

## Oral History Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Lynne Frances Keys

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Interviewer: Yvonne McFadden

Time period: 1980s

Groups: Strathkelvin Women's Aid, Glasgow Women's Aid

Roles: unpaid worker Strathkelvin, refuge worker Glasgow, survivor (lived in refuge in England)

*This is Yvonne McFadden interviewing Lynne Keys on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2016 at the Glasgow Women's Library. So, the first question is can you describe what your connection to Women's Aid was and why did you get involved?*

I joined Women's Aid in Strathkelvin, in Kirkintilloch, Strathkelvin's Women's Aid. I wasn't sure if you wanted the name of the, of...

*No it's fine, we can take that out if you want.*

In Kirkintilloch. And that would be 1982 or 3, no it was 1983. I'd just finished a Social Science degree and I didn't have an immediate job and I was interested in doing something with my time while I looked for paid work. During my degree, I'd look at the media representation of women and things that had happened to them and how a lot of stuff, I felt, was kind of glorified when women are either raped or beaten up. I'd done a sort of write up of how the media presents things like that. So, I was that way inclined I suppose. And there was an advert for volunteers for Women's Aid locally and I went along and we were, we were a voluntary group only. We'd no premises. We used the local community centre office in there and we started, we set up a phone line, we offered twenty-four hour phone assistance, phone support, but we all did it voluntarily and took turn on the rota, so we'd set up the rota. They had started the organisation before I joined but I was there from '83 until 1986. So I was there as I volunteer until '86 and in time from starting at that very small base we got funding and we got our first refuge, which was a building that was going to be destroyed of course, or demolished. And, it was, well, where it was now it is completely demolished and new buildings have been built. But it was an old tenement building, at the very centre of the town and there was a

pub across the road. And people in the pub got to know that, that was a refuge and some of the women, some of the workers went in there and some of the women from the refuge went in there. So, in some ways it wasn't very secret. It was just directly across the road from the pub. But as I say, we had two flats within the tenement building and that was just great getting that from the council. It was short lived of course but, you know, that was part of it all. It was all very much setting up and stumbling along as we discovered things and got more help.

**4:15** *And so, after you worked for Kirkintilloch, was that until '86. Did you work in another Women's Aid after that?*

Yes, I, my marriage ended and I decided to move to London, where I already had a sister and some friends. And Kirkintilloch's a very small place, I didn't want to stay in a small place. And, I moved to London and subsequently, despite what I'd learned working for Women's Aid and liaising with social work departments, police and hearing tales from women about abuse that they'd suffered, some for years; women from all areas of society. Many who'd suffered mental abuse for years and not been able to do anything about it, or even talk about it to their close family. Despite all that, I then, I suppose, walked into a relationship that was to become abusive. [Bin Lorry in background] And I've always through it very ironic because a lot of women then become involved in the Women's Aid movement, but I sort of did it the other way round. You know, I worked for the organisation and my eyes were open and yet it happened to me as it's happened to many, many, many women all round the world. And, I'm trying to remember, at one point when I left, and I left two or three times, I went to the police, locally where I was living in London, and I knew that there had to be refuge somewhere, by this time we'd even got, in Scotland, we'd got money, proper money and been able to get a purpose-built refuge –that was how much things had changed. So, I knew there had to be a refuge. I went into the police station to ask for help to get away from my partner, who had followed me but they closed the doors and one of the police went out to talk to him, and it was even then, it was like I had to tell the police, they were kind of... I said, 'There must be a refuge somewhere near' and they were all flapping about and phoning places and eventually, I think it was the inspector who ran me to the refuge, once they'd got rid of my partner. And erm, he ran me, he was going off duty and he ran me to the refuge. And I stayed there, I think for three days, and I fully remember the day I decided to go back to the relationship, you know, looking at the couple of women I got to know in that short time. You know, I could see them looking and going, 'Don't do this', you know, but I chose to do that and I did go back. Another time that I left, I went to, there was a taxi office round the

