

IMPACT REPORT 2024-25



A Message from the Chair of Trustees

I am proud to share this year's Impact Report, which highlights the **remarkable difference** Lotus Families continues to make across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Behind every statistic in this report are stories of **safety regained, confidence rebuilt and lives changed** for the better. These stories are a result of programmes devised, managed and delivered by a **highly skilled, adaptable and dedicated team** of staff and volunteers led by CEO, Kate Lawrence.

My fellow trustees and I take our **responsibility for oversight** seriously: monitoring outcomes, reviewing risks and ensuring that every pound we spend delivers meaningful impact for survivors and families.

We are deeply **grateful** to our staff and volunteers, as well as our funders and partners, whose **dedication and collaboration** make the delivery of our vital services possible. Together, we remain committed to **transparency, accountability**, and the **trauma-informed values** that guide all of our work.

Jayne Rice-Oxley
Chair of Trustees

CEO Report

In April 2024 the charity relaunched as **Lotus Families**, marking a new chapter that truly reflects who we are today; a specialist, trauma-informed charity supporting people affected by abuse. My heartfelt thanks go to **Home-Start UK** for supporting such a smooth and positive transition.

This year, more families than ever have contacted us for help. The ongoing **cost-of-living crisis** continues to place enormous pressure on survivors and their children, and we've seen first-hand how financial strain can intensify risk and make recovery even harder. Despite these challenges, and the extra demands created by staff shortages, the team has remained calm, compassionate, and utterly dedicated. I am so proud of how everyone has pulled together, with an **independent social worker manager** providing invaluable staff supervision during two staff maternity leaves. Recruiting for temporary part-time roles hasn't been easy, but the team's flexibility and commitment have kept our services resilient and continuous.

We were also thrilled to **retain our SafeLives Leading Lights accreditation** which is a nationally recognised mark of excellence that shows our services continue to meet the highest standards of safety, quality, and impact.

Our peer-led Lotus Blossom programme has gone from strength to strength. This year it trained three new facilitators, ran five support groups, and created our first paid Trainee IDVA post, filled by a former client and volunteer peer support mentor.

Seeing survivors grow into colleagues and leaders is one of the most inspiring and rewarding parts of our work, and a real testament to the power of lived experience.

Another major development has been the start of our transition to our **Early Intervention model**, ensuring survivors receive immediate IDVA contact when they first reach out. We introduced a **waitlist IDVA triage** system, and started working backwards from those waiting for a group longest, to provide every person with a risk assessment and a tailored safety and support plan.

No survivor left waiting without support.

From April 2025, our Early Intervention Model will be fully embedded across all services, ensuring every new client receives a safety plan and proactive, regular contact from day one. This approach strengthens safety at the earliest possible point and helps survivors and families feel heard, supported, and less alone. We will also work to increase the number of Recovery groups we run, enabling us to clear the current group waiting-list backlog by March 2026.

Thank you to our **staff, trustees, and peer facilitators**. Your compassion, strength, and belief in every survivor make Lotus Families what it is. Also to all our funders and donors, especially our major funders the Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner (OSPCC), National Lottery, Lloyds Foundation, Nationwide and Garfield Weston; we are so grateful for your trust and partnership.

I'm incredibly proud of the whole **Lotus Family** who are a team that continues to lead with empathy and hope, making a difference every single day, even in the most challenging of times.

Kate Lawrence
Chief Executive

Our people



Eight employees



Eight trustees



Six peer support mentors

National & Local Context: Why Our Work Matters

Across England and Wales, domestic and family-based abuse remains widespread and deeply harmful. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 6.6% of women experienced domestic abuse in the last year. Over a lifetime, one in three women are affected. Domestic abuse is a gendered crime: ONS data shows women are far more likely to experience repeated, severe abuse, and that most perpetrators are male. This underpins our decision to offer single-sex Recovery groups, giving women a safe, trauma-informed space to rebuild confidence and autonomy.

Behind these figures are real people living with fear and coercive control, working each day to keep themselves and their children safe. The impact reaches far beyond the home, affecting health, wellbeing, and relationships for years to come.

