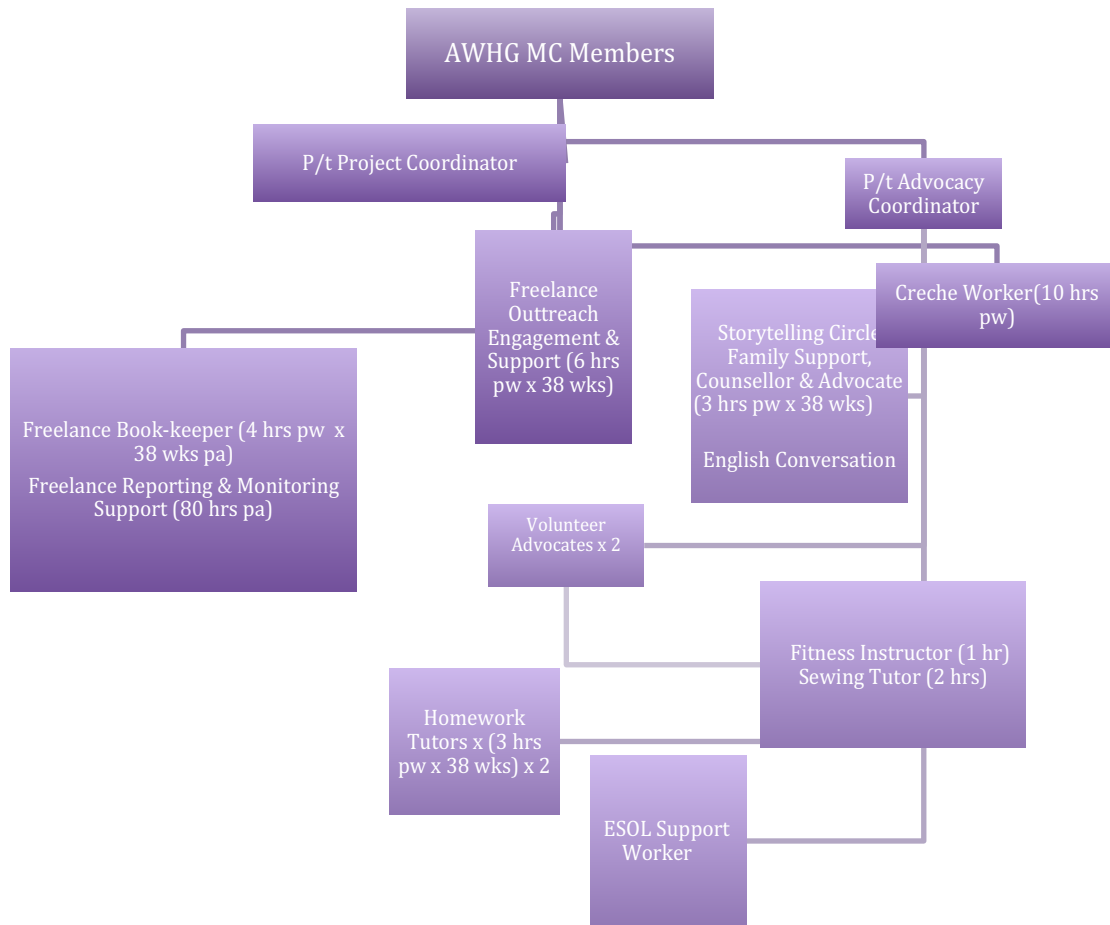
Most hear of our services by word-of-mouth. As all of us come from a position of shared experiences, we understand and support one another while each newcomer can see how other women have developed new skills and moved forward in life. In this sense, we provide ideal role models through our collective efforts.

Classes, workshops, health activities, preparations of refreshments, celebrations and outings help bond and build confidence amongst women who might have limited social networks to which to turn at times of trouble. Some say that looking forward to joining in with group activities in itself improves their outlooks.

Women attending our ESOL and Childcare say that better peer networks also make the experience more sociable as learners meeting others in similar circumstances helps break down taboos of shame as learners start to rebuild new lives. Our welcoming venue offers refreshments which women can help themselves as they please while meeting others in a safe space where they feel can come for help.

As a self-help group, BAME women at AWHG support one another. Newcomers say news of our helping with personal, practical and quality support, particularly when women come in crisis situations, helps our reputation grow. Word also spreads about each woman who achieves a small success. As each newcomer sees how others have developed skills to move forward in life, we also serve as informal, collective role models.

