



FEMINIST GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT
FOR TRUSTEES OF
WOMEN'S AID GROUPS
IN SCOTLAND



scottish
women's
aid

Spring 2018
Scottish Women's Aid

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Based on an initiative by
Rape Crisis England and Wales



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For support on service development, email Susie Dalton, Service Development Officer on: susie.dalton@womensaid.scot

Resources

Accompanying this toolkit are several resources, templates, models and further guidance documents. All relevant resources will be available through the Members Area of Scottish Women's Aid's website. Please email info@womensaid.scot for access details and visit www.womensaid.scot to log in.

For more information please contact SWA's Member Services Team.

For other good practice guidance, please consult SWA's National Service Standards.

FEMINIST GOVERNANCE MODEL

ATTITUDES + ASSUMPTIONS

Essential to challenge gender oppression;
Believe in solidarity of women working for women;
Respect for women's lives;
Committed to providing safe spaces for women survivors;
Need to negotiate 'contested' areas e.g. local planning partnerships.

Central function of trustees – in role and as individuals;
Importance of openness and transparency.

Value and celebrate difference within a feminist framework;
Essential to seek diversity and support negotiating common ground.

Interdependence of values and behaviour;
Power (authority to act/decide) located in roles and functions not personality;
Essential to actively empower women to i. have a voice, ii. carry out roles including how to be trustees.

Survivors have the right to i. be listened to; ii. to influence the shape of services/ campaigns, iii. to determine their own journey/ approach to well-being.

Belief in interrelationship between personal + political + performance;
Openness about feelings balanced with respect for others;
Owning and being responsible for expression of strong feelings (e.g. confrontation, sexual and personal disclosure).

VALUES

Solidarity based on antipatriarchy:

- Activism for social change
- For, of and by women

- Accountability
- Values
 - Behaviour
 - Organisational activities/outcomes
 - Use of resources

Inclusive

- Positive power
- Use not abuse
 - Invest in empowerment

Survivor's voice

Emotional responsibility

OUTCOMES

Values explicit in recruitment, awareness training and induction;
Values evident in strategy and shape of services;
Support for activism;
Aim for women-centred HR policies;
Protective of women's and girls requirement for safety/male-free spaces;
Mentoring re. working in 'contested' areas;
Seek to collaborate with sister organisations.

Evident in induction, training and support of trustees;
Intelligent processes/ procedures for accountability;
Included in strategic planning & review;
Working to ensure services for women and girls are sustainable.

Trustees from range of backgrounds; programme for negotiating differences; induction & training addresses dilemmas.

Clear well-defined roles; authority exercises according to functions; training in learning & performance management;

- Apprenticeships
- Succession planning
- Self-help and development programme (tailored); learning & development core to supervision & appraisal/other HR procedures
- Spaces to check/challenges perceived abuse of authority/power

Structures

- Clear and appropriate
- Promote involvement /consultation
- Adhered to (and changed as required)

Being employers

- Reliable and transparent

Meetings

- Well organised
- Information is right
- Decisions are crafted (e.g. based on evidence/ learning)
- Robust accountability

Active use of ways of 'hearing' & affirming survivor's voice; processes for accounting to survivors; evidence of influence of survivors in strategic planning & review; survivors involved in lobbying and in local planning.

Reflective spaces in meetings, in supervision and appraisal;
Training in interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, Self-management and managing conflict.
Ground rules and codes of conduct up-to-date, used and reviewed.

1. INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is the product of a partnership project between Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland, the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Voluntary Action Fund and Shirley Otto, Governance Consultant.

The toolkit is designed for charities providing direct services that are centred on feminist values. This version of the toolkit is tailored to Women's Aid services in Scotland. The purpose of the toolkit is for the Trustees, Management Committees or Board of Directors of Women's Aid groups to self-assess, develop their governance and strengthen their clarity on and adherence to their values as feminist organisations.

The toolkit can be adapted for:

- Collectives
- Women's Aid in other nations
- Rape Crisis Centres in Scotland and in other nations

The toolkit has restricted permissions for use. If you wish to use any part of this toolkit in your work, please contact one of the partners; Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland or Shirley Otto.

Please contact Shirley Otto, Governance Consultant on shirleyotto@btopenworld.com for more information about adapting the toolkit to your organisations' needs. Each of the four sections of the toolkit can be used independently or as interrelated exercises and resources.

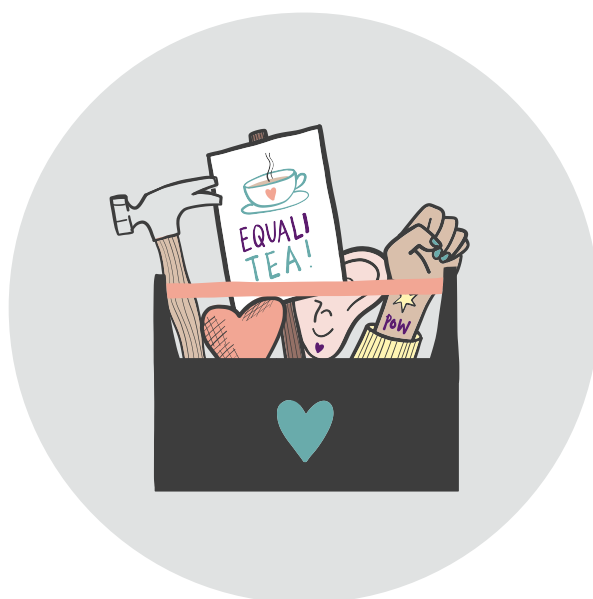
THE AUDIT

The Audit is for Trustees to have a means to self-assess their approach to governance, i.e. governance based on feminist values. The feminist framework that has been adopted for the audit, originates in a model identified by the Feminist Governance Project (CRFR Briefing no.70) based on interviews and focus groups with Trustees of services for women, children and young people who have or are experiencing gender based violence.

USING THE AUDIT

The suggested and intended use of the audit is for it to be incorporated into the Boards governance practice reviews or as part of other assessment processes. Trustees can first individually answer the questions listed in either all or selected sections, to then share their responses during the review. The Trustees can then discuss the results together and identify key themes to further develop, with appropriate staff and volunteers, e.g. during an organisational review day, development day or similar. The audit and consequent conversations should result in an action plan on areas of improvement, progress on which will be monitored by the Board (with input from staff, volunteers, service users as appropriate) before the next review date.

To encourage an ongoing commitment to developing a supportive learning culture, the organisation could host a facilitated session for the whole organisation, around the themes that arise from the annual review. Consequently, the Trustees will then have a reasonably sound assessment of areas to celebrate, and challenges from which they can decide on learning and action plans.