The Local Picture: East Sussex & Brighton & Hove

Locally, the need remains high. Domestic abuse makes up nearly one in five crimes across Sussex and over a third of violent offences. In East Sussex alone, police recorded more than 7,500 domestic abuse-related crimes last year.

Domestic abuse is a leading reason families come to the attention of children's services or MARAC. Its effects often span generations; children growing up in fear, parents rebuilding trust, and families trying to recover together.

Hidden Harms and Changing Patterns

We continue to support families affected by child-to-parent violence and abuse (CAPVA). Many parents describe feeling ashamed or too afraid to seek help. These experiences highlight why a whole-family, trauma-informed approach is so important – one that meets people with understanding and helps them rebuild safety and connection.

Why Lotus Families' Role Matters

Primarily commissioned by the Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner (OSPCC), Lotus Families delivers trauma-informed support across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove. We bridge the gap between crisis and recovery, reaching those who might otherwise slip through the cracks.

Each year, more survivors, parents, and carers turn to us for safety and hope. We meet them with compassion and expertise, helping them regain control of their lives. Our new early-intervention model reduces risk and nurtures recovery, one safe relationship at a time.

Looking Ahead

Domestic and family-based abuse remains one of the UK's most pressing social challenges. Demand continues to rise, and cases are increasingly complex. That is why the work of Lotus Families is not just relevant, it is essential. We will keep standing alongside survivors and families, transforming pain into strength and helping to build safer, more connected communities across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Key Statistics

- 1 in 3 women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime
- At least 160,000 children in England live in households where domestic abuse is taking place
- 7,500+ domestic-abuse-related crimes in East Sussex last year
- 1 in 5 local crimes involve domestic abuse

Helping to keep East Sussex families safe and well since 1996

One mission

Break cycles of abuse and foster a society free from violence. We achieve this by offering trauma-informed prevention, recovery, advocacy, and education for women, children, and families

2024–25 core services

Lotus Domestic Abuse Recovery Programme: Empowering Women to Rebuild after Domestic Abuse

A transformative 6-week group programme, complemented by one-to-one IDVA support, designed for women who have been historically subjected to domestic abuse. This service helps clients reclaim their confidence, process trauma, and equip themselves with the tools to keep both themselves and their children safe from future harm.

Lotus Blossom Peer Support Group: Empowering Survivors to Lead:

Domestic abuse survivor ex-clients are trained as facilitators, using their lived experience to guide others through the recovery process. By supporting fellow survivors, they not only accelerate their own healing but also play a key role in empowering others to rebuild their lives.



Child-to-Parent Violence Programme: Restoring Parental Authority and Strengthening Family Bonds:

An 8-week CAPVA programme with one-to-one IDVA support for parents or carers dealing with violent or abusive child behaviour. The service helps parents break cycles of guilt and shame, rebuild relationships, and establish clear boundaries with safe, meaningful consequences.

TNBI (trans, non-binary & intersex) IDVA Service: Specialised Support for a Vulnerable Minority Group:

Tailored one-to-one assistance for TNBI survivors and their children, ensuring access to critical support services and the creation of personalised safety & support plans. This service can provide the targeted care clients need to feel secure and supported as they rebuild their lives.

“

“After years without support, I feel like I’m finding myself again.”

”

DA Recovery Programme
Participant

Successes

Stronger Identity as Lotus Families

In April 2024 we completed our transition to Lotus Families, a name that reflects both our roots and our vision for the future. For almost three decades we were part of the Home-Start network, primarily supporting families with young children through volunteer-led early help. Those beginnings taught us the power of community, compassion, and practical support – values that continue to shape our work.

Today, as Lotus Families, we are a specialist, trauma-informed charity supporting women, trans, and non-binary people affected by domestic and family-based abuse, including child-to-parent violence. Our Women's Aid membership affirms our commitment to safe, survivor-led, and gender-responsive practice. The new name has brought clarity, energy, and wider recognition, strengthening our platform for growth and impact.

Expanded Evening Child-to-Parent Violence (CAPVA) Programme

In 2023–24 we piloted our first evening CAPVA group, enabling working parents to participate. Despite the additional challenges of risk assessing for children at home, the group was a clear success.

