

**DELIVERING**  
**≡ EQUALLY SAFE**

# **Cost of Living Crisis**

**Impact on  
Survivors of Gender Based  
Violence and Abuse  
and  
DES Funded Organisations**

**November 2022**



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

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# INTRODUCTION

This report provides an insight into how the Cost of Living crisis is impacting on survivors of gender based violence and abuse.

It also highlights the impact the crisis is having on organisations themselves and how they are striving to support survivors.

The Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe fund is the Scottish Government's funding programme to support third sector organisations and public bodies contribute to the objectives, priorities and outcomes of the Equally Safe Strategy. The Fund has been fully operational for 14 months.

The 112 funded organisations deliver a range of activity from frontline support including one-to-one emotional and practical support, as well as refuge, legal or financial advice and other services. Many of the organisations also run training and outreach programmes aiming to prevent violence against women and girls. A key part of the funded activities includes activity focussed on raising awareness of gender based violence and abuse and the need for it to be eradicated from Scotland.

Earlier this year, Scottish Government colleagues asked Inspiring Scotland to share data and insights on how DES funded activity helps to alleviate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on survivors in Scotland. To learn more from the organisations, the most recent progress reports covering April-September 2022 were reviewed. This was supplemented with 1:1 discussions with a number of the organisations.

# COST OF LIVING

## IMPACT ON SURVIVORS

**100% of organisations delivering front line support reported the cost of living crisis as an issue for survivors. They reported an increase in women struggling with fuel poverty and accessing food. People and families they support are struggling to meet the cost of increased energy bills, food etc. Organisations in the latest reports are reporting that more and more of the people they support are facing extreme poverty. This was not a key theme reported in the previous 6 month reporting.**

**A recent survey by Women's Aid\* found that the impact of cost-of-living increases is preventing women from fleeing domestic abuse. Findings from their survey include:**

- Two thirds (66%) of survivors told us that abusers are now using the cost-of-living increase and concerns about financial hardship as a tool for coercive control, including to justify further restricting their access to money.**
- Almost three quarters (73%) of women living with and having financial links with the abuser said that the cost-of-living crisis had either prevented them from leaving or made it harder for them to leave.**

**\*Source: Women's Aid England Survey 1st August 2022**

**Over 50% of the organisations in their reports said that the need to support survivors with the anxieties caused by the cost of living has increased. This often needs to be addressed first before support can start for the trauma the survivors have experienced. This elongates the length of time a survivor may need to be involved with the service. This has knock-on effects for the length of time that new referrals have to stay on the waiting list before being supported. Support staff time is required to address issues caused by the cost of living crisis.**



**96% of survivors responding to the Women's Aid survey reported a negative impact on the amount of money available to them.**

# Stories of Impact

In their progress reports, DES organisations told us about the the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on the people they support.

"However, many external factors relating to the cost-of-living crisis mean that more survivors are being supported with a variety of matters before it is possible for them to focus on coping strategies for their abuse. This includes support with food costs, rising energy bills and accommodation. We are mindful that the rate of extensions or re-referrals may continue to increase over the coming months."

RASAC Perth & Kinross

"A supported mother disclosed she had no baby food/ supplies, electricity or gas in her meter and had been staying with her daughter to keep her baby warm. The woman expressed embarrassment and was too worried to contact statutory services due to fears her child would be removed. As an emergency response, her The Bridges Partnership children and family worker purchased baby milk, nappies and wipes for her and topped up her electricity and gas. The worker returned days later with Babybank parcel to alleviate some pressure from Mum until she received her benefits payment. Mum latterly expressed her gratitude that the worker responded sensitively and discreetly without judgement, knowing in future she can reach for support much sooner than she had."

Aberlour - The Bridges Partnership



"Thanks again for your help today and my veggie soup"  
from a housebound survivor because we made up a bag of food from the community fridge, delivered it and helped her prep it so she could make soup.  
ORSAS (Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service)

# SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS

Whilst organisations do not typically provide income directly to those they support, the support they provide through in-kind benefits is invaluable to the people supported e.g., food banks, clothes banks, access to technology and safe refuge.

There are some examples where direct funding is being provided e.g. money put on a pre-payment electricity meter by organisation when women enter refuge accommodation.

Examples of the additional activities that organisations have been undertaking to support survivors include.

## 01 Support to survivors to find additional income

Many organisations provide support to survivors to find additional sources of income. These can be invaluable for the survivor.

ORSAS provides financial checks to help identify sources of income, benefits of grant funding that may be available for survivors. This removes additional stresses for survivors when worrying about children, food, getting into debt etc. They were able to make applications to local grant funded charities such as Orkney Children's Trust and Orkney Charitable Trust which meant that mums were able to pay for school meals, clothing, school transport and Christmas Grants so children were minimally impacted by their parent's circumstances.

## 02 Provision of free Wi-Fi / mobiles / iPad

Organisations have reported providing survivors with equipment such as mobiles, iPad, and free Wi-Fi. Equipment like this can be vital in providing a lifeline for survivors to communicate with those supporting them.

# SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS

## 03 Setting up Food banks / Referrals to Foodbanks

**Most organisations have close relationships with their local Foodbanks and make referrals when necessary. Some survivors feel they cannot use the Foodbank because their name can go on a referral form, and this would identify them as a victim of abuse. This is particularly impactful in rural areas with smaller communities. As a result, some organisations have set up foodbanks themselves where the women can access support without the same stigma. There is no membership or explanation required when collecting food.**

## 04 Providing Warm Safe Spaces

**Centres are aware of the impact of the cost of living and energy price increases on survivors and are keen to keep their own centres warm and welcoming, to give survivors and their families somewhere comfortable and safe to go to.**

## 05 Access to other essentials

**Many organisations provide support such as:**

- Clothes bank /toiletries – donated clothes for women and children that survivors can access**
- Food – store cupboard items to help women who are struggling financially as well as cooking sessions to give women skills in cooking on a budget**

**"With electricity costs increasing, women in refuge have reported that it is becoming increasingly difficult to budget due to increased fuel costs. They have secured funding to be able to give each new admission to the refuge, £100 on their electric meter when they move into refuge. The significant increase in living costs is also acting as another barrier forcing women to stay with abusive partners."**

**Angus Women's Aid**

# CHALLENGES FOR ORGANISATIONS

We asked DES funded organisations about how the challenge of increased costs was impacting on their organisations.

Responses were a combination of concerns about the sustainability of their organisation, and concerns about being able to deliver services that meet the needs of the people they support.

## Organisational challenges



The main challenges organisations identified are:

- Staff retention
- Insufficient funding, the need to fundraise more, and difficulty fundraising
- Cost of running the organisation (staff salaries, heating, running costs) are unsustainable
- Staff and volunteers themselves are impacted by cost-of-living pressures
- Staff and volunteer wellbeing and resilience

Funding has been a challenge - the worker has had her hours cut to 28 from 30 hours per week to meet the budget. Given the rising costs this will have a further impact. They cover both the whole of the Western Isles so there is a lot of travel involved in very rural areas. This takes time and reducing the worker's hours has an impact on the support they can offer.

Action For Children

## Service delivery challenges

The main service delivery challenges identified are:

- Concern about meeting level of demand for support, waiting lists and increased referrals
- Concern that staff and volunteers won't have the skills and resilience to provide the levels of support people are needing



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Thank you to the DES Funded organisations for sharing with us, and each other, how they are responding to the challenges.**

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