AWHG's Organisation Chart



Meet our Team!

Some of our **Management Committee** members were first met as service-users and volunteers. All of us are local, DBS-checked, and as women of Somali, Black, Syrian and Yemeni heritage, help to represent service-users from a range of backgrounds.

Our Chair, *Halima Mohamed*, Our Treasurer and multi-talented Engineer with talents to repair anything, *Rima Al-Khayat*, multi-certificated Health & Wellbeing community Outreach Worker, *Corrie Moss* and *Eram Al-Khasadi* who speaks Arabic and helps interpret, fill forms and visit GPs with visitors. All generously contribute their talents and support to help us shine!

Our Chair, who helped establish our community initiative three decades ago, received Sheffield's East Local Area Committee *Community Star Award* in September 2023. She is increasingly asked to share insights and help shape strategies so Sheffield's most disenfranchised residents can access support needed while effectively contribute towards improving our whole community. Halima was also recently nominated by *Voluntary Action Sheffield* for a Community Award!

Our Chair, Secretary and Treasurer help support our day-to-day running, supervising and supporting workers, tutors and volunteers while encouraging former service-users to join in and help. We meet quarterly and invite newcomers to join us reviewing the progress of our projects, making sure we provide safe services and

keep within budgets. Feedback from service-users, staff, tutors, volunteers and partners also help us identify new needs and think about how to help.

Our team is growing!

Our *3-days-a-week Outreach Advocate*, Somali, Dutch and Arabic-speaking ***Outreach Advocate*** joined AWHG in 2016 to outreach, advise and advocate for isolated BAME women, refugees and families with limited literacy and digital skills, organising and supporting class tutors, volunteers, empowerment and wellbeing activities including outings, health workshops, sewing, our Homework Club etc. She has Advice & Guidance Level 3 qualifications.

Our *4-days-a-week Project Coordinator* oversees staffing, volunteers, coordination of core activities, helps hands-on with sessional work and representation of AWHG in local forums and networks. sharing insights with strategic community panels including Sheffield's Partnership Board. In the process, we are also learning about wider resources available to support Sheffield's wider diverse demographic communities.

A review this year of her additional administrative duties, including bookkeeping, fundraising and monitoring and reporting on our progress, in coordination with our Treasurer and external support, has led to a pilot project detailed below, to share responsibilities worked round the clock without pay.

Structural Review

Our skeletal staff team have worked all hours over years. When we thankfully secured longer-term core funding from ***Comic Relief*** in October 2024, coupled with Emergency funding to help meet demand from a growing number of women coming to our services for help, we turned to a team of longstanding volunteers who have been core to our service delivery, and asked them to trial new roles on a self-employed basis.

All have been **DBS-checked** and completed our 6-week **Passport to Volunteer Training Certificates** run in partnership with **Sheffield City Council's Skills for Life team** in 2021; each obtained certification in ***Safeguarding (refreshed in Oct 2024), Health & Safety, First Aid, Confidentiality*** while exploring issues including outreach and community engagement skills to help us facilitate safe, effective and caring support to women visiting our centre as follows:

- A **4 hr. pw English Conversation Class tutor** helps women waitlisted for our ESOL classes in gaining basic spoken English language skills, alongside Pre-Entry and Entry-Level learners in need of additional support;
- A **6 hr. pw Urdu-speaking Outreach Advocate**, with skills in *Hindi* and *Bengali*, welcomes, engages and signposts women coming to our centre while setting up classroom arrangements, preparing refreshments ensuring admin, training and refreshment stocks are replenished;

- An experienced **4 hr. pw Finance Worker** tracks income and expenditure, supports our Treasurer as we diversify and consolidate services, transfers book-keeping systems online and produces quarterly cash-flow reports for our Management Committee and funders;
- **Storytelling Circle (3 hrs pw, 38 wks pa):** Our Kurdish/Arabic speaking *Weekly English Conversation* tutor is also a qualified as a counsellor, working in GP Surgeries and community settings. She facilitates our two-hourly weekly *Storytelling Circle* and one-to-one sessions with individuals with concerns about family issues, anxiety and trauma with support from volunteer interpreters and sessional staff. On a voluntary basis, she also accompanies women to hospital appointments.
- **Freelance Reporting/Monitoring Support: (80 hrs pa):** our longstanding Mentor helps us prepare quarterly reports, our Annual Report with information gathered by our team.

