



Lotus

Safer and stronger families

IMPACT REPORT 2025-26

Lotus Families

30 Years of Impact

Helping families rebuild
their lives after abuse



FOREWORD

A message from the Commissioner



Marking 30 years of Lotus Families is both a remarkable milestone and a moment for reflection. Over the past three decades, this organisation has been a steadfast source of support for individuals and families affected by domestic abuse across Sussex. I am proud to have worked alongside Lotus Families for many years and to have supported their work through funding and partnership. Their longevity speaks not only to their resilience but to the enduring need for specialist, community-based services.

Since the 1990s, our understanding of domestic abuse has evolved significantly. What was once often hidden and misunderstood is now more widely recognised as a complex issue requiring a coordinated, long-term response. Crucially, we have come to better understand that recovery does not end when immediate safety is secured. For adults and children alike, the journey to rebuild lives, restore confidence and heal from trauma takes time, consistency and specialist care.

This is where organisations like Lotus Families play a crucial role. Their whole-family, trauma-informed approach ensures that support is tailored, preventative where possible, and focused on sustainable recovery. They recognise that the effects of domestic abuse ripple across generations and that children and young people must be supported alongside their parents to break cycles of harm.

continued overleaf

As a trusted, locally embedded provider, Lotus Families have also made a wider contribution beyond frontline support. Their expertise has strengthened multi-agency collaboration across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, informed best practice and helped shape a more cohesive response to domestic abuse. By keeping the voices and lived experiences of survivors at the heart of their work, they have ensured services remain relevant, compassionate and effective.

This Impact Report highlights not only the scale of their achievements but also how needs have changed over time. We are seeing increasing complexity in cases, alongside growing demand for long-term recovery services. This makes the work of specialist organisations more important than ever.

"As a trusted, locally embedded provider, Lotus Families have also made a wider contribution beyond frontline support."

As we look to the future, it is vital that we continue to invest in and champion services like Lotus Families. Their work bridges the gap between crisis intervention and lasting recovery, helping individuals, families and communities move forward with hope and dignity.

Congratulations to everyone who has been part of Lotus Families' journey over the past 30 years. Your impact has been profound and your continued work will remain essential in building safer, stronger communities for generations to come.

Katy Bourne OBE

Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner



**Sussex
Police & Crime
Commissioner**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thirty years of standing alongside families

For thirty years, Lotus Families has been there for women, children and families in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove who have survived abuse and are ready to rebuild. We sit in a critical but overlooked space: beyond crisis, but before lasting recovery. This report reflects how we have evolved over three decades, but its focus is firmly on our impact today and the direction we are heading, not on organisational history. In 2025-26 alone, we supported 221 families, delivering 314 interventions across one-to-one and group services.

3,500

+

FAMILIES SUPPORTED SINCE 1996



OUTCOMES IN 2025-26

At Lotus we track the impact of our programmes for the participants and their families. In 2025-26, our clients reported:

98%

reduced risk of harm

98%

improved mental health

89%

positive for children

94%

improved relationships

91%

stronger social support

94%

overall positive

A message from Kate Lawrence



I have been part of Lotus Families since 2008, and the reason I came to this work is the same reason I have stayed. As a single parent, I understood what it felt like to hold everything together while everything felt uncertain. What drew me to this charity was the chance to support other women navigating those challenges, and to build services that felt accessible, honest and grounded in real life.

Supporting women means supporting whole families. When a mother feels safer, more capable and more connected, the impact ripples outward: to her children, her relationships, her sense of the future. That ripple effect has always been at the heart of what we do.

The context we work in has changed considerably over thirty years. Coercive control is now recognised in law, the impact of abuse on children is better understood, and more survivors are coming forward. But the need for what comes after crisis has not kept pace. Recovery support remains underfunded and too often treated as optional. It is not optional. It is what makes safety sustainable.

This year our team received the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership's Safeguarding & Child Protection Award. I am immensely proud of that recognition, which reflects years of careful, thoughtful work by Clare Rowland and the whole team.

"Supporting women means supporting whole families."

Kate Lawrence

Chief Executive

FROM OUR CHAIR

A message from Jayne Rice-Oxley



Thirty years is a remarkable milestone for any organisation. For a small specialist charity working in one of the most demanding and emotionally complex areas of social need, it is a testament to the resilience, skill and dedication of every person who has been part of Lotus Families.