2. VALUES AUDIT



VALUE: BEING AN ACTIVIST

Being an activist means being committed to more than delivering services; seeking to end domestic abuse and gender inequality. It means being committed to a feminist way of working, and women only spaces.

Attitudes and Assumptions - include

- Believing in the solidarity and benefits of women working for women, committed to women driving change for women
- Amplifying the voices of women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and placing them at the centre
- Committed to women making their own choices and determining their own lives
- Committed to providing safe and accessible spaces
- Challenging misconceptions and social norms of domestic abuse and holding perpetrators to account
- Respecting that service users may or may not share the organisations' feminist views and values
- In multi-agency working and partnerships, always placing service users' needs at the core, even when working with agencies that have a different set of values and aims

Audit

Reflect on each statement below and consider your Boards' practices. Does your practice rate a yes, no or somewhat, and why? Think through what examples of these you have.

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Providing opportunities for service users to engage and build on their strengths			
Creating methods for meaningful service user participation in service design, delivery and impact assessment			
Ensuring women-only spaces			
Having feminist values explicit in recruitment and induction of all Trustees			
Making the ethos and values of the organisation explicit internally and externally (e.g. publications, funding applications, blogs, recruitment etc.)			
Providing Trustees and staff with awareness raising training on feminism, gender equality and the dynamics of domestic abuse			
Discussing organisational values and ethos when formulating strategy and business plans			
Driving and engaging in advocacy and activism that challenges gender inequality; talks, articles, blogs, social media, demonstrations etc.			
Ensuring support for staff and service users who are in contact with partners agencies whose values are indifferent or in opposition to feminist values			
Seeking to collaborate with and support sister organisations			
Partnering with other VAWG organisations to advance access to support information, advice, quality services and advancement of gender equality			



VALUE: BEING ACCOUNTABLE

Being accountable has three elements: (i) taking responsibility for adhering to values (e.g. in terms of attitude and behaviour), (ii) taking responsibility for decisions about the use of resources (e.g. funding and reputation) and (iii) being open to and able to account for the decisions made, and for consultation and communication about these decisions.

Attitudes and Assumptions - include

- Placing accountability at the core to a Trustee's duty, as an individual and as a group
- Investing in robust, informed decision-making processes grounded in the needs of women, children and young people with experience of domestic abuse
- Committing to regular consultation and productive communication with key 'stakeholders' such as staff, service users, volunteers and partners
- Valuing openness and transparency, including making power dynamics transparent and able to be challenged and amended, ensuring integrity of trustees

Audit

Reflect on each statement below and consider your Boards' practices. Does your practice rate a yes, no or somewhat, and why? Think through what examples of these you have.

Would the staff of your organisation give the same answers as you to this audit? How can you find out?

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Working to ensure core services are sustainable, e.g. prioritising and protecting core support services, evidencing gaps and barriers to unmet needs			
Protecting and advancing the interests of service users, for example in negotiations with funders and in external communications			
Providing training, awareness and development of accountability processes for all Trustees, as part of role description, induction, policies and general conversations			
Seeking to make decisions based on robust evidence, information and advice (e.g. identifying strategic priorities)			
Ensuring decision-making is transparent and that the reasons behind them are made accessible (e.g. accountability to staff via sharing minutes minus confidential items, and robust conflicts of interest policies and practice)			
Consulting actively and communicating regularly with staff and volunteers			
Providing staff and volunteers with the best realistically possible terms and conditions (e.g. living wage, flexible working, leave)			
Ensuring clear communication with partners, funders and other associated agencies/stakeholders (e.g. knowing, and reviewing, what information goes to which organisations)			
Reviewing structures, work planning and progress annually, for future planning and ensuring sustainability			



VALUE: BEING INCLUSIVE

Being inclusive means a commitment to accessibility, equal respect and seeking diversity. Effective inclusivity goes beyond legal compliance with Equality legislation and seeks to add value to the organisation, increasing engagement and ensuring best practice services to women, children and young people. Trustees have a duty to uphold Equality legislation, and act fairly across protected characteristics. Inclusivity is also recognising that people have different needs, and pursuing accessible and safe engagement for all.

Attitudes and Assumptions - include

- Valuing and celebrating diversity
- Engaging positively with accessibility and ensuring anti-discriminatory practices
- Reflecting on effective diversity and inclusion strategies, considering these in recruitment, promotion practice and design
- Being transparent on core values of organisation, supporting constructive discussion and productive negotiation of non-core values and their implementations

Audit

Reflect on each statement below and consider your Boards' practices. Does your practice rate a yes, no or somewhat, and why? Think through what examples of these you have.

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Being clear about which values are core (i.e. non-negotiable) to the organisation and how these will be discussed with potential Trustees			
Striving actively to recruit Trustees from a range of backgrounds and experiences. Regularly reviewing accessibility and inclusivity of organisational practices			
Providing all Trustees with Equality and Diversity awareness training during their induction and enabling updates / refresher sessions			
Exploring dilemmas and challenges in value conflicts between trustees and organisation is constructively addressed as part of induction and training			
Reflecting on and checking the influence of dominant groups and individuals on the Board, being alert to who exercises the most influence, e.g. gets delegated more, or less, authority, responsibilities and tasks, and addressing this			
Striving to make Board meetings accessible to Trustees, keeping all trustees updated or making adjustments such as using Skype for sub-committees etc.			
Including and respecting all service users, staff and Trustees of different ages, ethnicities, religions, abilities and sexual orientations e.g. working against tokenism and direct or indirect discrimination			
Promoting an ethos of listening respectfully to all service users who may or may not share the values of the organisation. Being transparent about how this 'listening' influences decisions and is acted on			
Having an updated Code of practice/conduct in place for supporting and negotiating differences (e.g. training in managing conflict and mediation)			



VALUE: POSITIVE POWER

Using positive power means using your authority as Trustees to develop best practice, to enable and support staff and empower service users. It means not abusing or misusing the authority your position as an individual Trustees gives you, or as a group of Trustees.