Sessional Staff: AWHG is also supported by:

- **Three ESOL tutors**, provided by Sheffield College to provide twice-weekly term-time Pre-Entry Level to Level 3 combined classes with support from AWHG volunteers.
- **A Creche Worker** who cares for toddlers while mothers attend ESOL;
- **Wednesday Afternoon IT Class**, funded by *Comic Relief*, offers three cycles of 12-week basic digital skills sessions to help particularly vulnerable women go online.
- **A weekly Sewing tutor**, funded by *Sheffield City Council*, supports women weekly with sewing repairs, Make'n'Mend, textile design skills and networks!
- **A Weekly Term-time Fitness Tutor** funded by *More Light*;
- **Maths, English and Science AWHG Homework Club tutors** supported by three volunteers, help 38 children each year with schoolwork and exam preparation, critical where parents might have limited education and language skills to help them along. Parents also come in to help with setting up, preparing refreshments and sustaining a calm, quiet and positive environment.

Volunteers

Volunteers help welcome each newcomer to our service. Seven volunteers of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali, Kurdish and Syrian heritage now help prepare informal *breakfast-luncheon* of sandwiches and fruit for women attending classes.

Bilingual volunteers with Arabic, Somali, Kurdish, Urdu and Bengali community languages, to name a few, also serve as informal interpreters, even accompanying and supporting women at appointments while explaining how systems work. They help tutors and support learners in larger classes who need a bit of extra help.

At the end of our academic year, volunteers also help coordinate our annual outings with women and children to the Peak District. Each, in turn, also becomes a role model for peers and neighbours.

Volunteers are key to our busy service. We offer hands-on' experience, help build capacity, demonstrates what women can achieve and empowers them with skills for employment.

A majority of volunteer recruits are former/existing clients and learners developing new skills in a safe space to build confidence and gain references to move on. Others have recently arrived refugees with educational and work experience skills.

We are grateful to our wonderful volunteers who helps vulnerable women take first steps towards navigating a world of online communications; our community counsellor, *Samira Siddiqi*, who facilitates weekly craft activities knitting together 60 women yearly to share strategies for tackling anxiety, depression and building resilience at times of trauma. Many thanks to our *Fitness Tutor, Claire*, formidable *Sewing Tutor, Niyam Mohamed*, who supports women in repairing, designing and making clothes, textiles and domestic goods.

We celebrate their achievements. Without them, our team would struggle and hidden needs amongst lonely, struggling and anxious BAME women and refugees might not receive the attention volunteers help provide.

Partnerships and Sharing with Wider Networks

Many of our clients are elderly, have mental or physical health issues and need help to access basic services that are fast migrating online. As services close and civic funding pots shrink, we have been overwhelmed by an increased demand for help.

Thankfully, given financial constraints, partnership programmes have helped us diversify our services, trial new activities and help women and families with nowhere to turn. They also offer a conduit for conversations with organisations tackling similar social challenges while ensuring we enhance, rather than duplicate our work.

Sheffield College funds our ESOL classes. *Community Wellness Service* has also helped us source a fitness tutor who runs sessions as part of our Friday Wellbeing programme.

We regularly liaise with *Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)* who facilitated face-to-face appointments at our centre post-Covid. *Sacmha's* Corrie Moss, one of our dedicated Management member *Corrie Moss* also invites women to visit *Darnall Community Allotments* who share food growing strategies, plants, gardening gloves, trowels, seeds and more. Corrie also facilitates healthy eating, crafts, aromatherapy and fitness sessions to help children and women improve wellbeing.

Local schools continue to signpost young people struggling with academics while *Sheffield Wellness Centre's Indian Head Massage* practitioner, *Farah*, has also offer stress-reducing to women not otherwise able to afford such treats!

Voluntary Action Sheffield facilitates key community engagement hubs including *Sheffield City Council Partnership Board* where we share learning about some of Britain's hardest-to-reach BAME communities and consider linked up strategies for community, statutory and mainstream services. Our Chair also represent excluded voices via the CCG's BAME Health Network and sits with *South Yorkshire Community Foundation's* grants panel to consider the value of projects seeking resources.

ESOL and Employability

Demand for ESOL and vocational training continues to soar. With spousal visas now requiring new non-European arrivals to pay £1,200 (sterling pounds one thousand two hundred) which they simply can't pay in the absence of work permits for the first five years. Many are Kurdish and everyone wants to learn. Education is important and everyone wants to work. Their determination and hard work have meant some have achieved their GCSEs, then entered college.

