

Organisation Name		Reference code
Stepping Stones Luton		2024-05-YWG33
Organisation Address		
George Street West, Luton LU1 2BJ, UK 9A George St W Luton Bedfordshire LU1 2BJ Bedfordshire		
Website Address		
George Street West, Luton LU1 2BJ, UK		
Type of organisation? (tick all that apply and complete relevant details)		
Charity	Registered Charity Number	Date Registered
Yes	1162349	2008
Community Interest Company	Registered Companies House Number	Date Registered
No	06588338	
Social Enterprise	Social Enterprise Mark Awarded Yes/No	Date Awarded
No		
<b>Grant Summary</b>		
To extend and enhance the provision of emotional and practical support to female survivors of domestic abuse, women who are vulnerable due to substance misuse, and those with short-term sentences or at risk of offending, through empowering them to lead safe, non-violent, equal lives so they may flourish and contribute to the community		
<b>Please describe the specific needs of the young women and girls you work with that this project will address</b>		
<p>Stepping Stones Luton supports young women and girls facing various challenges and vulnerabilities. The majority of these women have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, and require support to overcome trauma and rebuild their sense of safety and self-worth. Young women and girls vulnerable to exploitation, such as trafficking or involvement in gangs, need guidance and protection to navigate away from harmful situations and access resources for a safer future, whilst those struggling with mental health issues require specialised care and counselling to address their emotional well-being and develop coping strategies.</p> <p>Many of these women have offended, and all, through their vulnerability, are potentially at risk of offending. We have worked with the Ministry of Justice through Advance Charity to support women on probation through licence, and also those released from custody. Women who have lived experience of trauma, substance misuse and fractured families are often at risk to become involved with the criminal justice system. By working with our service beneficiaries on the root causes of their challenges we can effectively help arrest some of the symptoms which can often include offending behaviour and maladaptive coping mechanisms.</p> <p>Building self-esteem, confidence, and resilience are essential for these young women and girls to overcome adversity and achieve their full potential. They need opportunities for personal development, leadership training, and life skills workshops. We believe that women are the experts in their own lives and we work collaboratively to establish their individual needs and support them in a trauma-informed way.</p>		

In addition we know that many mothers often need guidance and support in parenting skills and navigating the challenges of raising a family at a young age, and we offer a suite of training programmes to enable women to understand, recognise and break cyclical domestic abuse, address long-term trauma, appropriately manage anger and parent effectively. . Women who to attend statutory agency meetings, health, and rehabilitation appointments as well as employment can also access care for their child / children in a safe, supportive learning environment without cost to themselves In our year 2023-24 we supported 358 vulnerable women. Of these, 101 were self referrals, whilst 70 women were referred to us by the Police or Criminal justice System, either as having received a short-term sentence, or to be deemed at risk of offending. The remainder came from other local organisations who recognise the ongoing needs of these women and the success we have had in supporting them. Whilst we aim to contact all women within 48 hours of their referral, and arrange an initial assessment within 7 days, we nevertheless currently have a waiting list of 91, and we need to address this through extending our service and making it more accessible to women who need the support. We know that these women need our support, but we are unable at present to provide it, due to lack of resource. Whilst these women are awaiting intervention, or in the early stages of receiving it, they are all at risk of offending or experiencing additional trauma.

**What are the key outcomes that you will be seeking to achieve for young women and girls either at risk of offending or who are already caught up in the criminal justice system?**

Stepping Stones Luton works to provide holistic support tailored to the specific needs of each young woman and girl, empowering them to overcome challenges, reach their potential, and lead fulfilling lives. We aim to prevent young women and girls from engaging in criminal behaviour, by addressing the root causes and implementing interventions and support services aimed at addressing underlying issues such as trauma, substance abuse, mental health challenges, and lack of positive opportunities. Our support programmes include Own My Life, Anger Management and Serenity and we measure attendance and engagement with these programmes and the correlation with increased self esteem and resilience.

For those already involved in the criminal justice system, the focus shifts to rehabilitation and reintegration. This includes providing access to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities to help them build skills and reintegrate into society as law-abiding citizens. We offer Employment, Training and Education (ETE) programmes and measure the effectiveness of these in supporting women to move on. By addressing the underlying factors contributing to criminal behaviour and providing ongoing support and guidance, Stepping Stones aims to reduce the likelihood of young women and girls reoffending. This may involve providing access to counselling, mentoring, and support groups to help them navigate challenges and make positive life choices

Building resilience, self-esteem, and empowerment are key outcomes for young women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system. Stepping Stones seeks to equip them with the skills, resources, and confidence needed to overcome adversity, make positive changes in their lives, and advocate for themselves.