corner, and I ran round there and got a taxi to a friend in Ealing. But then, as I found out later, my partner then went into the taxi firm – I thought this was just absolutely shocking – and asked, and they told him where they'd taken me to. And I think, yes it must have been the same driver, he then brought my partner over. By this time, I was in my friend's flat and her boyfriend had, you know, left us to it sort of thing, and my partner had turned up and rang the buzzer and she spoke to him and said to you know, go away and that I was ok. But I never forgot that, that that taxi, and I never, why I don't know, but I never ever thought even that I should have went round and put in a complaint to the... because I just thought that was diabolical. The driver knew I wasn't just getting in and going off to a dance of something. He knew the state I was in when he took me the first time and yet they'd brought my partner. Awful, awful, awful. And when that, I'm trying to remember now if they, oh yes, of course the time I'd left and went to the refuge, I'd found out that there was Women's Aid in Harrow and when the relationship finally did end, of course as it did, I went and approached Women's Aid because they'd helped me by giving me refuge when I so desperately needed it. I went and worked for them as a volunteer. And, again, when you look back on things, how they were so different. If we had a car that was good and well and you could pick women up and take them to the refuge but I don't think things like that happened anymore. But we didn't think about it and we didn't think about insurance. And I worked for them for a couple of years until (pause) I changed jobs, so I didn't have the car. The car went with the job. So I didn't have the car anymore, so I had to give up being on the roster, although I still worked, I helped out at the refuge. And I then moved to New Zealand and did more volunteer work with Refuge they're called in New Zealand. I did that again when I moved to New Zealand.

**10:30** *So, if we go back then and talk about the Scottish group in Kirkintilloch. What was a kind of, what would you say, was a kind of average day in your Women's Aid group, if there was such a thing?*

Eh, there was two women who, one was the co-ordinator and I think the rest, I don't think she was paid even at that point. She was there on a day-to-day basis. The rest of us came in different times in the afternoon. It was mostly women coming into the office. We had an advert in the local paper and it was women coming in, and or telephoning, for advice and for support before we were able to offer that, initially it was – we had the refuge but not straight off – it was just a phone line and we could refer women on to Glasgow Women's Aid if they needed refuge at that point. There was a social worker, a community worker who was very great for us. She was very supportive and helped us set up things and introduced us to other organisations that we had to meet. She was the local

community worker and she gave us a lot of support. I'm trying to think. We did liaise with Social Work because we had a few, I remember we had a family where the father had been, well it came out that the father had been abusing one of the young daughters. And that came out and we had to get social workers involved and erm, that was all quite, you know, shocking. And it came out with the children playing. The little girl did something to one of the boys and we all just knew straightaway that, 'Oh my god'. And that was an eye opener for us that led into all the other stuff that it does. Now you hear about that [being] commonplace but in 1980, early 1980s it, you know it wasn't, it wasn't. Yet, and as I say, we had our eyes opened. We worked with the police. The police, the police were good but yet they were also not good. It was better later on when we got a proper refuge and office base. The relationship with organisations were better, even with council. Trying to get women rehoused, initially, it was, you know the: 'But you've got a house'. 'Yes, I've left it because I can't live there'. But that wasn't, you know, that wasn't a consideration at that time. Whereas now you have... It was the thing about 'Well, you've intentionally made yourself homeless'. And that was until the law got changed, that was what we had to put up with, unless people, women had a relative to go to.

*So you were talking about links to social work and police, did you have a lot of contact with Scottish Women's Aid when you worked in that group?*

Yes, yes, we did. We went to the Scottish Women's Aid meetings; I can't even remember how often they were. But there was periodically, obviously it was every three months, it wasn't every month – I can't remember how frequent they were. But those that could go went, or if you couldn't go you didn't go. But they were good because you met organisations from all round Scotland and you made a report from your group. And they were in, you know, Edinburgh or Perth, or wherever they were, Glasgow obviously. But they were good to meet other organisations. To hear what other Women's Aids Groups were doing. And occasionally you heard about English Women's Aid, what they were doing. 'Cause they were, from what I recall, they were quite separate: WAFE – Women's Aid Federation England. Where did that come from. I've just remembered W.A.F.E., WAFE. For some reason, although they were all in the same field, that there was a different set up from Scottish Women's Aid and I can't remember what the actual organisation of things were but I do remember WAFE.