Thanks to outreach sponsorship from *Sheffield College*, three Celta-qualified English as a Second Language (ESOL) teachers run three combined levels of twice-weekly **ESOL classes attended by 78 BAME women**. AWHG runs a creche alongside classes to help ensure no one is excluded.

With ongoing waiting lists for our free classes, we have blended Pre-Entry and Entry Level 1 ESOL classes with Level 2 & 3 combined as well as Level 3 groupings combined. With 26 learners in each class, we also have two Support Worker/volunteers in each class to help support individuals according to varying starting points and need. Teachers cannot otherwise cope with our 78 learners who meet twice weekly each during 38 weeks of term-time. All pass at least two of three end-of-year exams in speaking, reading and writing in English according to levels achieved!

AWHG staff recruit and support tutors and learners and, alongside volunteers, take registers, remind women to bring absence notes for GP or benefits appointments, and help students, in smaller groups, learn how to receive messages, homework, join classes online, take tests and receive updates via *WhatsApp* and *Google Classroom*. Should the centre be forced to close, vulnerable learners are now equipped to attend lessons remotely!

We also help facilitate elements of exams including video recording of speaking and listening skills, which culminate in an end-of-year celebration where learners are awarded what might be the first certificates they've ever earned in their lives!

Most learners are aged of 25-60 and of Pakistani, Libyan, Somali, Sudanese, Kurdish, Bangladeshi, Yemeni, Syrian, Eritrean, Afghani, Iraqi and Turkish heritage. Classes

offer a chance to get out of home and meet others which isolated women say improves their mental outlook. It also helps knit together a community of women who go on to help one another out in times of challenge. While improving English skills to fill forms, speak with GPs, teachers and neighbours, most say they slowly gain confidence and skills to become more active, volunteer or attend vocational training for employment.

AWHG starts in August to recruit, interview and register learners for each further academic year, ferrying women to and from Sheffield College, helping with form filling, translations and follow-ups to ensure each woman's papers are processed. *Sheffield College*, meanwhile, provides funds to cover venue hire and tutors who are also recruited by AWHG itself, while AWHG provides stationery, hand-outs and refreshments daily for women struggling to make ends meet.

Employability Training and Support

For over three years, we partnered with *Red Tape* and tutor *Helen Haythorne* to provide three 12-week cycles of *Level 1 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)* training for **Childcare, Health & Social Care** and **Passports for Volunteering** which has ensured our teams of volunteers have certificates in *First Aid, Health & Safety, Basic Safeguarding*. While this programme has sadly come to an end, over 200 women have gained basic qualifications towards employment through this partnership programme and moved onto further vocational training or jobs.

IT Drop-in Sessions

Our IT Drop-in sessions help 30 women each year via three 12-week-long sessions. By helping women learn to set up and write emails, do online searches, shopping and access critical GP appointments and update Universal Credit information for benefits, these small but vital steps help particularly vulnerable and disenfranchised women to begin to transition online.

Refreshments for All!

We noticed women who spend much of the day with us don't bring food along, so a small team of volunteer now prepare sandwiches and lay out fruit for visitors each morning. More than fifty sandwiches and fruit arrays we purchase wholesale disappear each day; some women seem to head straight to our kitchen when they arrive. This informal *Breakfast-Lunch Club* is particularly popular Wednesdays and Thursdays when 25-odd women visit mornings, and 25 more come in the afternoon.

Advice and Advocacy Support

Thanks to generous support from Comic Relief, our three-days-a-week *Advocacy Worker* is available to meet a surge in demand from women in crisis.

Seemingly simple tasks - booking GP appointments or updating benefits information – are quickly transiting online, making them inaccessible for women with limited digital and English skills. Where complex issues cannot be resolved online, waiting times for telephone assistance can literally waste hours of staff and client time.

Where digitally skilled residents have skills to resolve benefits, housing, schooling and disability issues swiftly, women lacking such skills often arrive in crisis, penniless, homeless, without heating or electricity. Unable to read letters and respond without external support, it only at this point that they realize there is a problem.

Timing is critical so we frequently remind service-users to come to us immediately when they receive letters they don't understand. Delays can mean women might find themselves without homes, food, benefits and help. Once alerted, we act swiftly to make sure each visitor get the help she needs before matters get worse.