I have seen at close hand the difference this organisation makes: families who arrive feeling isolated, ashamed and overwhelmed, and leave with greater safety, restored confidence, and a renewed sense of what their lives can look like. That transformation does not happen by accident. It happens because of an exceptional team and thirty years of learning about what actually works.

The past year has not been without pressure. Demand has continued to grow faster than the available funding, and the team has navigated that with skill and integrity, never compromising on quality, always keeping families at the centre.

As trustees, our role is to hold the organisation to the highest standards of governance, safeguarding and impact. We do so with deep confidence in the leadership of Kate Lawrence and the team she has built.

“Demand has grown faster than the available funding. The team has navigated that with skill and integrity.”

Jayne Rice-Oxley

Chair of Trustees

THIRTY YEARS

Our journey

1996

Founded as Home-Start South Downs, supporting families across Lewes District.

2008

Expanded into Wealden District.

2012

Expanded into Eastbourne Borough.

2014

Expanded into Hastings Borough, Rother District and Brighton and Hove. Became Home-Start East Sussex to reflect our county-wide coverage.

2016

Staff trained to deliver the Freedom domestic abuse recovery programme before going on to complete further specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) training.

2020

Developed the evidence-based Lotus Recovery Programme, combining group and IDVA support. Achieved SafeLives Leading Lights accreditation and secured funding to train for and develop a specialist CAPVA programme.

2024

Became Lotus Families, reflecting our transition into a specialist domestic abuse recovery charity.

2025–26

Introduced one-to-one IDVA support from the point of referral, helping to reduce risk while clients waited for the next stage of support. Received the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) Safeguarding & Child Protection Award.



THEN AND NOW

How understanding has changed



THEN • 1996

- Focus largely on physical violence; coercive control rarely named
- Children rarely part of the response
- Abuse largely hidden; significant stigma
- Safety seen as the end goal

VS



NOW • 2026

- Broad understanding of coercive control, emotional abuse and trauma
- Children central to safeguarding and recovery planning
- More survivors coming forward: crisis responses stronger
- Recovery recognised, but still underfunded

WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED

Survivors still carry shame and isolation. Families still struggle to access long-term help. Recovery support remains the critical gap.

“Safety is only the beginning of rebuilding a life after abuse.”



WHERE WE FIT

The space between crisis and recovery



Lotus Families sits in the space between crisis intervention and long-term recovery. It is the most under-resourced part of the domestic abuse pathway, and the part families need most. Most families reach us once immediate safety has been addressed, but while the emotional, relational and practical impact of abuse is still very present.

WE WORK ALONGSIDE

- Advance
- Women's Aid
- Family First teams
- Schools & social care
- Sussex Police
- Safeguarding partnerships

WE SERVE

- Women affected by abuse
- Trans, non-binary & intersex survivors
- Parents experiencing child-to-parent violence and abuse (CAPVA)
- Children affected by family abuse



OUR SERVICES

Domestic Abuse Recovery Programme

Every referral to our Recovery Programme begins with support from an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA). This includes a risk assessment and Whole Family Safety and Support Plan, enabling us to understand each survivor's circumstances and identify the most appropriate recovery support. Women who are ready to join our six-week Recovery Group move from individual IDVA support into structured group-based support.

Trans, non-binary and intersex (TNBI) survivors can access individual IDVA recovery support tailored to their needs. Where appropriate, we can also arrange a warm referral to specialist group support through our referral pathway to Switchboard.

Delivered in line with SafeLives Leading Lights quality standards, our Recovery Group helps women understand what happened to them, rebuild their confidence and develop tools to keep themselves and their children safer. Two trained facilitators lead every session, creating a safe and supportive space in which women can process their experiences alongside others who understand. Since its launch in 2020, the group has supported more than 500 women.

100%

more confident recognising
abuse

98%

feel less isolated

98%

more likely to have a future
free from abuse

***"I carry much less shame and a lot more hope
for the future now."***

Recovery Programme participant



A RECOVERY STORY

S's Story



Nine years after leaving an abusive 16-year relationship, S was referred to Lotus Families by her GP. Although she was no longer living with the perpetrator, the impact of the abuse continued to affect every aspect of her life. She experienced persistent anxiety, nightmares, low self-esteem and struggled to trust her own judgement. The trauma had also affected her relationship with her daughter, who had grown up witnessing domestic abuse.