Building on this, a second evening course in 2024–25 was equally well-received, confirming the strong demand for flexible delivery. As a result, evening CAPVA groups will now become a core part of our offer, ensuring more parents can access support at a time that works for them.

Creating Pathways into Leadership

In 2023–24, alumni of our domestic abuse Recovery group began leading Lotus Blossom peer support groups, empowering survivors to support one another in their healing journeys. Building on this success, by the end of 2024–25 we were preparing to recruit our first peer mentor into a paid Trainee IDVA role. This milestone marks the start of a clear pathway from lived experience to professional expertise, strengthening our team while ensuring survivors' voices remain at the heart of our work.

Outstanding Client Feedback and Impact:

We take pride in the overwhelmingly positive feedback from our clients. An impressive 95% of those who completed evaluation forms reported that the service had made a positive difference to their lives

Strengthening Safety Through Early Intervention

In 2024–25 we transformed a key area of risk into a success. Recognising the importance of knowing every client's level of danger, we introduced a proactive triage system to provide early support to those on our waiting lists. Our team contacted 102 Recovery clients and 39 CAPVA clients, completing risk assessments and creating tailored safety and support plans.

This new approach meant that many families received help and reassurance while waiting for a group place. It has already strengthened safety and engagement, laying the foundations for our Early Intervention model, which from April 2025 will ensure that every new referral receives immediate IDVA contact and support planning.

National Research Impact: Training Informal Supporters to Respond Safely

Our CEO, Kate Lawrence, co-authored a national systematic review published in *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* (Schucan Bird et al., 2024): *Training Informal Supporters to Improve Responses to Victim-Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse*.

The review analysed 11 studies on programmes for informal supporters; friends, relatives, colleagues, and community members who are often first to hear a disclosure. Training was shown to improve knowledge, attitudes, and confidence, making safe, supportive responses more likely.

Why this matters

Most disclosures are made to someone the survivor already knows. A kind, informed response can increase safety and recovery; disbelief or blame can deepen trauma. Strengthening informal supporters is therefore essential to a whole-society response. The review drew on the COM-B model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation – Behaviour):

- **Capability:** skills to recognise and respond safely
- **Opportunity:** confidence and supportive environments to act
- **Motivation:** belief that action can make a difference

Together, these elements encourage safer behaviours and better outcomes.

How Lotus Families Applies the Evidence

- **Embedding into practice:** The findings inform our Lotus Blossom peer support model, where trained mentors with lived experience provide structured, bounded support under professional guidance.
- **Early intervention:** Our specialist Early Intervention team applies the same COM-B principles, ensuring survivors experience capable, empathetic, and motivated responses from their first contact.
- **Evaluation:** We are refining monitoring to capture survivors' feedback on support quality and impact, contributing to national learning on sustainable recovery.

Our contribution and influence

As co-author and advisory-group member, Kate ensured frontline experience shaped the research. We continue to share learning with funders and partners, helping to strengthen safe, trauma-informed responses across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Reference

Schucan Bird, K., Stokes, N., Rivas, C., Tomlinson, M., Delve, M., Gordon, L., Lawrence, K., Gregory, A., & O'Reilly, N. (2024). *Training Informal Supporters to Improve Responses to Victim-Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Systematic Review*. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 25(2), 1568–1584.

Challenges and Learning

Managing Risk on a Long Waitlist

A major challenge in 2024–25 continued to be the risk of holding a long waitlist without knowing the level of danger faced by each client. To address this, we introduced a new triage system, contacting 102 Recovery clients and 39 CAPVA clients to carry out risk assessments and create safety and support plans. Although we were not able to reach everyone on the waitlist, this proactive step meant many clients received important support while waiting for a group place. From April 2025 we will extend this approach to all new referrals, embedding Early Intervention IDVA support so that no one is left without help at the point of referral.