**14:54** And at that time Erin Pizzey, have you heard of her? She was one of the first women in England to first set up refuges before they did in Scotland. And she was a name that became famous

because she literally opened her own home to begin with and took women in. Over the years, she, she kind of moved onto, to writing books and there was a lot of stuff about that some women are pre-set, programmed to go into relationship like this. So, there was a diversion in the English set up into people that thought that way and WAFE I think split away from her - I think that's where the split was. But Scottish Women's Aid was, that was the contact that I remember, was predominantly at other meetings. And in the summer, we often organised children's, group things for children and we'd go to other Women's Aid groups that were at the seaside, say, and we could all go there and do stuff with the kids. Activities in the summer, holidays, we did that as well.

*So just when you're mentioning children, do you think you could talk a bit about your views on Women's Aid's work with children?*

Initially, we didn't have a children's worker. When that incident happened, we didn't have a children's worker and we did it all in the beginning, muddled through on our own. But in time, you know, we thought very clearly that we needed someone to work just with the children. The children's experiences were, even just that one, there was often out of the mouths of babes and suckling as they say. And no truer expression. Because children would just, quite unconsciously, come out with shocking things because of what they experience and they didn't think of them as being... As adult, as women adults, we were the ones that were shocked to hear it. So, as I say, a lot of children needed a lot, a lot of help and we started to do that. And also worked with social workers, you know, in that specifically, when things like that turned up. Yeah, that was something we identified quite early on that we needed a children's worker.

**19:15** *You were talking about the difference of ideology in the English Women's Aid, so I mean, can you think of any different ideas connected to Women's Aid that were important to you at the time. Maybe from books or film or friends, if you can think?*

I suppose at that time, it was the 'battered women syndrome', you know, was how it was referred to. My father still to this day, he's still alive, he's 87, and for years my father always, this was his quote, he would always say, 'You and Your Women's Lib'. Always, always. And in the last twenty years, I've had to say to him, 'Dad, it's not Women's Lib anymore, it's Feminism'. You know, but he'll still say, 'You and Your Women's Lib'. And he would know that it was, that anything that would come up on the television or the newspapers to do with women moving into a position of power... He had six children my dad, I'm the eldest of six, one boy and five girls. And I've always said to him, to be the father of five daughters, some of the things he comes away with still to this day are just amazing

because it's totally shocking. He'll say, 'Oh for goodness sake!'. You know just a woman, policewoman on giving her quote or if she's been involved in an incident and it will come up Detective Sergeant and he would say, 'Detective Sergeant and she's a woman!'. Honestly, I've had that all my life and I cannot believe that knowing how I feel and having five daughters that he still, he still... He's the original misogynist, well maybe he's not a misogynist but very, very, very sexist and a woman's place in the home, very much and he's never budged from that.

My mum never worked outside the house and my dad, over the years, be it 'Keep them barefoot and pregnant', that's another one. He would say it in a flippant way but I always knew, 'Yeah, right. That's what you believed'. So, as I say, when I was growing, when I was... I stayed at home until I was twenty, anything that came up in the media or on the TV, my dad would always say, 'Oh, Lynne will know about this. Lynne and her Women's Lib'. And of course then when I went on to work for Women's Aid and I moved overseas and worked for Refuge and Rape Crisis. It was 'Oh yes, yes. I always knew you'd end up doing stuff like that'. Yeah, that's been my way of looking at society and my attraction I suppose to areas that I'm interested in and want to work in and have managed to do. I'm quite proud that I've managed to do, as I said, I've worked for Refuge in Auckland and the time my paid job was a Social Worker in Crisis Mental Health team. And I distinctly remember that was my job and someone on the Crisis Mental Health team said, 'You work for the CAT team and you also do voluntary work for Women's Refuge', like in astonishment. And conversely, I remember one of the women at Refuge saying, 'You work here and you also work for the CAT team'. It was like both of them, neither of them could comprehend that I did both, such, such jobs if you like that I did and often there was connections. A lot of women move into the mental health field as a result of the abuse that they've suffered and that's not always recognised that that's, that can be the cause of them becoming mentally unwell, even having to go into the mental health unit, that happened also because of their background. So, I think everything I've done, I've always been attuned into that sort of stuff.