Attitudes and Assumptions - include

- Understanding the interdependence of values and behaviour
- Situating power and decision making authority in clearly defined roles and functions, not personalities or alliances, enabling these decisions to be open to transparency and scrutiny
- Working in ways that are focused on women's empowerment, committed to not disempowering women and sharing power appropriately amongst the women involved in the organisation
- Making formal and informal power transparent and holding each other to account e.g. code of conduct policy / practice for the organisational roles
- Promoting a culture of collaboration and consultation within the organisation, encouraging feedback from staff and volunteers on the strategic direction and leadership of the Trustees and actively use this to strengthen the governance
- Respecting, and facilitating, the roles and functions of others, e.g. the Manager or Team Leaders. Trusting and respecting the autonomy of lead staff roles and responsibilities
- Committing to a process of self-reflection - individual Trustees reflecting on and being conscious of the way they use their authority in the Trustee role
- Creating opportunities and safe spaces to discuss power, authority and influence as a Board, and organisation
- Seeing positive uses of power as essential to actively empower women to (a) have a voice and (b) carry out roles including becoming Trustees

Audit

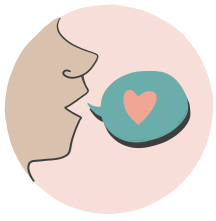
Reflect on each statement below and consider your Boards' practices. Does your practice rate a yes, no or somewhat, and why? Think through what examples of these you have.

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Developing and sticking to clear and well-defined roles, role boundaries, and structures e.g. details of remits and how roles relate is included in induction			
Exercising authority according to role and functions e.g. governance guidance for trustees gives examples of good practice and includes values and responsibilities			
Training offered in learning and performance management (e.g. devise and use action plans to scrutinise progress)			
Developing programmes for empowerment and development for women e.g. continuous development for staff, succession planning and investing in board development			
Ensuring effective arrangements for supervision and appraisal for staff, and the equivalent for volunteers, e.g. external support and/or 1:1s for Managers, feedback survey amongst staff and volunteers			

Continued...

Positive Power Audit - continued

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Acting in collaborative and co-operative ways with fellow Trustees			
Organising meetings well, e.g. good preparation, well-organised paperwork that Trustees read before and after the meeting, and effective use of the time in the meeting			
Making robust decisions in meetings (i.e. based on sound information and robust discussion/ problem-solving).			
Creating and adhering to clear and appropriate structures that promote involvement and consultation – so that staff, volunteers and service users meaningfully influence policies and priorities			
Striving to be reliable and fair feminist employers in promoting employee rights and giving best possible terms and conditions			
Reflecting actively on communications with staff and how messages from the Board are perceived			
Having meetings and processes where there is a space to check and challenge how authority and power is used and supporting all Trustees to productively reflect on and address how they use power, and the impact of their use			



VALUE: SERVICE USERS' VOICES

Attitudes and Assumptions - include

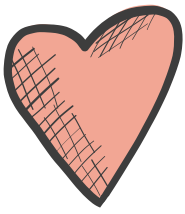
- Service users have the right to be listened to
- Service users have the right to influence the shape of services and campaigns
- Service users have the right to determine their own choices and approach to their lives

This means valuing the voices of past, present and potential future services users, and other women, children and young people with experience of domestic abuse who have not accessed a Women's Aid service. It involves being dedicated to respecting the individual service user, seeking feedback on their experiences of the service and finding meaningful ways service users can shape the service and the organisation.

Audit

Reflect on each statement below and consider your Boards' practices. Does your practice rate a yes, no or somewhat, and why? Think through what examples of these you have.

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Using a service user involvement policy and practice, including this in induction for all staff and volunteers, including trustees			
Actively using alternative ways of 'hearing' and affirming the voices of service users, e.g. using art, drama, IT, newsletters and /or social media; include service users in Care Inspectorate assessments			
Having processes in place for the work of the Board to be accountable to all service users e.g. development of peer-support groups, use of ad hoc working groups/ focus groups that include service users			
Evidencing the influence of service users in strategic planning and review e.g. service users consulted in the planning, development, direction and evaluation of services			
Service users involved in lobbying and local planning processes, i.e. Trustees responsive to women, children and young people's needs and for this to form the basis for the development of services and campaigns			
Encouraging the mentoring and support of service users to develop skills and take up career or other opportunities, such as being Trustees in future			



VALUE: EMOTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

This means being aware and accountable for our own strong feelings, personal stressors and the managing of conflict/ differences between people. In the work of Women's Aid, strong feelings will from time to time emerge for women involved on every level of the organisation.

Attitudes and Assumptions - include

- Believing in the interrelationship between the personal, the political, and our performance/behaviour
- Believing in the importance of reflecting on the use of power and influence
- Promoting openness about expressing ones feelings and supporting safe spaces, balanced with respect for others and boundaries of relationships
- Acknowledging, reflecting on and taking responsibility for one's own expression of strong feelings (e.g.confrontation, disclosure of personal experiences or trauma)

Audit

Reflect on each statement below and consider your Boards' practices. Does your practice rate a yes, no or somewhat, and why? Think through what examples of these you have.

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Including awareness-raising on risk of burnout when working in the field of domestic abuse, in induction of Trustees			
Including spaces in meetings to reflect on individuals' wellbeing and consider impact, safety and support			
Including opportunities for raising issues / concerns and reflections in supervision, appraisal and team / Board meetings			
Giving training, for all, in interpersonal skills, such as managing conflict – include this in induction and development plans			
Using ground rules and/or organisational code of conduct that is up-to-date, relevant, practically used and regularly reviewed			
Trustees, as individuals, to personally reflect on the way they use power – create safe supported spaces for conversations			
Ensuring that Trustees do not use 'feminism' in name only, as a tool to avoid conflict or criticism e.g. regarding it as 'unfeminist' to challenge poor practice			
Recognising and respecting others' differences of opinion – seek to understand, not always agree			

3. IN CONCLUSION

1. What are we doing well that is to be celebrated?

2. What are any gaps, issues or concerns?

3. ACTION List – what steps would strengthen and sustain feminist governance in your organisation?

4. What might be the timeline for making the changes?

5. What resources will be needed?

6. Who could help (internal or external)?

7. What would a successful result(s) look like?

4. GUIDELINES

These guidelines include examples or stories that can help in thinking about what a Women's Aid Board should prepare for, as a feminist charity. Accompanying resources such as templates, further guidance and mini-toolkits are available on the members area on Scottish Women's Aid's website

www.womensaid.scot

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THOSE WHO DO NOT SHARE FEMINIST VALUES

CASE STUDY 1

Bowmont Women's Aid (BWA)

Trustee: Luisa

Prevention Worker: Yasmin

Luisa came in early one evening to the office to help with the funding application to Big Lottery Scotland. She said hello to Yasmin and asked how she was. Yasmin replied 'Fine thanks, I am just sitting here reflecting on what happened today'. Yasmin went on to say, 'as I am the Prevention Worker, I went to see a showing of the new 'This is Not Consent' film at a school. The students told me all about how, at an earlier showing, a couple of the boys started verbally abusing one of the girls whose naked picture had been shared without her consent. The teaching staff shut it down by taking the girl out of the room'. Yasmin went on 'the girl had been suicidal and only recently agreed to come back to school. The school does not really have a great understanding of feminism or gender equality, evident from their responses to the girl. We have to work with them to be able to continue our prevention work, but it's really hard going!'