Where court cases, immigration or specialist issues arise, we also help clients access a new online *Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)* screen located in a neighbouring *Pakistani Muslim Centre*. We also routinely now take women along to show them how to this a new local touchscreen service for benefit updates.

Newcomers often say they feel safe coming for help at our women-only service as our own experiences reflect theirs. Empathy and understanding of how easily women can find themselves alone, and with no one to turn to, comes naturally as we've all faced similar challenges along the way.

A Search for Employment

Many clients over the age of 60 are in poor health, have limited English and digital skills and struggle to find work. Some arrive in tears, asking for help to understand messages saying their benefits will be cut if they cannot show they have actively applied for work. Some become traumatized as they do their best, but are, or feel, chided for failing to achieve the impossible.

Our Advocate therefore spends hours trying to help women with limited skills search for roles they can try to apply for, or even to get through to appropriate offices for clarification of what is realistically wanted of them.

Many cannot work because of chronic health conditions, so need help completing forms to explain why they struggle, often with mobility issues, to travel to distant appointments, fruitlessly searching for work. Such applications are often rejected, so we need to follow them up time and time again.

Poverty and distress are directly linked to poor physical and mental health. Women with limited educations, employment, digital and English language skills speak of feeling demoralised and distraught as they do their best to comply with a system into which they simply don't fit. As they struggle to find work, many experience severe anxiety and depression. Some simply come in and cry. Others confide they skip morning meals to ensure their children are properly fed.

Friday Wellbeing Sessions

A principle of self-help informs our sharing of information and resources to empower and embed learning amongst hard-to-reach women and their peer networks. We are effective in moving quickly to address gaps in mainstream services affecting some of Sheffield's most vulnerable residents - often the first to feel the impact of socio-economic and cultural deprivation.

We help women navigate access to what sometimes seems like impenetrable institutions with fast-changing requirements, upon which they depend for their survival. As face-to-face services transit online, isolation, anxiety and depression have also substantially increased.

Given a growing number of women seeking help, we are also working where possible with groups; a need for activities for young people, many reporting increased social anxiety who are often not in school because of homelessness, displacement, a lack of school places and a surge in post-Covid school drop-out, a need for further local youth activities is evident.

Healthy Living Activities

In-house fitness, sewing sessions, crafts and group discussions, support for children out of school, health & wellbeing talks, family outings to allotments and annually, to the Peak District, are facilitated alongside advocacy, signposting and support for isolated women, refugees and families.

Older women in particular speak of feeling lonely and always turn up to share refreshments and join our Friday Healthy Living sessions; we don't walk long distances with them as many have health issues which make this difficult but they love to join chair aerobics sessions.

Lightweight, Obesity and Health Awareness Classes

Thanks to input from superstar, Corrie Moss, a 12-week programme was facilitated with 35 women seeking to learn about weight management, healthier diets, nutritional advice and all manners of essential oils. Cards are also written to show what is positive in the delivery of workshops to explore how each participant felt.

After a nutritionist's talks about links between diet, nutrition and wellbeing, each woman keeps records of what they eat each day, how much and what is included so they can reflect on how to improve their own and their families' diets. Pop drinks, breads and milk are tabled, for instance, so the group can collectively explore how much sugar, salt and fat content each one holds.

Informal feedback suggests that women are now changing the way that they eat. Such was the popularity of this course that Corrie will be back shortly to run another 12-week cycle for a long waiting list of women waiting to take part!

Type 2 Diabetes

Walks, diet, keeping stress levels low and small changes in life help keep us healthier. Given a high level of diabetes in our communities, outings, talks, workshops and walks help explore ways to prevent and reduce risk of diabetes. Twenty women have attended every Friday to learn, share and gain awareness.

More Life, Fitness and More!

Thanks to *Claire*, our fabulous fitness tutor who cheers up any room she enters, an average of 20 BAME women join us each week for free, gentle fitness classes. While they try to keep fit and maintain good health, they also say it offers a rare moment to find peace of mind for a short hour each week and keep worries briefly at bay.

Healthy refreshments of sandwiches and fruit were made available on Fridays for our Healthy Living exercise, Circle and health talk drop-in sessions where neighbours sometimes come just because they feel isolated at home, particularly where their children shut their bedroom doors and spend their time online. Nothing went to waste as any leftover sandwiches went home with visitors too. While welcoming newcomers every time we provide food, as women tell one another of such opportunities which means we see new faces, we are sometimes told that the provision of simple refreshments helps make people feel more optimistic that they can get by when household incomes are so tight that food budgets are impacted.