S joined the Domestic Abuse Recovery Programme, where she was able to learn about the dynamics of abuse alongside other women with similar experiences. Through the programme, she began to understand how coercive control and emotional abuse had shaped her beliefs about herself and her relationships.



After completing the programme, S chose to continue her journey through Lotus Blossom, our peer support programme that brings survivors together. Facilitated by trained mentors who are themselves graduates of Lotus Families programmes, it offers a lasting continuation of support from women who truly understand the journey. The ongoing support helped S build confidence, reduce isolation and develop meaningful connections with other women in recovery.



Over time, S reported significant improvements in her mental wellbeing. She felt better able to manage anxiety, challenge negative thought patterns and recognise the strengths she had developed through surviving abuse. Importantly, she also noticed positive changes in her relationship with her daughter, who commented that her mother seemed happier and more confident.



S's experience demonstrates that recovery from domestic abuse does not end when the relationship ends. With the right support, survivors can rebuild confidence, strengthen family relationships and move from surviving to thriving.

"I like myself again."

S, Recovery Programme participant

OUR SERVICES

Child-to-Parent Violence (CAPVA)

Every referral to our CAPVA Programme begins with individual support from a Whole Family Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA). This enables us to understand what is happening within the family, assess risk to the parent, siblings and others in the household, and develop a Whole Family Safety and Support Plan. We then decide with the parent or carer whether our eight-week CAPVA Group is the appropriate next step. When they join a group, their individual IDVA support ends and they move into structured group-based support.

Our programme supports parents and carers experiencing violent or abusive behaviour from their child or teenager and is one of a small number of specialist CAPVA services in the country delivered to Safelives Leading Lights standards. CAPVA is a hidden and highly stigmatised form of family abuse, and parents often carry enormous guilt and shame. The programme gives them somewhere to turn, helping families break cycles of guilt, rebuild relationships and establish safer, healthier boundaries.

100%

more confident in their role as a parent

100%

improved relationships with their child

96%

feel less isolated

"Being held once a week to reflect, alongside others' lived experience, was validating."

CAPVA Programme participant



A CAPVA STORY

R's Story



R was referred to Lotus Families by Children's Services after experiencing ongoing abuse from her teenage daughter. Following a period of relative calm, the situation escalated again when her daughter physically assaulted her, leaving R feeling frightened, overwhelmed and unsure where to turn for support.

Like many parents experiencing child-to-parent abuse, R felt isolated and struggled with the emotional impact. Her daughter had been diagnosed with autism and displayed Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) traits, adding further complexity to family life and leaving R caught between meeting her daughter's needs and keeping herself safe.

Following referral, R received immediate support through our Welcome and Review process, including a risk assessment and an individual Safety and Support Plan. She was also signposted to specialist resources relating to neurodivergence and parenting.

R then joined our CAPVA programme, where she met other parents facing similar experiences and could share openly in a safe, non-judgemental environment. The programme helped her understand the dynamics of abuse, explore practical strategies, and feel less alone in what had often felt like an invisible issue. One session included a local police officer, giving parents a chance to ask questions and reduce fears about reporting incidents when safety was at risk.

Although the situation at home remained challenging, R reported feeling better equipped to manage it, able to look more objectively at the situation with the skills to handle it better. Her experience highlights the importance of specialist support for parents experiencing child-to-parent abuse.

"A great benefit to join this group of lovely women, all on one journey."

R, CAPVA Programme participant

OUR SERVICES

Lotus Blossom Peer Support

Lotus Blossom is our peer-led support programme for women who have completed the Recovery programme. Online peer support groups, facilitated by trained survivor mentors, provide a space to maintain connection, continue healing and support others on the same journey.

What makes Lotus Blossom distinctive is its pathway. Women move from client, to group member, to trained peer mentor, and for some, into paid roles within the organisation. Our first Trainee IDVA post was filled by a former client and peer mentor. Survivors are not just supported here; they become leaders.