Supporting the overall well-being of young women and girls involved in or at risk of offending is also crucial. This includes addressing their physical and mental health needs, providing access to healthcare services, and promoting healthy coping mechanisms and self-care.

Stepping Stones also works to address systemic barriers within the criminal justice system that may disproportionately impact young women and girls, such as discriminatory practices, lack of gender-responsive programming, and limited access to support services. Advocacy efforts aim to bring about systemic change and create a more equitable and inclusive system. We will continue to liaise with the Probation

Service to achieve positive measurable outcomes for the women we support.

**What are the key activities you will undertake with this funding to achieve this?**

Assessments to understand the individual needs and circumstances of each woman, including identifying the underlying factors contributing to their involvement in the criminal justice system and developing personalised case management plans tailored to their specific needs.

Providing access to counselling, therapy, and trauma-informed support services to address any underlying mental health issues, trauma, and emotional well-being. This may include individual counselling sessions, and/or group therapy designed to promote healing and resilience.

Skill-Building training sessions and educational programs aimed at building essential life skills and vocational skills eg vocational training courses, job readiness workshops, etc

Establishing mentoring programs and peer support networks to provide positive role models and a supportive community for vulnerable women and girls. Mentors can offer guidance, encouragement, and practical support in navigating challenges, setting goals, and making positive life choices.

Employment and Educational Support: Facilitating access to educational opportunities and providing support in accessing and maintaining employment through job placement services, CV building workshops, and interview preparation sessions.

Conflict resolution programs aimed at repairing harm, fostering accountability, and promoting healing, to address conflicts and repair relationships.

Engaging with the wider community to promote understanding, and support for women transitioning out of the criminal justice system, through awareness campaigns and partnerships with local organisations to create opportunities for reintegration.

Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, measure outcomes, and continuously improve services, by collecting data, conducting assessments, and seeking feedback from participants to ensure that interventions are effective and responsive to the needs of the vulnerable women we support

**Does your proposed project already exist or is this a new piece of work?**

Stepping Stones Luton is currently contracted by the Ministry of Justice to provide support for women being discharged to Luton from custody or serving community licences where they meet our referral criterion. Stepping Stones Luton aims to further strengthen its impact and effectiveness in supporting women at risk of offending or already involved in the criminal justice system, ultimately empowering them to overcome challenges and build brighter futures.

We will build on what we have achieved to date by reflecting on successes, challenges, and lessons learned, to improve and enhance our approach moving forward.

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With the additional funding, we will have the opportunity to expand and enhance our existing services to better meet the needs of the women who need it. We will look to increase capacity, expand training opportunities and introduce new programmes as appropriate.

Additional funding will enable us also to strengthen existing partnerships and collaborations with other organisations and stakeholders working in the field of criminal justice. By pooling resources and expertise, we can enhance the effectiveness and reach of our interventions and ensure a coordinated approach to supporting vulnerable women.

We will use the funding to recruit and invest in staff development and training to ensure that our team members are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to effectively support these women, and we will look to embrace new approaches and technologies in order to enhance the quality and efficiency of our interventions and better meet the evolving needs of the women we support.

<p>We will continue to measure the impact and outcomes of our programmes by collecting data on participant outcomes, and conducting regular assessments to ensure that our interventions are achieving their intended goals and making a positive difference in the lives of the women we support</p>
<p><b>What expertise and track record do you have to be able to deliver this work successfully?</b></p>
<p>Stepping Stones Luton possesses a wealth of expertise and a strong track record in delivering successful interventions for vulnerable women to overcome adversity, build resilience, and achieve positive outcomes. Our programmes have helped countless individuals break the cycle of violence, trauma, and involvement in the criminal justice system, empowering them to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives.</p> <p>Our staff members undergo rigorous and continuous training &amp; development to stay abreast of best practices and emerging trends in supporting vulnerable women, and we rely on evidence-based practices and proven interventions to aid and improve our service delivery. We continuously evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions to maximise the outcomes for the women we support, and we collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders and organisations to share resources and expertise to enhance the effectiveness of our programmes.</p> <p>We are very experienced in trauma-informed approaches to care, recognising the prevalence of trauma among women involved in or at risk of offending. Our staff members are trained in trauma-informed care principles, which guide our interactions, interventions, and service delivery to ensure sensitivity, safety, and empowerment for survivors of trauma. As a women's only charity, we treat each case in a unique and holistic manner, working collaboratively and supportively with each individual woman to recognise and support their own individual needs and circumstances, and tailoring our programmes according to those unique needs and experiences. Our team understands the complexities of gender dynamics and recognises the importance of addressing issues such as gender-based violence, societal expectations, and systemic inequalities in our interventions.</p> <p>One client was initially referred to us by her son's primary school, with a diagnosis of bipolar affective disorder and anxiety. Significant concerns were raised regarding emotional abuse from her husband and his family, leading to her children being subject to a Child Protection Plan for Emotional Abuse.</p> <p>After an initial assessment, it was evident that she needed empowerment to understand the impact of domestic abuse on her and her children. She participated in the 12-week Freedom program, focusing on empowering women. Completing the program boosted her confidence, yet she sought further support in 2022 due to ongoing psychological abuse from her husband. She underwent 12 weeks of counselling with a volunteer counsellor and then engaged in an 11-week Trauma program, which notably increased her self-esteem.</p> <p>She then worked with our ETE practitioner to explore career options, update her CV, and enhance her interview skills. Through encouragement and practice, she overcame her fears and secured a full-time position after a rigorous three-hour interview. Her employment commenced on April 22, 2024, marking a significant achievement in her journey of personal growth and empowerment.</p>
<p><b>Explain how the grant will be spent</b></p>
<p>We will recruit and train an additional Women's Service Practitioner to work alongside our current 6.5 FTEs. This will enable us to extend and grow our service by 15 - 20%, enabling us to reach more vulnerable women who are at risk of offending.</p> <p>In 2023-24 we supported 358 women so we would expect to be able to support an additional 40-50 vulnerable women with this funding.</p>
<p><b>Who will be responsible for overseeing and delivering this work?</b></p>
<p>The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Women's Services Manager (WSM) will recruit an additional Practitioner to deliver this extension to our service. The CEO came to</p>