Listening and Sharing Craft Sessions

As women struggle to keep families afloat, a growing number report that their GP have put them on anti-depressants. We therefore launched creative sharing sessions after Covid facilitated by a qualified and experienced BAME community counselor, to help women develop collective strategies to address anxiety, stress and depression.

Mainstream mental health services are rarely available in community languages. Therapists often lack insights into the cultures, social expectations and needs of women from marginalised cultural communities. One of our visitors regularly sits down and silently cries without saying a word while the word 'depression', for instance, does not exist in languages include Somali. This means words and concepts to explore emotional health are very limited.

As direct conversations about poor mental outlooks continue to be social taboos in some of our networks, a craft collective provides a vehicle for women, unlikely to engage in formal 'therapy', to simply come together and share experiences.

Feedback suggests that women coming together to reflect, share trauma and solutions results in collective brighter outlooks at times of financial and emotional crisis. Many say that just getting out of home and joining activities or sharing tips on taking better care of themselves and their families makes a huge difference.

Some women say they wish we didn't have to stop sessions over the Christmas period; this indicates the difference such activities make to particularly isolated

women. Where women experience very personal distress which cannot be fully explored in a group. our counselors offer follow up sessions on a one-to-one basis.

We are really a group of women coming together to speak openly and without being judged. Sharing emotional experiences is critical - it is not the same to do it online when we are upset. Joining our network, sharing stories about life experiences and sharing what is on our minds just gives us relief. It's really important to learn that other people are going through similar experiences and that it's not just you; it means we understand one another and are there to help when each of us needs a bit of support which, in turn, might be offered to others when we overcome obstacles which are difficult when we face them alone.

Inviting our whole street to join in has also made a difference to everyone as we greet one another, know a little bit more about our neighbours, feel safer and happier in the knowledge that we are friends and are more likely to call on one another if needed where once we would not dare.

Crafts and Family Activities

We brought whole households together over summer thanks to *Corrie Moss, Sachma* and funding from *Comic Relief* and support from two volunteers, helping 20+ children aged 5-11 to design, paint and create Eid, birthday and greeting cards.

During warmer weather, we also take an average of 20 women for twice weekly walks as well as a series of 6 outings for swimming at Heeley Baths, which are warm and run women-only sessions. While improving health, outings also build social connection and learning!

We also Visit Darnall Allotments for fresh air, exercise, growing, healthy eating and herbs and are particularly popular with Bangladeshi women who grow herbs, vegetables and produce in their back yards - garlic, aubergines, herbs and more which they bring to the centre and share when they over produce. Some women are teaching others and pots of herbs shared at the allotments were shared out so women could try growing things they had not done before including strawberries, cucumbers, trees and even roses! We also learnt about herbs, and which are good for us, the difference in olive, avocado and other oils.

Aside from exercise classes, talks, workshops, snacks and a moment to connect and relax, aromatherapy oil workshops run by *Yasmin* and *Corrie Moss* at *Sachma*, showing women how to prepare mixtures to improve outlooks, health, address bruising, stress and more, clinical hypnotherapist and Massage Therapist *Farah* from *Sheffield Wellness Centre* is also joining us to offer five-minute stress-busting *Head & Shoulders* massage for 10 women per session. Lucky them!

Classes offer a rare chance to socialise so chances are, a visitor to our classes will be greeted by waves of laughter!

Sewing Sessions

Our popular sewing sessions, paused over lockdown, have been revived! [Sheffield City Council](#) enabled us to purchase sewing machines two years ago and continues to pay for our tutor. Half a dozen women join us each week to share skills, socialize, design, repair and make clothes. This extends the life of textiles and household goods at a time of financial distress while encouraging more sustainable practices!

Sewing sessions enabled an average of 12 women to join 12 sessions in which they learn to mend as well as design, cut and sew clothes including coats which a whole collection of women made from fabric bought cheaply in the market for an average of £10. It looks like visitors to the centre wear a uniform!

Our teacher is amazing and puts in far more hours than she is actually paid for. She also taught us to use sewing machines, changing needles and, alongside a woman who ran Electronic Repairs workshops, how to rewire a plug and basic skills for self-sufficiency in home maintenance. Such is the popularity of sessions that we had to open a waiting list; sometimes our Friday Healthy Living sessions are so busy that we have to limit our numbers to 40.