'The boys' cruelty has really shaken me'
concluded Yasmin.

Luisa listened a while longer and made them both tea. She checked that support was available, and known to Yasmin, and that she felt comfortable talking about this in her supervision. Luisa then said, as much to herself as Yasmin, 'it is essential we Trustees remember the real impact on workers when the job requires navigating hostility towards women and girls'. Luisa made a mental note to pass on the information to the other Board colleagues and have a conversation about putting appropriate processes in place for staff to debrief.

Working in situations where there is hostility or indifference to feminist values, i.e. in 'contested areas' is unavoidable if an organisation or group is committed to social change. There are many examples also of occasions where feminist organisations must adapt or comply with funders, regulators and legislation that do not fit our way or working. Sometimes, as in the example above, you have to 'get in' to make change from the inside. It can be essential to do this work, but it can also be emotionally demanding, especially over long periods to be working from the inside of organisations or institutions that do not share the same core values.

As employers Trustees need to be aware of, and acknowledge the significance of the emotional demands on staff and volunteers and consider what kind of support structures and what staffing procedures are needed to sustain them. It is useful to consider this support as distinct from performance management; this is to allow for the impact of the professional and political on the personal and could take the form of a space for the worker to debrief and reflect.

Furthermore, decisions of when to work in partnership and when to challenge and protest, and every middle ground, must be always be a strategic choice, and any fallout, risk or implication should be planned for.

CASE STUDY 2

Avon Women's Aid (AWA) Trustees: Judy and Christine

Judy thinks AWA should sign up to the local Pro-life Action Group's new statement, which is lobbying for doctor's rights to decline treating women who want access to abortions. A few months ago, the trustees had decided to openly support a local group of women Care Leavers and published blogs on their website. Judy thought they should do the same for the Pro-Life Action group. She justified this to Christine, a fellow Trustee, 'I believe that Women's Aid is all about choice, and we should support doctors' choice to not carry out abortions if this is against their belief'. Christine objected because she felt this was Judy's personal view and did not really match the aims or purpose of AWA, which was to challenge gender inequality, support women and end domestic abuse. They did agree on the central value of choice, however, but disagreed in this instance. Christine believed that in this instance, aligning with this group would not be in line with AWA's core value of supporting women's choices. Their discussion got rather tense and they agreed to take Judy's proposal to the next Board meeting to get direction from the rest of the Board.

At the meeting the Board debated the proposal. The other Board members respectfully listened to Judy's reasoning and considered their position carefully. In the end they did not

decide to formally align AWA with the Pro-Life Action group. Judy was not pleased with the outcome of the discussion, but felt she had been listened to and understood that even though she differed in her views from other Board members, being a trustee meant adhering to the core values of the organisation. This raised a wider question for the Board in how they communicate the organisations' core values in recruitment and induction of trustees, and which values are so key, or core, they must be shared by all on the Board.

'Of course,' the Convenor of the Board said to Judy, 'it's your personal choice being involved with the Pro-Life Action Group, but it is vital this does not interfere with your role as a AWA Trustee'. 'Your choice to be involved must be seen as a personal one, and if this cannot be separated from the work of AWA then it is a reputational risk for us'. Judy requested that she have time, over the next few weeks, to consider her position as Trustee of the WA group. She later wrote to say she had decided to resign as she was becoming a spokesperson for the Pro-Life Action group and she felt this was a conflict.

Trustees Judy and Christine are right to discuss dilemmas about values, as is their Board in protecting the values of the organisations and being careful about how the WA group is perceived. The values at the heart of the work of a WA group explain why we deliver services the way that we do. A core common value base is essential for the Board, staff and volunteers to act together and stresses the importance of talking about values at recruitment and induction, as part of training, at Away Days and during supervision and appraisals. These values are fundamental to shaping the nature of services and those who participates in them. They are pivotal to Trustee recruitment and induction.

It is important that Trustees understand the difference between personal and organisational values, when an organisational value is core and all must support it, and other values that won't necessarily result in a conflict if people don't agree.

Charity Trustees must make sure that their activities are in pursuit of their charitable purposes; and always bear in mind that the charity trustees' duty is to act in the best interests of their charity. If personal core values conflict with the

organisations' core value in a way that frequently disrupts the work of the Board, this must be considered. Clearly communicating values, and deciding what the organisation needs to have a position on, is important in attracting more diverse group of women to the Board, and mitigating reputational risk.

- What happens if the Trustees disagree on the WA group's policy position? How is this resolved?
- What do you do if a Board member doesn't share the core values of your organisation?
- At what point do you draw the line? What are the core values of your service?

Relevant resources (via www.womensaid.scot)

- Trustee Recruitment and Induction pack
- Welcome pack
- Governance standard in National Service Standards

CASE STUDY 3

Nevis Women's Aid (NWA)

Trustee: Marcia Team Leader: Esme

Esme had volunteered to do a presentation on the impact of working with trauma on staff. 'That was an interesting presentation, but I am not sure how relevant it is to our Centre' Marcia said 'we have a good structure of supervision in place to deal with any issues staff may have'.

Esme was quiet for a moment then said 'you were not here two years ago. Annie, the Manager had lots of periods of being unwell and was then on long term sick, she was completely burnt out. It was a shock as she was so skilled in her manager role and seemed so resilient to all the crisis and emergencies that had been going on.'

'What do you think was wrong?' asked Marcia. Esme said 'Annie was great, very conscientious and she always went that extra mile because she cared so much about the staff and the work that Women's Aid does. She did extra hours when Anita was on mat leave and again when Babs was off sick. She held strong through the sad deaths of two of the clients.' 'She sounds very special ...but maybe she just got too tired and needed a break!' said Marcia. Esme interjected, saying that 'burnout is more than being too tired! Giving so much for so long drains you physically and emotionally; in the end you damage your health ... and empty yourself out.'

'Wasn't she given the support she needed?' responded Marcia. 'Well' muttered Esme, 'we missed the signs and assumed she was almost invincible and would always be there. We

actually became quite annoyed as she started changing and was constantly challenging our decisions. She was quite blunt and unpleasant with service users, and then she was just off sick a lot'. Marcia said 'she probably just realised she had done her time here and should move on?' 'No, not that!' retorted Esme, 'Annie, we later realised, had become burnt out and we had a total blind spot to her needs.' 'Sorry, I did not mean to be so dismissive' Marcia said quickly.

'What we did learn from Annie's experience' said Esme thoughtfully, 'it is often the most motivated and empathic who burn out, Annie's commitment meant she tried to protect her team from the stress'.