Staffing Capacity During Maternity Leave

In 2024–25, two members of our small team were on maternity leave, including our Services Manager. With limited resources, securing suitable temporary cover was challenging. A subcontracted, qualified Social Work Manager provided some support, but the CEO had to backfill much of the Services Manager’s role to maintain safe delivery and oversight. While this ensured continuity for clients, it placed additional pressure on leadership capacity and stretched the team during an already demanding year.

However, the experience also highlighted the strength, adaptability, and commitment of our staff, who worked collaboratively to keep services stable and uphold high standards of support. The learning gained has strengthened our future workforce planning and increased our overall resilience for the year ahead.

Our reach in 2024-25

174

individuals directly supported

319

in East Sussex

children indirectly supported

We are dedicated to a trauma-informed approach in every aspect of our work, ensuring our services are delivered with empathy and understanding.

Our mission is to support clients with diverse needs, offering compassionate, personalised care at every stage of their journey.

42%

reported that they were living with a disability

13%

lived in the lowest 20% deprivation deciles (including refuge or temporary housing)

2%

were aged 18-25

10%

were from a minority ethnic background

4%

LGB parent

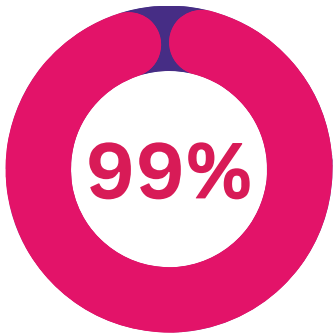
Feedback from clients



experienced improved safety



reported improved mental health



reported improved social support



reported that the service had a positive impact on their children



reported that the service had a positive impact on their partner relationship (if applicable)



95% Overall positive outcomes

Across all of our four services.

“This by far has been the best group I have ever attended. The knowledge and support is unbelievable, I am so grateful I have been part of such a fabulous group.”

“The best thing about the group was validation.”

“I’m calmer now. It makes me a better mum.”

“I felt heard and part of a community.”

“The best thing about the group was the positivity and believing things will improve in my life.”





Domestic Abuse Recovery Programme

Empowering Women to Rebuild after Domestic Abuse

Lotus Domestic Abuse Recovery Group is delivered in line with SafeLives Leading Lights quality standards, the benchmark for excellence in domestic abuse services.

Since its launch in 2019, the programme has empowered and supported over 500 women on their journey to recovery.

A transformative 6-week group, complemented by one-to-one IDVA support, designed for women who have been historically subjected to domestic abuse. This service helps women victim-survivors reclaim their confidence, process trauma, and equip themselves with the tools to keep both themselves and their children safe from future harm. To ensure the inclusion of women from orthodox religions and women with an ongoing fear of males, it is a single sex service.

Direct feedback from clients revealed that:

100% are now **more confident to recognise different types of domestic abuse**

98% **feel more likely to have a future free from domestic abuse**



across six programmes



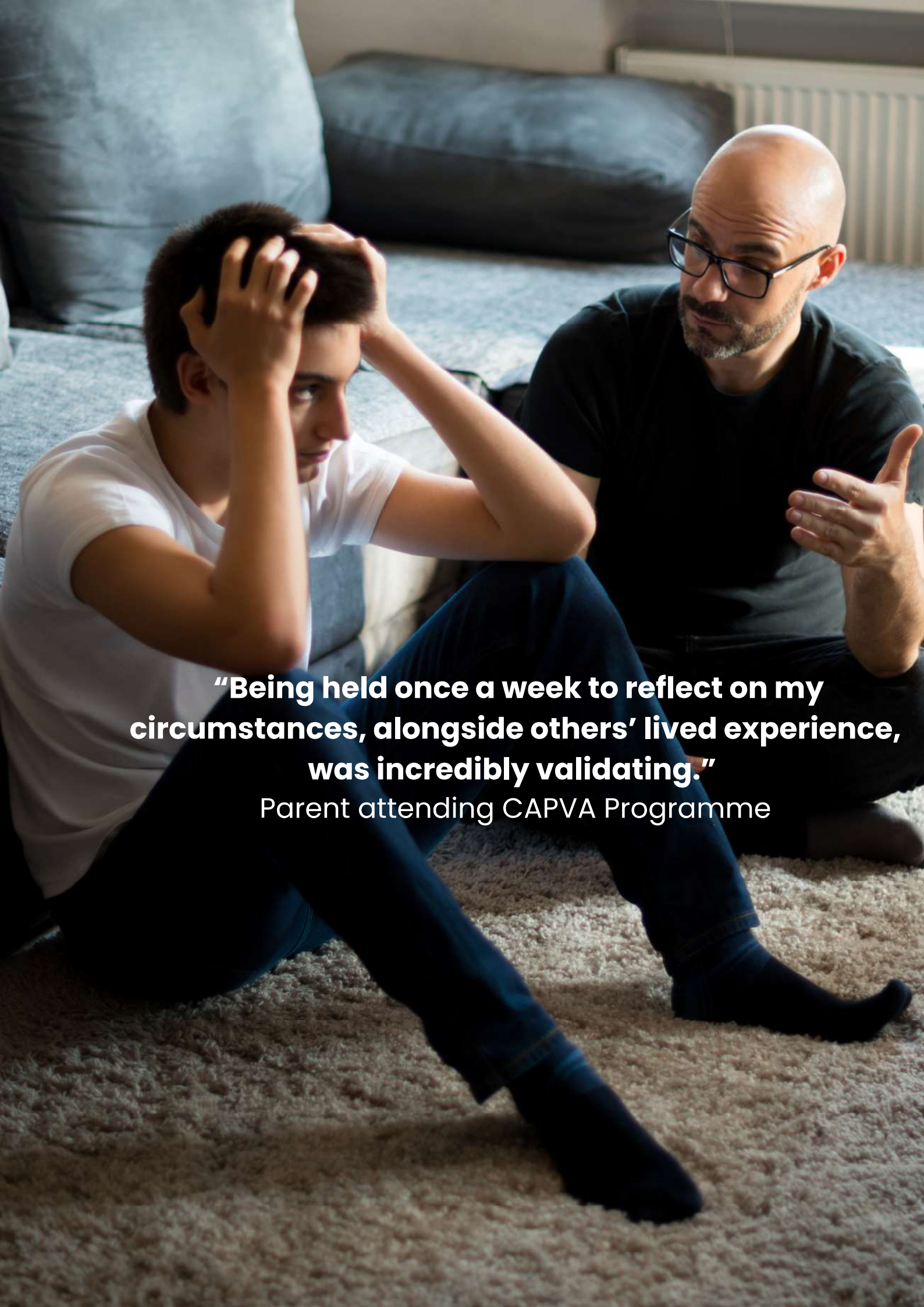
7% of women were from the LGB community

100% reported that **their wellbeing had improved**

98% reported that the group had helped them to **plan to make positive changes in their life**

98% feel **less isolated** after meeting the other females in the group

"The best thing about the group was seeing patterns in black and white and hearing others' experiences which helps me understand my own"



“Being held once a week to reflect on my circumstances, alongside others’ lived experience, was incredibly validating.”

Parent attending CAPVA Programme

Lotus Child-to-Parent Violence Programme

Restoring Parental Authority and Strengthening Family Bonds

The programme offers support and strategies to any parent/carer experiencing abusive or violent behaviour from their child/teen (aged 8-17).

After several years of delivering the national Who's in Charge? group, with additional IDVA support, we recognised the need for a more relevant and impactful approach. Following extensive research, drawing on international best practice and, most importantly, feedback from our child-to-parent violence clients, we co-produced a new programme with families we had supported, focusing on areas they felt were missing.

From April 2024, we began running the Lotus CAPVA programme, fully aligned with Safelives Leading Lights Quality Standards – the gold benchmark for domestic abuse services.

"Thanks for your time and support. I feel much stronger and less guilty, I am able to set clear boundaries without feeling anxious – a huge relief."

An 8-week support group with one-to-one IDVA support for any parent-carer struggling with violent or abusive child behaviour. The service helps parents break cycles of guilt and shame, rebuild relationships, and establish clear boundaries with safe, meaningful consequences.

"Our home is a calmer place."