Case Study

An older woman who comes to our centre brought along a friend who was really isolated, walked on her own a lot and had no one to speak to. She joined our sewing sessions, has something to eat, and says it makes such a difference to have somewhere to come along and share, talk to others and feel less alone. It makes life much less stressful when you have someone to share strategies with about how to cope with rising prices and opportunities.

She has changed so much. She is happier, greets people now on the streets where she walked alone and looks forward to meeting us every Friday. She says it's changed her life.

What a difference a few community activities and services can make!

Sheffield University Medical Student Wellbeing Sessions

Our very popular sessions, led by medical students from [Sheffield University](#), shared insights on managing diabetes, arthritis, cancer, hyper-tension and Paediatric First Aid. While offering preventative learning to help women be well, stay safe, and reduce chances of developing chronic health conditions which are particularly prevalent amongst BAME women, students also learn from feedback, questions and discussions with participants. Learning to identify blood pressure readings, for instance, equip women with an understanding of what is going on when they have their blood pressure taken so they can join in the conversation from an informed point of view!

Homework Club

Our very popular [Homework Club](#), two [English](#) tutors and three [Maths & Science](#) tutors and a team of parent volunteers, 35 young people aged 11-16 are offered an

hour each of GCSE-level Maths, English and Science each Sunday morning. Our Homework Club is particularly helpful for households where parents have limited English language, educational experiences and resources to support children struggling at school.

We also work closely with parents and schools where attempts to address poor academic achievements might come late and parents, lacking skills and financial resources to help, feel helpless. Those left behind by age 11 have a mountain to climb, do not know where to turn for help and often feel the future is bleak.

Volunteer parents prepare refreshments provided at the start, break-time and at the end of each Club session to give learners a break and help make learning more sociable. These breaks also offer a pause to meet, share and break down stigmas where students might feel embarrassed by school failure and afraid ask for help.

When children first join, they are often disruptive, particularly when they've been suspended from school. Thanks to our supportive team of parent volunteers, a level of discipline and respect is maintained, our students are thriving.

Seven children last year passed their GCSEs and have gone on to A-level studies while eight are preparing to move on this year. Given that our neighbourhood is one of the most deprived in Britain, our young people are working hard to improve their educational standards and their lives. Thankfully, also, young people who did not immediately return to school after Covid have slowly gone back.

Former students, now working as lab technicians in local hospitals, in IT and analytical sciences, are all the first in their families to find their way through educational systems and make informed choices for their futures. Their stories inspire young learners who start believing that they too can go on to gain degrees and follow dreams. This, in turn, draws more young people to come along to learn...

We interview each young person joining, listen to their personal, academic, emotional and home experiences as we try to gauge how best to help. Volunteers who themselves have attended our Homework Club are available to spend more time with individuals in need of additional support.

Our approach to teaching is shaped by each child's needs. As time goes by, we learn through class feedback, parents and one-to-one conversations arising at breaks about further hidden needs which young people are embarrassed to talk about. We also ask young people about workshop topics they would like to explore.

More than just Academics As we build trust with young people who might feel they have no one to confide in at times of distress, stories of bullying often emerge. After years of shame, fear and isolation, some discover others share similar experiences and visibly become more confident. A lack of motivation and emotional withdrawal slowly melts as kids share with peers and start taking an active interest in learning, speaking out in class for the first time ever!

Celebrations are also key to recognising each learner's achievements. While inspiring generations, whose parents have often not completed secondary school, to aim high, we continue to share learning via peer role modeling, with our own staff team, volunteers and Management members demonstrating how each of us can take small steps and keep going until we do things we never imagined possible.

Media

We have quite a few photos of our activities but many of the women who come to our centre don't want to have their pictures used in publications and a wider media. They feel it's not safe, as asylum-seekers and refugees have been targeted by racist demonstrators across Britain. We keep a very discrete profile because we don't want to make our centre a target for abuse.

While we don't advertise our activities widely in the media, however, we do have very good word-of-mouth networks which reach women who might not access mainstream information outlets at any rate. They find us when they need us, with friends, neighbours and signposting from other local community organisations.

We did design and produce photocopied leaflets which we distributed to all our neighbours on our very long street of 69 households. It brought new families and neighbours together to meet, work as a team and visit our centre. In this sense, our publicity targets local residents directly rather than broadcast our achievements to the wider public.