'That's a painful learning ... I now need to reflect on the presentation and ask the rest of the board what we are doing to look after our team' said Marcia. 'The staff team all got involved with Women's Aid because they felt strongly about the cause, and we need to make sure we are protecting them from burnout and SVT.' Marcia decided to put this issue on the next Board meeting agenda, and agree a way forward in consultation with staff, to implement good care practices for staff that are constantly exposed to stress and traumatic stories.

'Good, thank you' said Esme, 'I feel relieved that you heard me and I hope we can prevent a repeat of what happened to Annie, she was a first class manager'

Burn out: what is it? Burn out is a popular term for the mental or physical running down after a period of chronic unrelieved job-related stress culminating sometimes in physical illness. The person 'burning out' may lose concern or respect for other people becoming derogatory and cynical about them; a way of dehumanising the clients or staff who once mattered very much. Causes of burnout include stressful work environments, lack of support or recognition, lack of respectful relationships amongst staff or volunteers, long hours, chronic under-staffing and the pressure of responsibility for providing high care over long periods.

Secondary vicarious trauma (SVT): what is it? Firstly, what is primary post-traumatic stress disorder? Post-traumatic stress disorder (can be referred to as PTSD) may be diagnosed in someone who has experienced, witnessed or was confronted with a traumatic event and responded with intense fear, helplessness or horror. Secondary trauma is

defined as indirect exposure to trauma through a first-hand account or narrative of a traumatic event. The vivid recounting of trauma by the service user and the worker's subsequent cognitive or emotional representation of that event may result in a set of symptoms and reactions that parallel PTSD (e.g., re-experiencing, avoidance and hyperarousal). Secondary vicarious trauma (SVT) might also be referred to more loosely as 'compassion fatigue' or in some circumstances as 'burnout'.

Trustees have a responsibility to act to prevent burnout or secondary vicarious trauma (SVT). Good governance

More resources about SVT and 'burnout' are available on www.womensaid.scot. Protective measures include:

- Quality supervision- that includes support, debriefing sessions as well as discussing performance, i.e. achievements, good practice and issues with expectations [cont.](#)

COUNTERACTING OR PREVENTING SECONDARY VICARIOUS TRAUMA (SVT) AND 'BURNOUT' cont.

- Support and oversight of the Manager by the Board in place. This could be by Board member(s) chosen by the Board and /or an outside mentor
- An ethos of safeguarding the staff and volunteers of Trustees, being explicit about duty of care and not relying on 'self-care'; and having HR reviews that include staff and volunteer wellbeing, healthy workplace and reviewing the effectiveness of support and supervision
- A culture of consultation, collaboration, involvement and learning, reflecting the groups ethos and values
- Diversity in the types of work done, so that there are a variety of demands and rewards in a workload that balances out, or prevents one demand becoming unsustainable. Involving an activist or creative strand in the work can be beneficial

BEING ACCOUNTABLE: TRANSPARENCY IN DECISION MAKING

CASE STUDY 4

Tayside Women's Aid (TWA)

Trustees: Martina Team Leader: Miriam

Martina was tired and anxious. Cuts in funding to the group had put everyone under enormous strain. Martina was one of the three Trustees left after five trustees had left this year. They had just made two staff members redundant as the prevention posts were not funded anymore; despite the great need for education in schools.

Now Martina was to go to the staff room to talk with staff, at the staff's request. "Demand more like", thought Martina. Morale was very low, tempers short with staff covering people off sick and the lost posts. Furthermore, that trustees had resigned saying they did not have the time required did

not help. 'I will have to take the staff's anger on the chin', muttered Martina, 'making good women redundant is not consistent with feminist values and we should never have to do this as a feminist organisation.'

Once they were seated Miriam said she spoke on behalf of the staff team. 'Losing the two prevention workers has been awful and it is going to be tough to cover the work without them. However, we want you to know we think you have been brave and fair in the way you have carried out the redundancies, thank you.' Martina burst into tears.

Martina understands that Trustees are ultimately responsible for the use of resources and outcomes of the WA group and must protect the service so that it exists in long as well as short-term. As they discovered, this duty of sustainability does not always sit easily with the expectations of feminist Trustees as always doing what is best for all women, in this case; workers. Ideally, staff will not be made redundant and staff on maternity leave get the best conditions. However, what if the group has not got the necessary funds? In line with charity law, what must always shape Trustee's decisions is what is best for current and future service users.

It is vital that staff and volunteers, as well as Trustees, know and expect this and do not feel disempowered or betrayed by the tough decisions their Board have to make. Trustees face

a paradox. How to do difficult things, such as make women redundant, and yet carry out these decisions in ways that are transparent, reasoned and feminist. What will help is an ethos of openness and transparency about the Board and its work; of how the Board functions and the 'what' and 'why' of their decisions making. This means accessible minutes and reports, sound conflicts of interest policies and practice that do not shy away from being accountable and explaining their decision-making to staff and volunteers.

Also important is that all know about and understand the primacy of certain core values and duties, i.e. what is not negotiable by Trustees, for example in the story the commitment to long term sustainability of the organisation.

CASE STUDY 5

Strathclyde Women's Aid (SWA)

Staff member: Lucy Team Leader: Ese

Walking back together from a briefing meeting with the Trustees. Lucy, a new worker asked her Team Leader, Ese, 'do you usually have so many meetings with the Trustees here? After a brief hesitation Ese said 'I wondered why you looked rather despondent'. 'Well' replied Lucy 'with the all the various consultations and updates I won't be getting much actual work done!'

Heading for the kettle Ese suggested they have break and discuss the situation. 'You remember at your interview we explained at some length that the Centre was taking over the Safe Helpline, a local service that is insolvent. It is not straightforward because of the Helpline's debt and pension liability; it's quite a risk for us. Some of the Trustees were against the takeover because of the risk'. 'But the Helpline is crucial!' Lucy broke in. 'Yes, indeed' replied Ese, 'but it is a risk and we all know it is, and I for one, don't want to damage the Centre, or lose my job because the acquisition isn't viable'. 'Me neither' said Lucy now very worried.

'However, continued Ese, 'our Trustees are pretty experienced having been through the move from collective to having a Manager. They are committed to regular consultations and briefings with staff. The Convenor keeps saying 'there will be no surprises'. Curiously what's helping a lot is having a Manager. She is good at reporting to the Board and feeding back to us, and at deciding when that's not enough and calling a joint meeting of Board and staff'.

'That isn't what happened at the last place I worked', said Lucy, 'over our heads the Trustees decided on cutting our pay; relationships got so bad the Trustees wouldn't come in to the Centre'. Ese said, 'so you are OK about there being so many meetings are you Lucy?' 'Yes,' Lucy said smiling, 'makes me feel I can trust the Trustees and get on with my work!'