This year the programme supported:

30 families
with 65
children

Direct feedback from clients revealed that:

100%

reported **increased knowledge of ways to manage risk from their child(ren)**

100%

are **more confident about their role as a parent**

100%

are **more likely to be able to manage their child's behaviour** in the future.

100%

parents reported **improved relationships with their child, with calmer and more constructive communication at home**

96%

feel **less isolated** after meeting parents in a similar situation.

97% of clients were women
3% of clients were men

“

I feel like I've really changed, and I'm finally putting my life back together.

Lotus Blossom Peer Support Mentor

”



Lotus Blossom

Empowering Survivors to Lead



Lotus Blossom online Peer Support Groups provide a nurturing space where survivors come together to offer mutual support and guidance.

Domestic abuse survivors are trained as facilitators, using their lived experience to guide others through the recovery process. By supporting fellow survivors, they not only accelerate their own healing but also play a key role in empowering others to rebuild their lives.

Our peer support groups provide a warm and welcoming environment for survivor-led healing and growth.

4 trained
peer support
mentors

ran 5 groups
supporting

28 group
members

"It's a healing and a learning process being on the Lotus Blossom groups with women who have survived, and are surviving the abuse they have experienced"

100%

said they felt **inspired by other women** on the group **to keep moving forwards**

100%

said they felt **empowered** by the way they have been able to support other women

"I didn't realise how much it was going to help me when I signed up. Even though we are the Peer Group Facilitators, we get as much out of the group as the group members do. Every single week we learn and we're empowered by the women we spend time with"



TNBI (Trans, Non-Binary and Intersex) IDVA Service

Specialist service for a vulnerable minority
group

Since 2022, we have offered a specialised Trans, Non-Binary & Intersex (TNBI) Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service for some victim-survivors who do not qualify for our Domestic Abuse Recovery Programme. We recognise that TNBI individuals face a high risk of domestic abuse and encounter unique challenges, including discrimination and the complexities of navigating competing protected characteristics. For example, some domestic abuse groups, including ours, implement single-sex criteria to ensure they are not excluding vulnerable survivors from other protected categories, such as women from religious communities (who believe it is not appropriate for them to access mixed sex public spaces unaccompanied) or those who have a continued fear men and maleness.

Additionally, TNBI survivors are more likely to experience homelessness, mental health issues, and social isolation, all of which increase their vulnerability to abuse. Our dedicated IDVA service can provide trans, non-binary, and intersex individuals with the personalised, one-to-one support they need. This ensures their safety and dignity, effectively overcoming the barriers they often face when accessing mainstream services. By delivering tailored care, our service can play a crucial role in reducing risks and improving outcomes for this minority and frequently overlooked community.

New Pilot Projects 2024-25

At Lotus Families we are always looking for new ways to reach clients and respond to emerging needs. This takes courage and creativity, and it helps our team continually build their skills and knowledge. Pilots are an essential part of this growth, strengthening our services but also supporting staff development and retention and ensuring our work stays relevant and impactful.

Managing Money in Relationships

Many women experience economic control as part of wider domestic abuse; partners restricting access to money, taking out debts in their name, sabotaging employment, or leaving them with no independent income. Such control often continues long after separation, creating barriers to rebuilding safety and stability so although our financial abuse pilot did not reach the targeted beneficiary numbers, it generated important learning around this key issue. The Lotus team pivoted the programme and offered 1:1 financial empowerment support which proved highly effective. Participants reported increased confidence, understanding of financial rights and ability to avoid further economic abuse. Sessions included guidance on budgeting safely, understanding credit, setting boundaries around shared finances, and accessing specialist debt and benefits advice. Staff developed specialist skills in identifying and responding to financial abuse, strengthening our overall advocacy offer.

Relationship Goals

This pilot, aimed at helping teenagers recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships, faced difficulties engaging young people and it proved challenging to find the right model to engage with local schools and youth clubs. Continuity was also affected by staff changes mid-year. Although the pilot did not progress, Lotus has built a fully developed programme that could be delivered in future. Although the project itself was not successful, the funding supported organisational sustainability and enabled wider contributions.