100%

felt inspired to keep moving
forward

100%

felt empowered supporting other
women

**“You don’t realise how much strength you need to get through it
until you see other people go through it and talk about it.”**

Lotus Blossom participant



A LOTUS BLOSSOM STORY

From participant to mentor: C and E



Lotus Blossom was created to ensure that recovery does not end when a programme finishes. For many women, it becomes a space where they can continue to build confidence, connection and purpose. For some, it is also where they discover they have the skills to support others.

C first came to Lotus Families through our Domestic Abuse Recovery Programme after experiencing 22 years of abuse. She completed the programme twice as she rebuilt her life and confidence. When she later joined a Lotus Blossom peer support group, she quickly became a steady and encouraging presence for other women.

Recognising her strengths, C went on to train as a Peer Support Mentor and is now facilitating groups. She supports women to share their experiences safely, helps build connections within the group, and encourages members to learn from one another.

E's journey followed a similar path. After engaging with Lotus Blossom, she completed our Peer Support Mentor training and later co-facilitated part of the training programme itself, sharing her lived experience and helping prepare future mentors for their role. As a mentor, E brings warmth, structure and insight.

Together, C and E demonstrate what long-term recovery can look like. Their journeys show that, with the right support, survivors can move beyond crisis and isolation to become leaders within their communities, helping create safety, connection and hope for others.

“Survivors can move beyond crisis to become leaders in their communities.”

RECOGNISED FOR EXCELLENCE

The ESSCP Safeguarding & Child Protection Award



During 2025-26, the Lotus Families team received the Safeguarding & Child Protection Award from the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP). ESSCP brings together East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police, NHS Sussex and partner organisations to keep children safe, and its awards recognise outstanding safeguarding practice across the county.

The award recognises our transition over the past 18 months to a front-end, early-intervention service. Every new referral since April now receives immediate triage, risk assessment and support planning, so risks facing victim-survivors are understood and addressed while they wait for group support.

The Lotus Families team, led by Services Manager Clare Rowland, demonstrates best practice through a proactive, whole-family approach to domestic abuse and child-to-parent violence. They assess risk and provide support from the point of referral, ensuring children are safer sooner. Through Clare's leadership, the team has embraced reflective practice, strengthened analysis, and consistently prioritised children's safety, creating a trauma-informed model that sets a benchmark in safeguarding.

— ESSCP Awards Panel

RECOGNISED FOR EXCELLENCE • CONTINUED



Kate Lawrence and Clare Rowland
receiving the ESSCP award

WHY THIS AWARD MATTERS

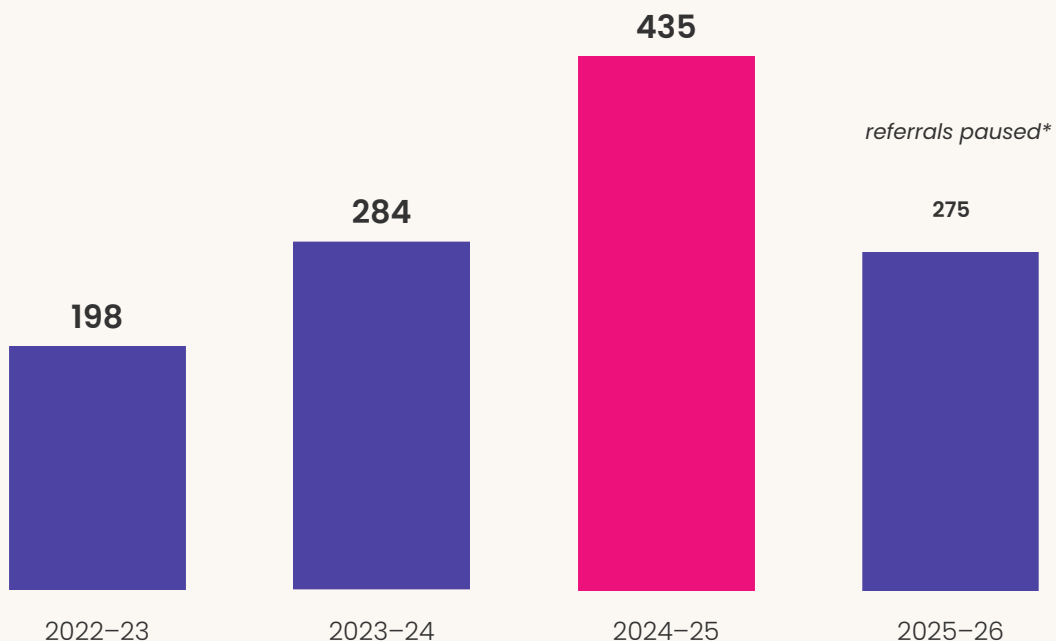
- It recognises Lotus Families as delivering exemplary safeguarding practice across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.
- Being recognised for reflective practice, a core expectation in this work, strengthens our credibility with partners and funders.
- It validates the team's work to embed trauma-informed approaches and improve risk assessment.
- ESSCP awards are peer-reviewed by safeguarding leads from statutory agencies, showing strong professional confidence in our model.