<p>Stepping Stones after 7 years working as Head of People in the Health &amp; Social Care sector, responsible for ensuring safe recruitment, training and wellbeing of a large team. She has a strong financial and project management background, and a good knowledge of mental health issues and domestic abuse.</p> <p>Our WSM has sixteen years' experience working with domestic abuse victims via the local constabulary as a civilian staff member and is a specialist in honour based violence, female genital mutilation, and spiritual abuse, having joined us from a national domestic abuse charity.</p>
<p><b>How do you plan to continue this work once the grant ends?</b></p> <p>Stepping Stones will actively seek out and apply for additional funding opportunities in order to be able to sustain our programmes and services. We will continue to cultivate and strengthen strategic partnerships with other stakeholders invested in supporting vulnerable women, to provide access to resources, expertise, and support networks that enhance the sustainability and impact of our programmes and interventions. Through engagement with the community we will endeavour to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for our work to thrive.</p> <p>We will remain responsive to the changing needs of our women and the broader community context, by adapting our services, and strategies based on feedback to ensure relevance and effectiveness over time. We will also investigate and explore opportunities to generate earned revenue through activities such as training workshops to supplement funding and ensure the long-term sustainability of our project.</p> <p>In addition, we are engaging sector experts including CVS Bedfordshire to help us develop a financial strategy to become more sustainable in the medium to long term. This will include the achievement of a more diverse range of income streams in order to spread the risk of over-reliance on individual funders</p>
<p><b>Does your organisation only work with women and girls?</b></p> <p>Yes. Stepping Stones (Luton) is run by women for women and is therefore restricted to women applicants under the Equality Act 2010, Schedule 9, and Part 1. Our Chief Executive Office, Operations Manager and Women's Service Manager are all female, as are our teams of Women's Service Practitioners and Childcare Assistants. In order to maximise diversity and ensure a balance of skills and experience we are looking to widen the demographic of the Board of Trustees and we may well be joined by 1-2 males at Trustee level. There is strong connection between the Trustees and staff team, demonstrating a united charity and maximising our advocacy and positioning in the community.</p>
<p><b>Does your organisation have existing knowledge and expertise working across the criminal justice system?</b></p> <p>Stepping Stones Luton is currently contracted by the Ministry of Justice, through Advance charity, to support women residing in Luton and Central Bedfordshire who are on probation through licence or being discharged to the area from custody. The income we receive from this work enables us to support 70 women with 1.4 FTEs. However, we recognise that there are many more women who are at risk of offending and this funding will be used as a separate project to enhance our reach and scope of services and enable us to support more women.</p>
<p><b>Will you be receiving funding from any other sources for this project?</b></p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Do all staff have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks? If no please state why.</b></p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b>Reason why not all staff have DBS checks.</b></p>
<p><b>Total funding requested in this application (£10,000 to £80,000 with a maximum of £40,000 in one year)</b></p>

£73000	
<b>Proposed grant start date</b>	<b>Proposed grant duration in months</b>
11/1/2024	24
<b>How much funding is required each year?</b>	
<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>
£36000	£37000
<b>What was your organisation's expenditure in the most recent financial year?</b>	<b>What was your organisation's annual income in the most recent financial year?</b>
£557207	£418661
<b>What value of unrestricted reserves did your organisation have at the end of the most recent financial year?</b>	
£235702	