Key Learning from Pilots

Flexibility Matters

It is important that Lotus Families preserves our adaptability, both in embracing feedback and fresh initiatives from front line staff to reshaping the delivery model. Our team bring valuable insights into new approaches – and enabling the team to build innovative programmes is crucial to skills development. Equally, enabling colleagues to adapt to new circumstances is essential for a small organisation. Delivering our financial empowerment support as individual sessions still gave meaningful help, increased safety, and built confidence.

“Strong outcomes can still be achieved, even when the model changes.”

“Fresh ideas from staff invaluable.”

Partnerships Are Critical

Lotus Families work closely with our partner organisations, funders and community stakeholders. Fresh initiatives can be trialled in partnership with trusted schools, youth agencies, and referral partners. Early collaboration boosts recruitment, avoids duplication, and increases impact.

“Partnerships amplify impact – no service exists in isolation”

“Every pilot adds value – through learning, skills, and sector insight.”

Overview of Finance and Key Figures

Financial Snapshot 2024–25

Income

£268,516: Funding from statutory sources, grants, and donations enabled continued delivery of trauma-informed services.

Expenditure

£275,188: Invested in frontline delivery, safeguarding, staff wellbeing, and digital systems.

Deficit

£6,672: A planned shortfall due to timing of income and investment in service sustainability.

Reserves

- £136,524 total: £131,052 unrestricted of which £94,052 designated as contingent liabilities (e.g. redundancy, closure costs).

● Lotus Families continues to maintain prudent reserves while prioritising frontline delivery and growth.

Rising Demand and Growing Reach

Referrals received:

2022–23 → 198

2023–24 → 284

2024–25 → 435

 Referrals have more than doubled in two years

Recovery group waiting list:

March 2023 → 88

March 2024 → 194

March 2025 → 230

 Demand continues to rise, highlighting urgent local need for more recovery groups.

Our response:

- ✓ Early-intervention triage
- ✓ Continuous service delivery despite capacity pressures
- ✓ Expanding reach through partnerships and funding bids

Who refers?

Survivors (self-referral) and professionals: social care, health, education, and specialist DA services, showing strong local trust in our work.

Plans for 2025–26

Ensuring Clients Receive Support at the Right Time



In 2024–25, we received 435 referrals across all our services; a clear sign of the **growing demand for specialist support**. We secured funding so we could begin **triaging clients already on our group waiting lists**, starting with those who had been waiting the longest. A total of 141 clients were contacted and offered IDVA support. Each was contacted up to three times: 41 responded and 24 engaged in one-to-one support.

Engagement was lowest among those on the **Recovery group waitlist**, many of whom had been waiting for around **three years**. In many cases, circumstances had changed or other services had been accessed. This underlined an essential learning point; the importance of *reaching clients at the right moment*, rather than months or years after referral.

Demand remains especially high for our **Recovery groups**. Despite the team working at **full capacity**, by year-end the **waitlist had grown by 21%**. This shows that while triage increases safety and engagement, it *cannot by itself resolve the backlog*. Without **additional group capacity**, families will continue to face long waits for the recovery support they need.

From **1 April 2025**, every new referral will receive **immediate one-to-one IDVA contact and safety planning** at the **point of entry**, ensuring that urgent needs are met when survivors are most ready to engage. Alongside this, we will continue working systematically through the **existing backlog**.

To truly reduce waiting times and ensure no one is left behind, we **must secure funding for additional groups in 2025–26**. With the right investment, we can **clear the backlog, reach survivors earlier, and restore safety and hope more quickly**.

Our Supporters

We deeply appreciate and rely on the invaluable support and funding provided by our generous donors, enabling us to continue our vital work in assisting East Sussex women and children to prevent or recover from abuse. Thank you.

Funders 2024-25



With generous donations from:
DOC, and Volunteer Gift Aided expenses plus
J Kirby Electrical pro bono PAT testing



In Loving Memory

Lynne Smith

1953–2025

In loving memory of Lynne, who, through volunteering with us to support struggling families with young children, brought light and comfort to them in their darkest times.

Your compassion lives on in every life you touched.

"They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel." — Maya Angelou