Our goal is to help residents who are vulnerable rather than to applaud our good work. The people who need us speak of our value and that is more than rewarding enough to all of us who work hard to help!

Our Work is made possible thanks to the following funders:

We are very grateful to **Comic Relief** for supporting our work with careful guidance and encouragement to continue serving local women for a further five years. Securing long-term core funding makes all the difference to our being able to plan and develop services with the knowledge that we will still be around in the years to come. It has also enabled us to build on our wellbeing and training activities providing opportunities for a range of former volunteers and service-users who themselves arrived in crisis before taking small steps to finally join our team through short-term work opportunities.

We are also indebted to **Sheffield City Council** who continue to fund our sewing sessions, while **Sheffield College** enables 78 women achieving **ESOL certification** to progress in learning English, gain skills to better understand their own and their families' health, housing, education and wellbeing issues while moving into vocational training, connecting with others and access jobs otherwise outside of their reach. As each person progresses, it also reminds us that we can all improve our lives!

Last, but not least, our volunteers, Management Committee members and all the wonderful women who make our services vibrant make all our efforts rewarding.

We look forward to each and everyone rising to achieve further untold things!

AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH GROUP

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30th JUNE 2025

**AZIM & WAKAS
CHARTERED CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANTS
537 ABBEYDALE ROAD
SHEFFIELD S7 1FU
TEL 0114 2588067**


AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH GROUP
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30.06.2025

	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>
Balance B/F 01.07.2024		Total 19826
<u>Grants Received (Restricted)</u>		
Sheffield City Council	1060	
More Life UK	7701	
Main Grants	25945	
Voluntry Action Sheffield	3940	
Sheffield College	9312	
Charity Projects (Comic Relief)	50349	
		98307
		118133
<u>Payments</u>		
Salaries	37077	
Seasonal Workers	20425	
Admin Workers	7734	
HMRC-Paye	4458	
Creche Workers	4022	
Outreach Support Workers	5107	
Project Support	8020	
Consultancy Fees	2030	
Voluntary Action Sheffield	201	
Voluntary Expenses	1990	
Event Activities, Food and Health Workshop	2440	
Insurance	290	
Bank Charges	119	
Premises Rent	8707	
Community Wellness	1132	
Telephone & Internet	336	
College Fees	0	
Travel & Refreshments Cost	5350	
Stationary & Equipment Purchase	2601	
Repairs	0	
Accountancy	1000	
Misc	0	
Total Expenses		113039
Restricted Funds Available As At 30.06.2025		5094
BALANCE AT BANK 30.06.2025		5094
Less: Cheques presented after date		0
		5094

ACCOUNTANT'S REPORT

In connection with my examination, no material matters have come to my attention which gives me cause to believe that in any material respect the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act or the accounts did not accord with the accounting records or accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a true and fair view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.


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Chartered Certified Accountants
537 Abbeydale Road
Sheffield S7 1FU

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SHEFFIELD S7 1FU
TEL: 0114 258 8067

CLIENT'S APPROVAL

I approve these financial statements and confirm that I have made available all relevant records and information for their preparation.

Committee member  Dated 30/10/2025

Committee member H. Mohamed. Dated 30-10-25



SECTION A

Independent Examiner's Report

**Report to the trustees/
members of**

AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH GROUP

**On accounts for the year
ended**

30th JUNE 2025

**Charity no
(if any)**

1013817

Set out on pages

1-1

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity for the year ended **30/06/2025**

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011.

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

**Independent
examiner's statement**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Date: 30/10/2025

Name:

Mohammad Wakas Ashraf

**Professional
qualification or body**

Chartered Certified Accountant

Address:

537 Abbeydale Road

Sheffield

S7 1FU

AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH GROUP

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30th JUNE 2025

**AZIM & WAKAS
CHARTERED CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANTS
537 ABBEYDALE ROAD
SHEFFIELD S7 1FU
TEL 0114 2588067**


AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH GROUP
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FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30.06.2025

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Committee member  Dated 30/10/2025

Committee member H. Mohamed. Dated 30-10-25



SECTION A

Independent Examiner's Report

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**On accounts for the year
ended**

30th JUNE 2025

**Charity no
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Date: 30/10/2025

Name:

Mohammad Wakas Ashraf

**Professional
qualification or body**

Chartered Certified Accountant

Address:

537 Abbeydale Road

Sheffield

S7 1FU