*So, I've got a question here about do you remember any media stories that were in the news during your time at Women's Aid, in the 1980s?*

Oof, blimey. Of course there would have been but memory. My memory's not great. Oh gosh, gosh gosh. I can't think, I'm sorry, off the top of my head. Of course there would be but I can't think of any.

*That's okay. So just thinking about your Women's Aid group. Obviously, there were changes while you were there, you got funding and stuff. Can you maybe talk about these kinds of changes a wee bit more and how they were managed by the group?*

**23:40** Yeah, the first that I remember us getting funding and I can't remember timewise how long it was after, well I joined in '83 and the group had maybe been going for a year or two, at least a year, and the woman who is the co-ordinator then is still the co-ordinator because now they're fully established. But initially, the funding we got and had to apply for was, well we got the refuge which was donated by the local council but then we got MS, oh these letters, it was MS something funding and it was funding that was going out at the time for various community projects. I remember that and that gave us money to have the paid co-ordinator part-time and I think, one or two workers. Manpower something, manpower, MS... Anyway, that was the body that gave the money, manpower, funnily enough, but it was a local, eh, funding, you know, community funding but I always remember that was the first money we got. And of course the co-ordinator had to apply for, and applied loads of places to get funding before we got, we finally did get [it]. That was the first one and that was a community [fund], and of course it was limited and I believe it was also connected to European, European Union funding at that time because I think we'd not that long been in the European market at that time. I know we got European money also.

We, after that, I think once we were established and got money from that MS fund, that was, that stood us better to get more proper funding from councils or whatever. And as I say, eventually we were given money to build a refuge, a purpose-built refuge. I'm trying to remember where the office, we still used that community office for a long time because we had our meetings in there. We had quite a range of women that came to the meetings but didn't... that maybe worked full time and that was their input. Our treasurer was a solicitor which was good because she had a lot of in knowledge from representing women. That was helpful having someone like that. And we had a secretary, someone was a secretary and every week someone took a turn to chair the meeting. I can't remember much else about funding. Just that originally we didn't have it, that was the first stuff we got. And that, it went onto, streamline, you know, normal, full-time permanent funding and it was all workers paid. We had at one point, from when I remember, I had gone away by that time but I always came back, and they had one, two, three, they had four workers and the co-ordinator and they were, and I remember the friend I stayed with who was working for Women's Aid, they

were having some trouble at times because they had to have a meeting in her house. So, there was four refuge workers. I think there was also an outreach worker and the co-ordinator and the children's worker. Yeah, an outreach worker because she used to do follow-up with women that had moved on from the refuge. Some did want contact and some didn't want [it]; some just wanted to break the connection but a lot did want to keep support. So she did that, kept in touch with women, women who had moved on. So, in comparison to the initially funding, it definitely got a lot better. And from what I understand, the same group, in later years, also got a purpose-built refuge in Bishopbriggs, close to Kirkintilloch. So that was great as well, that was purpose built with a full-time paid worker. And the roster of course was much better organised, it wasn't organised by volunteers, it was a lot more structured.