A Board's commitment to consulting with staff and volunteers in a meaningful and helpful way is important in the best of times but especially so when making changes, considering redundancies or when job satisfaction is at risk. Trustees can seem 'invisible' to the front-line staff and volunteers as they meet in the evenings and are not always able to come in to the office during the day; and /or where there is not an ethos of joint meetings and Away Days. It is the Boards responsibility to create opportunities for staff to ask questions, challenge and problem solve in supportive ways.

The Board is not alone in its responsibilities for ensuring trust in their governance; it is also the responsibility of Team Leaders, the Manager, or Chief Officer (if there are these posts). Senior staff are a key conduit between frontline staff and the Board; passing on information/explanations to staff and volunteers and feeding back to the Board on the wellbeing and impact of the processes for informing and supporting staff and volunteers through periods of organisational change.

The quality of the relationship between Board and staff members is a powerful factor in the reception and outcomes of difficult decisions in difficult times. What helps in hard times, is that in harmonious times the Board:

- consults with staff and volunteers in a meaningful and helpful way
- ensures the role and responsibilities of trustees for staff and volunteers is clear and understood
- actively connects with staff and volunteers
- reinforces the responsibility of the manager or CEO to feedback on the wellbeing of staff and volunteers, especially during organisational change, reporting on the processes for updating and supporting staff and volunteers

CASE STUDY 6

Loanan Women's Aid (LWA)

Trustee: Luisa

'What training are you going to this Saturday for Women's Aid?' asked Luisa's partner.

'Update for Trustees on SORP,' she replied.

'Whatever is that?' he retorted.

Luisa replied: 'SORP stands for 'Statement of Recommended Practice'; something to do with financial accounting; the rules are changing about how the WA reports publicly on its management of the money.'

'Not your cup of tea,' said her partner, 'you normally avoid anything to do with figures.'

'We get public money,' Luisa responded, 'not enough of it mind you, but we would get much less for the WA if we got a reputation for incompetent reporting.'

'Well, good luck,' he said still sounding skeptical.

Luisa replied laughing, 'the course is called 'SORP for Dummies!'

At the beginning of the course the trainer said being confident about the basics of financial matters was, for Trustees of RCC, a feminist issue. 'Right on', thought Luisa, 'now give me this SORP'.

Sound decision making is central to Trustees carrying out their roles and functions. It is not always easy, but decisions can be made with confidence if Trustees know they are well informed, are deciding on the basis of evidence and have the skills and experience amongst their number – or if not, that they seek, even buy, the expertise they need from Advisors or Co-optees.

It is not unusual in a lot of charities for Board members without financial expertise to leave oversight to those who have; this is understandable but unwise. Even though some Trustees (such as the treasurer) might be delegated specific tasks, Board members still have shared responsibility and are equally accountable and therefore liable if there are serious financial problems.

If it is not the case already consider reviewing the composition of the Board and governance practice annually. Also do a 'skills audit', i.e. ask each Trustee to tick, on a list of governance and strategic skills required by the Board currently or in the foreseeable future (e.g. procurement or marketing),

their skills and/or experience. Then, comparing the existing and required skills, identify the gaps to be filled by targeted recruitment or co-option or by inviting specialists to attend meetings to inform specific items on the Board agenda.

Whatever skills or experiences may exist amongst fellow Board members, if you do not understand some point or a conclusion do ask and if necessary ask again, even again!

Examples of relevant resources (via www.womensaid.scot members' area)

- Template Board Skills Matrix
- OSCR Good Governance guidance

CASE STUDY 7

Eastoun Rape Crisis Centre (EWA)

Trustees: Shona and Lydia

Shona, the Chair of the Trustees, had put a lot of energy into arranging a Board Away Day and had been pleased to get a good deal with the venue. The morning was for the Trustees to be together then the staff to join them at lunch. However, all did not turn out so well.

On the day, the Board was reviewing the trustee recruitment process. They had advertised in professional and local newspapers and contacted 'Changing the Chemistry' (an organisation dedicated to improving diversity on Boards). They were pretty pleased with the feedback from this organisation, except that the physical space they use may be a barrier to an inclusive recruitment process.

'Well, on reflection, I think we are aware there are barriers to individuals with physical disabilities applying' said Lydia 'as a wheel chair user I know myself of the difficulties in accessing the meetings'. Shona flushed deep red. 'OK', she said, 'Again I am very sorry you had so much trouble getting into the venue.'

I did not realise being in a wheelchair meant having to use a dark, dirty back entrance; or that the accessible toilets were poorly maintained. I rang the hotel management numerous times to check and they assured me all would be well'. After a silence Shona said 'look, things do go wrong however hard you try'.

Lydia said soothingly 'what I am actually thinking about is the old lift in our building. It quite terrifies me; it's like a lift in a horror movie. I have been stuck between floors too many times. Once I get into office things are fine'. 'We must talk to the Factor again' said Shona, 'but I don't hold out much hope. The trouble is the rent is so reasonable and as we know our grant is going to be cut again.'

After some discussion the Trustee decided to consult staff about offering a service for survivors in a 'satellite' centre in more accessible premises, perhaps a health centre or community hall; and then to consider using any of the rooms for the Trustee's meetings. They also agreed that finding new premises would have greater priority in their strategic plan and look for funding to support this. Not that any of them were very hopeful about it.

It is the duty of Trustees to ensure the WA group adheres to legal and ethical commitments to inclusion. This means taking inclusion seriously at Board level as well as for staff and volunteers. For example, all individuals who wish to take up a board role in Women's Aid group should have access to a fair, transparent recruitment and then given tailored support to take on the role with confidence.

Inclusivity of course goes beyond pursuing accessible spaces, but is generally about making sure people are able to contribute fully in their role. Inclusivity also applies to work with service users. Feminists believe in the solidarity of women working for women and challenging inequalities. To hold these values and provide support and services to all women, children and young people who require them is to face a number of predicaments. Many feminist Trustees will be aware that:

- There will be service users who do not share the organisation's values or ethos
- Feminist views and values are a broad church, quite how they are understood and acted on is a source of debate, and on occasions there will be considerable differences
- In providing a service it is essential to ensure inclusivity of the diversity of users of the services and respect them whether or not they share the values of the services

Relevant resources can be found under the 'Equalities' tab on www.womensaid.scot members' area.

CASE STUDY 8

Westoun Women's Aid (WWA) Trustees: Ligia, Ming-Yan, Eve

Getting into Ming-Yan's car after the Board meeting Ligia said to Ming-Yan: 'Eve is bullying me. She shouted at me in the kitchen during the break and I thought 'that's enough, I am leaving'."

