

Edinburgh Women's Aid "grows up" and buys their own home

In a major step marking its 50th anniversary, the charity which helps women and children at some of their lowest points, Edinburgh Women's Aid (EWA) has just purchased its own property which will become a new refuge space to use.

At present EWA have 29 refuge spaces in the capital, and the newest addition means they now have spaces in all four localities in the city. These are safe places where women, with or without children, can escape abusive situations and use as a stepping stone. The addresses of all refuges are not disclosed for fairly obvious reasons – they are intended to be a safe space, and a meantime response before permanent housing is secured.

CEO of Women's Aid, Linda Rodgers, prefaces what she tells me with caution. She said it is on the one hand quite nice to celebrate the 50th anniversary of EWA in this way, but she would really prefer that their services were no longer needed.

She said: "This is the first fully owned refuge by EWA. We have photos of the inside, and it is in a part of Edinburgh where we did not previously have a safe space. The house is currently being decorated ready for the first family.

“We are entering a whole new era for EWA and I think this builds on the amazing women who started this with with a vision that we continue to have – a vision of a world without domestic abuse. But in the meantime we’ll do everything we can to make women’s and children’s lives better.”



Linda Rodgers CEO of Edinburgh Women's Aid PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

The money to buy the home came from the charity's reserves, built up over the years, and now the property will also create an income stream for the charity from rent paid by the occupants. (some will be entitled to housing benefit) Linda was proud to say that the charity had bought the property outright.

Linda continued: “We didn't want the money just sitting in a current account, and thought that actually it would be something so powerful for the organisation. It is a two bedroom property and will become a single family refuge. Our other properties tend to be quite large where women share the kitchen and living room, and often a bathroom as well,

depending on the size of the property. We have learned from women over the years that they would prefer not to live in shared accommodation.

“One of the big things about domestic abuse is about finding yourself again and feeling confident in yourself as a mother. There is value in sharing in that people have been through the same experience, but there can also be tensions and difficulties.

“We plan on running the new place as a single occupancy, and so it will probably be for one woman with children.”

The charity works with around 2,000 women a year, not all of whom require refuge, but all with different support needs. So asked if this purchase was “enough” Linda replied that of course it wasn’t. She said: At the moment I would say no it’s not enough, we could always do with more, but I think that to add another space on to the 29 we already have is fantastic.”

EWA has refuge workers who spend quite a lot of time settling women into refuge. They will visit regularly, making sure women have enough information about the local area, perhaps even doing the first supermarket shop with them.

At present in Edinburgh the housing situation is quite difficult, as there is a shortage of suitable homes. In terms of the contract which EWA has with the council the new house will – just like all their other refuges – be classed as “temporary accommodation”. But Linda thinks that any one family might be in one of their refuges for anything between six months and a year benefitting from all the other support packages that EWA can provide.



Former MP and MSP, Malcolm Chisholm, a member of the EWA Board, Councillor Mandy Watt, Deputy Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, Amy Steele artist who created the lovely artwork to mark the anniversary and Chair of EWA Morag Waller and Chief Executive of EWA Linda Rodgers

Proactive approach

The charity is also taking a proactive approach by speaking to the local authority about the types of property they are currently using, and asking if there is any merit in exchanging these at any point. It may for instance be better for the council to have a larger home available for rent while EWA might benefit from two smaller properties instead.

The other properties which the charity uses are leased from the council or other housing associations. One property is a standalone block of six flats with a community room and an office space with a sleepover room for a member of staff to

use if needed. Others are flats for single women – perhaps without any children.

The charity knows from their own research that it is important to the women they help that they have the same EWA staff member accompanying them on their journey. So their 50 members of staff are now organised according to customer need rather than any other classification. Some of the staff are based in the office running the helpline, and others may only work part time, but most of the 50 are out and about offering the help and assistance that is still needed.

The EWA board is clear that it will consider all options, reviewing its ownership of the new property in due course and deciding whether or not to buy any more.

In this 50th year of Edinburgh Women's Aid you can help by attending any of the EWA events which they have planned. Keep up to date with them on social media – the links are below.

And you can help with fundraising by signing up to their Challenge 50. Their aim is to raise £50,000 and you can raise the money in any way you like around the theme of the number 50. Linda herself is running 5K every day for 50 days.

There is more information on the [JustGiving page here](#).

<https://www.edinwomensaid.co.uk>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/edinbwa/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/edinwomensaid>

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Malcolm Chisholm, Member of the Board, Councillor Mandy Watt, Deputy Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, Chair of EWA Morag Waller and Chief Executive of EWA Linda Rodgers