*I don't know whether you want to comment on this one. I've got a question about changes in Scottish politics in recent years and do you think that's had impact on the work of Women's Aid and how domestic abuse is talked about? I'm not sure whether you want to comment on that?*

Because I've been away, although I do come back a lot to visit, well my mother died four years ago. So, I lived back here from 2009-2012 and I actually worked for Glasgow Women's Aid. Just kept... It's amazing the things you forget. From 2009 and to 200... I was here for three years and I got paid work, I was working through an agency and worked in the refuge, Glasgow Women's Aid refuge in the West End of Glasgow and it closed down towards the end of my... I think I was there, was I there for six months? I can't actually remember. But towards the end of my time, was obviously not permanent, although it was paid, they were closing that refuge. I remember because that was really dire...erm... for the women who worked there and for, obviously, the women who were in the refuge at that time. And it was an old tenement building so, you know, we had a lot of rooms from the basement right up to the top. And again, you never cease to be amazed, at the time we suspected... One of the women that at the time was living in the refuge was bringing her partner into the refuge when the staff, because the staff went away, the staff didn't stay there. There was a telephone line twenty-four hours but the staff were 9-5. And, but we had CCTV, so sitting watching the videos to see and sure enough we saw him coming into the building. So myself and the refuge worker, I think we'd stayed late in the hope of meeting them coming in and they hadn't. And we were leaving the refuge and walking down the road when she was coming up with him. So, she was asked to leave and such like. Yeah. Amazing all the different things.

But it was to do with funding I think, that they closed and also some of the outlier refuges Glasgow Women's Aid were having to close which was a pity. I've got a feeling there was one in this area that was either opening up at the same time that the West End one was closing. 'Cause I do remember that's the first I knew of anything in the Bridgeton Cross area, Dalmarnock area. There was a refuge and a drop-in centre, kind of joint thing, that seemed to be taking off at the same time our refuge was stopping. So there was funding, you know, funding continued to be a problem in government cuts because Glasgow Women's Aid was, I think, funded by Glasgow Council at that time, at least partly if not more. So, for me that was good to go back to Women's Aid and get a paid job as well. That was my only paid job, I think, ever in Women's Aid. Yeah. And as I say that was further down the track.

Politically with that incident that was just cuts and closures as a result and since then I've been in New Zealand a lot so I'm not greatly in touch with what's been going on for women, what's going on politically for women in Glasgow and Scotland. I've been here now for two years this time. So, yeah, I've caught up with what I consider madness I have to say. The splitting, the possible splitting of Scotland away from the rest of the UK and I've made sure I've got a postal vote because if there is, I voted in the referendum and if there's maybe another one, I've made sure I've got a postal vote because I feel very strongly about, the way I believe about that. So, I want to ensure I've got my vote when it's important.

*So, what do you think the impact of Women's Aid has been both on society and maybe on yourself at a personal level?*

**34:05** On society, I do feel, and as I've said, it's been what, over twenty years? Can't count, oh, thirty years will it be, from '80.

*Forty, no thirty, sorry. Thirty and a bit.*

That's a shock. Because I have to say when I was at the thing before, the forty... When I first saw about the Speaking Out thing and it was forty years, that really gave me a shock I have to say and I thought, 'No way'. And then when I worked out, but eh, same thing that it's thirty years since I started. Definitely, things have changed and things will never be ideal, just being realistic. The attitudes, generally, I think are better, in that more people don't believe that it's a woman's fault, which was the predominant view when I started in Women's Aid. 'She asked for it.' 'It's her own fault' – that kind of stuff. I'm not thinking for a minute that that's not still there somewhere but it's