Checking they could not be overheard Ming-Yan asked 'Why don't you tell her?' 'I am scared of Eve', confessed Ligia. 'She is so angry!'

'How about the other Trustees and I give you support? One of us could be with you. It should help both of you to talk openly and to help find a resolution.' 'I will find it very stressful, Eve is very bossy', replied Ligia.

Ming-Yan said, 'Eve is not going to enjoy it either. What's important is that you voice your concerns, for your sake, Eve's and indeed for all of us Trustees'.

A feature of feminist thinking and values is the uses and the abuses of power and authority – by individuals, groups and institutions. Indeed, feminists organisations have long considered different ways of working that values sharing power and minimises levels of authority. An important learning from this work is that formal and informal power issues still occur and if left unchecked and unrecognised, this can sometimes be highly problematic. This in part if organisations have few formal ways for containing informal leadership/ interpersonal/power struggles or for responding early to controlling or bullying behaviours (whether intentional or not).

Ming-Yan is wise to encourage Ligia to talk with Eve and seek a resolution, ideally for both parties. Eve has a right to be heard and understood (which is not the same as being agreed with), i.e. for the Trustees to be aware of how Eve perceives the situation. It could be that Eve, through commitment her to the Board, is experiencing burnout. As a long term Trustee she has long been surrounded by stories and experiences of domestic abuse and challenging work. Trustees can 'burnout', just like frontline workers. A sad symptom can be that the person experiencing this can express negative feelings on those who are closest, be they family or colleagues.

It helps if:

- Organisations having a code of conduct which trustee can sign up to and refer to in meetings or when there are problems
- In the guiding document there is a process for attending to and resolving differences both between Boardmembers and between staff and Board members
- Hosting specific training on personal power as part of induction for trustees or after a review of Boardrelationships and effectiveness
- Making use of active working together agreements
- Bullying & harassment policy to include making explicit the range of unacceptable behaviours and attitudes, not just for staff and volunteers, but also for Trustees
- Complaints procedure to include process for how to deal with complaints about individual Trustees.

Example resources (via www.womensaid.scot)

- Examples of Trustees Code of Conduct
- Example Working Together Agreement
- Example process for complaints against individual trustees
- Framework for dealing with difficult behaviours

CASE STUDY 9

Durness Women's Aid (DWA)

Trustees: Jane and Sam

Service users: Sharon and Kylie

Jane and Sam left the Board meeting feeling pleased even elated. The meeting had included reports from two women who had acknowledged they had previously used the service and now were on the local community planning committee. The women, Sharon and Kylie, were on the Community Safety Committee and had been for 12 months; participating fully after the first few meetings. The increase in Sharon and Kylie's confidence and self-esteem was clear from their report.

After completing their report Sharon said the best bit was when a police officer had said, 'you are not "victims" or "survivors" you are local planners'. Kylie said in the meeting 'we are both survivors and local planners and feel all the more valued for it'. Jane smiled at this recollection then said, 'It seems that for Sharon and Kylie, having a 'voice' had changed them, empowered them.' 'Yes', replied Sam, 'but more than that it means they are have joined us in the business of making change happen.

At the centre of Women's Aid are the women, children and young people who have experience of domestic abuse. It is central to Trusteeship, whatever the charity; to have as the primary focus what best helps the 'beneficiaries' (i.e. the people or cause to which the charity is dedicated). Yet how do Trustees know what matters to service users (and potential users) and how do Trustees know the impact of the services and/ or those who provide them? Listening to the voices of the users and including their voice in decision making spaces is fundamental to the role of the Trustee.

To 'listen' is not straightforward; using WA's services is confidential to the individual, and service users come from all backgrounds and ways of life. Despite these complexities many groups have developed creative ways of 'capturing' the voices of survivors and including them in decision making.

The story of Sharon and Kylie's success reveals another aspect of the service user's voice; having the voices of service users heard by those deciding social policies, practice and expenditure. Having service users themselves be involved in activism and change is a powerful way to challenge attitudes of partner agencies. Providing service users with confidence, skills and pathways to policy makers is part of the activist role

of feminist service provision. It would not be every service user's choice but if coming back for group support and an 'apprenticeship' as a change agent was on offer then some will grab the opportunities, grow and make social change.

What does this mean in practice? All strategic plans and policy development (see NSS Standards) should be informed by:

- Partner agencies forums – local and national consultations on women, children and young people's needs
- Consultation, advisory or reference groups – if consent is given to participating in consultation or in advisory position
- Anonymous consultations online for the range of services provided
- Service user feedback through workers, and being informed by exit interviews and complaints procedures

Example resources (via www.womensaid.scot)

- National service standards
- Service user participation policy and procedure

CASE STUDY 10

Jura Women's Aid (JWA)

Trustees: Wendy and Phoebe, Alana and Ruby

'Well' exclaimed Wendy 'that was some meeting! Who needs to go the theatre for drama?' 'Indeed' replied Phoebe 'I am exhausted from all the tension. I ate a whole tube of 'Juicy fruits'. 'For a change I felt sorry for Ruby, normally I find her bossy' said Wendy.

Phoebe started the car then said, 'Alana had a point that after all the work the sub-group had done finding new premises it was a shock to find people questioned moving at all. But her behaviour! Demanding that the staff left the meeting and then accusing us of lack of respect for her as the founder of the service'.

'To be fair Alana was very upset and she had a right to be, she has dedicated her life to Women's Aid' argued Wendy. 'That is true' admitted Phoebe, 'but it is unacceptable to me for Alana to demand that much personal influence. It is not consistent with feminist values about not abusing personal power.'

The ethos of a women's organisation can make it a very special place for openness and emotional honesty, but this can also be challenging. Unmet expectations and disappointment can mean women turning on one another and Board members trading blame and criticism. Some behaviour may mirror the very issues that some service users may bring to the service i.e. verbal aggression, bullying, silencing etc.

And so in the story Alana points the finger in anger at Ruby implying she was being 'unfeminist' and therefore lacking credibility. It has been known for Board members to avoid making difficult decisions because deciding between competing views seemed 'unsisterly' and Managers when challenged about their poor practice, or not being properly supervised, trained or formally qualified, claiming that it was not feminist to challenge her in any way.

The personal and emotional commitment Trustees, and staff often feel in relation to Women's Aid can also explain why tensions might rise when decisions are made or controversial issues are discussed. It is both good feminist practice, and good trusteeship to value emotional responsibility when expressing opinions or disagreement.

To avoid abusing both personal and position power and to balance the honest expression of feelings and respect, Trustees should consider their emotional responsibility.