DEMAND & RESPONSE

Growing need, a considered response

Demand for referrals nearly doubled in 2024 and by 2025 outstripped our ability to meet this need. This growth reflects the scale of unmet need, not a failure of capacity. Without additional investment, families will continue to wait.

REFERRALS RECEIVED



* 2025-26 referrals paused for 5 months to protect quality of service

No one waits without support

Every new referral now receives immediate contact, a full risk assessment, and a Whole Family Safety and Support Plan from the point of referral. This approach was recognised by the ESSCP as a model of best practice.

INFLUENCE & PARTNERSHIPS

Shaping the wider response

Alongside direct support, Lotus Families contributes to the wider response to domestic abuse across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove. We sit on local and strategic safeguarding forums, share learning with commissioners and partners, and ensure the voices of the families we support are heard in the systems designed to protect them. In times of challenging budgets, it is only by collaborating with partner agencies and local authority organisations that we are able to maximise resources and provide the highest possible level of care to vulnerable communities.

We are proud to be a full member of Women's Aid, the national federation of domestic abuse services that has shaped the response to violence against women and girls for fifty years. Membership affirms our commitment to safe, survivor-led, gender-responsive practice, holds us to national quality standards, and connects us to a national network of expertise, campaigning and shared learning that directly strengthens our local services.

We also hold SafeLives Leading Lights accreditation, the gold standard for domestic abuse services, and contribute to national thinking through our CEO Kate Lawrence's co-authorship of peer-reviewed research on training informal supporters to respond to disclosures. We work alongside statutory and voluntary partners to ensure families receive joined-up support throughout their journey.



LOOKING AHEAD

2027 and beyond

Thirty years on, the need for specialist domestic abuse recovery support has not reduced. The 30th anniversary is both a moment of celebration and a call to action. With the right investment, Lotus Families can reach more families, reduce waiting times, and ensure recovery is recognised as essential, not an optional extra.

OUR PRIORITIES

- Sustain and grow our Recovery and CAPVA programmes
- Secure continuation funding for Lotus Blossom peer support
- Strengthen early intervention so every family is supported from day one
- Embed survivor voice at the heart of service development
- Build a more diversified and sustainable funding base

“Women, children and families should not only be able to escape abuse. They should be able to recover, rebuild and move forward.”

— Kate Lawrence, CEO, Lotus Families

THANK YOU

With gratitude

None of this work is possible without the people who make it so. Our staff and peer mentors bring extraordinary dedication to work that is demanding and often unseen, and this report is a tribute to them as much as a record of what we have achieved together. To our trustees, our referral partners, our funders, and above all the families who have trusted us: thank you. We hope this report inspires the colleagues who will carry the work forward over the next thirty years.

OUR FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS



GLOSSARY

A few terms explained

CAPVA

Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse: violent or abusive behaviour directed at a parent or carer by their child.

Coercive control

A pattern of behaviour used to harm, punish or frighten a partner or family member; a criminal offence since 2015.

IDVA

Independent Domestic Violence Adviser: a specialist who assesses risk and provides safety planning and support.

MARAC

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference: where agencies share information on high-risk cases to keep victims safer.

OSPCC

Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, which commissions and funds specialist services across Sussex.

SafeLives Leading Lights

The gold standard accreditation for domestic abuse services in the UK. Held by Lotus Families since 2020.

Trauma-informed practice

An approach that recognises the impact of trauma and prioritises safety, trust, choice and empowerment.



Lotus

Safer and stronger families

Charity number 1108855 · www.lotus-families.org.uk