not outspoken, people don't come out with things like that. Probably, and hopefully, because they know it's not tolerated anymore and it's not. Nobody deserves to have a life like that and they deserve to have alternatives that they can use and be supported in. So, I think, that for me is the biggest change. And certainly for me, if something comes up in, you know, my social life, my personal life, a conversation, I will very much stand up for that point of view that it's not a woman's fault and that people in an abusive relationship need to be helped or offered help and it's their choice whether to take it or not. I know for myself, I remember quoting it to one Women's Aid meeting in London when I was working as a volunteer. And we were talking about, the thing about women going back and I remember saying, 'I think for each woman it's different and most women at some point will realise that they're not putting up with this any longer. And in some women it will come early on and in some it comes after very many years'. But I personally, because that's what happened to me, think that every woman has a point that they suddenly come to it and think, 'Eh, eh, no more', because that's what happened to me. And I just put that out there at a Women's Aid meeting in London, that that's what I believe. And I remember one of the other workers didn't agree with me, but I still, I still think that. It's understandable, it's frustrating if you've worked with women and their children and they go back to the relationship but at the time, as that woman, you want to hang onto the relationship for all sorts of reasons and you want to hope that it will work out this time and so, until suddenly [they] wake up one day and think, 'Eh, eh, this isn't going change'. As I say, there will always be the need for women to have Women's Aid I think. And it's good that we do. But that's something that I strongly believe. And it came of personal experience but built on seeing women leaving relationships, going back because that was a common thing. As I say, I knew by the look on the women's faces in the refuge when I decided to go back. I knew what they were thinking at that point and, I was, 'Oh no. It's going to be alright for me'. (Chuckles) And of course it wasn't. But yeah, that's something that I've never lost and I wouldn't let go.

**39:05** And as I say, I'm very defensive of women's organisations and groups that offer support to women in any fields. I suppose that's still where I come from. I'm stronger though than I was in the 1980s. Then, I wouldn't have had the knowledge or the feeling to speak out in social groups whereas now I wouldn't even think twice about it. So that's a good positive change for me.

*So thinking about that you were saying, you think there will always be a need for Women's Aid. So there's a question here about what do you think the future holds or what would you like to see happen next?*

There is, I mean I'm aware that there's a growing voice for men who are always, can of course be physically, mentally or sexually abused in relationships, either by a male partner or a female partner and even in my time, I think it was a Scottish Women's Aid meeting I went to and someone spoke up from that point of view. And at the time people were like, 'What! Erm, are you having laugh?'. It was true of course, there was say ten million women to two males needing assistance. That was the initial reaction but very much that is the truth. So that is good that had been accepted but it's still predominantly women who are in that vulnerable situation and often because they are the main carers for their children. That will always be there I think, although it's better and different now. I think, yeah, the nature of man, I don't think is going to change in that way. And it's sad and it's awful but it's not just in personal relationships, it's in every element of society around the world. So, in that way, I think there'll always be a need for Women's Aid, unfortunately. But, it's so, so, so good that it's there. It is, it is. I'm afraid I don't know anything, unfortunately, about how Women's Aid are even, in Scotland, how they are doing financially now, no longer. 'Cause I haven't... This time that I've been back I haven't been in touch. I'm living with my dad who's got dementia so I haven't even... That's shocking. I haven't even been out to Kirkintilloch in the two years I've been here, just because my life's been taken up now with something else. And I frequently have thought, 'I must just get on a bus and go out' because I know the office is still there from what I last heard. And the meeting here, the Speaking Out meeting, I met a woman from Airdrie Women's Aid and I've kept in touch with her and she know the women I worked with in Kirkintilloch. So she said, 'Yeah, yeah, they are still there'. And I did, I did send an email to the co-ordinator and it bounced back to me, cause that was my only way. I suppose I could of phoned, if the office, it there is, must be... But I'm not aware of what's going on. I'm sure there's still massive financial problems. So, that doesn't change.

*I think I've went through all my questions. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your time when you worked in Women's Aid in Kirkintilloch.*

I do remember the first woman I helped. Her husband was a policeman. And again, you know it was finding out things like that, you know that it didn't matter what people's jobs were. And she, I even stayed the night because she was our, the first family, her and her two kids moved into our derelict building. She was the first woman to use the refuge and I stayed the night even, because it was the first night, you know, in one of the other rooms because you just did things like that, you know. You didn't think. Well, I still think I would anyway because of the building it was in and she'd just left her

husband of many years. But, eh, we got her rehoused I remember. She did get rehoused by the council. So, that was good but that building was awful. (Laughs) Yeah.

**End interview**