'Well the informal authority of founders has long been a feature of feminist organisations, they get very invested and we benefit from it', said Wendy somewhat dismissively, 'I think Alana feels she is entitled to be angry with us and to show it'.

'Being angry is one thing, how it is expressed is another. That why we have our Code of Conduct' responded Phoebe 'Ah! That's when I felt sorry for Ruby', exclaimed Wendy 'there she was, as Chair, trying to draw attention to the Code, and wanting to move on, when Alana leaps up and accuses her of being 'unfeminist', of being controlling and bureaucratic'!

Wendy went on, 'it is a credit to Ruby that she had the presence of mind to close the meeting and get agreement for date to meet again to address the issue of the new premises.'

'A date for more drama' replied Phoebe grumpily. 'Not necessarily' said Wendy 'I am going to bring the Code of Conduct on a banner and act in solidarity with Ruby!'

It can be useful to:

- Talk about the obligations of emotional responsibility at trustee induction, board meetings, training and annual reviews
- Have a code of behaviour and working together agreement that all is informed of and signed up to, and that is referenced, adhered to and 'live' in meetings
- Have a space in meetings for people to raise concerns (e.g. a standard item at the end of the agenda of staff or Board meetings, particularly through periods of change within the organisation)
- Be conscious of how you use your power regardless of your position in the group
- Foster effective and respectful relationships – be mindful of time for this work
- Succession planning including mentoring and support to women to develop feminist trusteeship – and so develop the next generation of feminist trustees

Example resources (www.womensaid.scot)

- Example Working Together Agreement
- Example Code of Conduct

5 GUIDELINES SUMMARY

These stories can be used as starting points for discussion as reflective exercises, or even in recruitment. Some might be more relevant than others, for your groups particular circumstances. The stories illustrate some of the issues that may arise on a Women's Aid board.

The example resources are meant to give an indication of the types of processes that will help you in managing issues such as those detailed in the stories. On Scottish Women's Aid's Website, the members area will be regularly updated with new resources, templates and tools to support you in your trustee role.

If you have a suggestion or support need, please get in touch with Member Services by emailing Selma Augestad, Member Services Officer on: selma.augestad@womensaid.scot

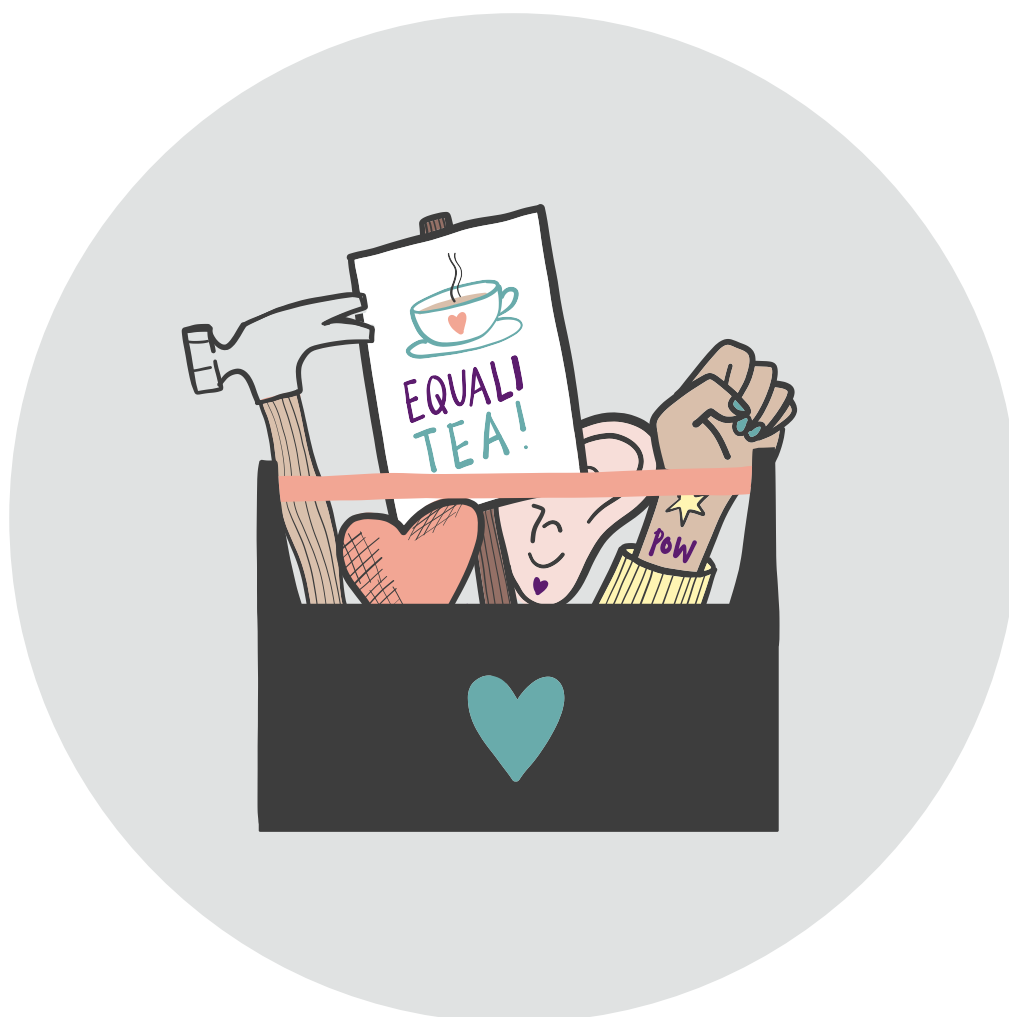
6 CONCLUDING WORDS

Thank you for reading the Feminist Governance Toolkit. We hope that it has given you new ideas and inspiration for your work.

In three parts; values model, values audit and guidelines, this toolkit offers a framework for trustees of Women's Aid groups in Scotland to reflect on and embed feminist values in their organisational practices. Please use the three parts flexibly and adapt it to the particular needs of your group.

Scottish Women's Aid are seeking to improve, develop and expand in the field of feminist governance, and we will continue to offer resources, ideas and frameworks towards this aim. If you would like to get involved and share your ideas, please contact us.

The Feminist Governance Toolkit is the result of supportive collaboration and we would like to thank our partners Rape Crisis Scotland, Shirley Otto, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Voluntary Action Fund and Carron Riach for their contributions and commitment to this publication and to feminist governance.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Feminist Governance Champions:

Nisha Munogee, Naomi Blight, Kirsty Mooney,
Irina Mclean, Rebecca Stafford, Ruth Triggs, Louise Slyth, Lucie Bennett,
Anna Ritchie Allan, Christine Martin, Suzanne Ross, Cat Stewart, Clydebank WA

Design & illustration by Jo Harrison