

Oral History Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Yvonne Nawaz

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Interviewer: Sandra Ingram

Time period: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s

Groups: Aberdeen Women's Aid, Grampian Women's Aid

Roles: Domestic abuse survivor, volunteer (Aberdeen WA), director (Aberdeen WA), support worker (Aberdeen WA), support worker (Grampian WA)

Recording 1

I think that's it recording. So, it's Sandra Ingram, 15th September 2016, interviewing Yvonne Nawaz. Okay Yvonne, that's okay and ready to go. How do you want to start off, Yvonne? Do you want to start maybe with what your connection with Woman's Aid was?

Mmhm. Do you want me to kind of tell you the story first of all about my domestic abuse and how I first got to know about it?

Absolutely, if that's a good place to start for you, yeah?

Yeah. Erm, I met my husband at that time in 1977. Erm ... he was older than me by about six years and the first time my parents met him they were not that happy about ... about him. About his ... He did have a criminal record for probably breach of the peace, arguing and fighting in the street and things like that. I continued with the relationship and in the October I found out that I was pregnant to him. The abuse hadn't quite started yet. Erm, I think because I didn't realise how much he was drinking until I was, kind of, going out with him. Erm ... after I stopped, kind of, going out when I knew I was pregnant and I stopped drinking, I started realising how much alcohol he was drinking. Erm ... I left home without telling my mum and dad, about

October time. I had a good job at the time. I was working in a solicitor's office and, erm ... I ended up, you know, leaving the job and left to go to Dunfermline with him, packed my bag and everything from home. Erm, that didn't work out 'cause the first day we got there his brother-in-law, unfortunately, was murdered and we came back up to Elgin. Erm ... so I called my parents and they agreed that I could come home but I still didn't tell them that I was actually pregnant at that time. After a few weeks, erm ... I was looking for somewhere to live knowing that my dad, in particular, would not have been happy about me being pregnant. So we got a caravan in Elgin and I moved in and left a note for them. My mum was very sympathetic in that and when I saw my dad first I said, 'It's okay, we're getting married', as you did in them days.

00:02:52 That would be back in 1977. Moved into the caravan. By this time we got married on December 28th I was actually six months pregnant at the time. My first son Derek was born on the 8th March. But going back to December 31st which was New Year's Eve was the first time my husband assaulted me, which was only three days after we got married. He smashed my head against a jeweler's window in the High Street in Elgin and causing extensive bruising to my arm and I think that I was more upset that I'd gotten a new watch from my mum for my Christmas and he smashed this against the window. I didn't know what to do and I'd never been in that situation before and I just went back to the caravan. This was really, really difficult. My mum and dad invited us the next day to New Year's dinner and when he woke up in the morning, he showered, got dressed and said, 'What are you waiting for?'. I said, 'I'm not going anywhere'. So he forced me that day to go. Covering the ... most of the bruising was on my arms so ... but covering the small bruises that was at the side of my face with makeup I went to my parents. My mum did ask me if I was okay but I said I was tired, you know, not sleeping well due to the pregnancy. And all the time I was hiding. This was the first time of hiding that the abuse had started. It continued on.

My son was born. A few weeks after he was born was another episode of domestic abuse. I took my little boy and I went to my friend's house who advised me, 'Don't ever go back to him'. But again, you go back. I didn't know where else to go and I certainly didn't want to tell my parents.

00:05:06 So this continued for again and again. After a couple of years I was pregnant with our second son. When I was eight months pregnant with my second son – we had gotten a new house by this time, a council house. I was really happy and did it all up and he assaulted me, erm ... when I was eight months pregnant. It was actually just before my 21st Birthday. Erm ... he threw me to the ground. He kicked me in my stomach. I was bruised very badly all over my body and this was probably one of the first times I'd gone to see my GP. Erm, I had him put out the house on my ... just after my 21st Birthday which was two weeks after that, he came to the door with presents and gifts and flowers begging for forgiveness once again and I took him back again which didn't ... the family were not happy about that, erm ... and my dad told me not to come back to their home while I was with him. Our son was born and that kind of bought us back together as a family with my mum and dad and everything. They looked after their ... who was ... my eldest son who was their first grandson who loved them so much [said with emotion].

Again it continued after he was born and continued on for a long time. In my mind I had made a plan that I was going to leave and I was trying to save some money. But every time I saved a little bit he took it from me for alcohol. I started hiding money in funny places like inside the stair carpet, erm ... but it was never a lot 'cause it was maybe something like £1. But in them days it was a lot of money, erm ... trying to hide money to try and make a proper move. In between that I had gone and stayed with ... Even his own sister I went to stay with for a short period of time and came back, left again. Every time there was another time. There was an incident which didn't give me a great thingmy [idea] of how the police reacted in them days. I told him one night I was leaving. I couldn't take it anymore and started putting things of the boys into a case. I told him that the things that were in the house belonged to me and it shouldn't be me that should be leaving the house, it should be him. So he started throwing a lot of the living room furniture out into the front garden. When the police came they made a really sarcastic remark by saying, 'Billy, I didn't know you were in the removal business now'. I felt really, really hurt by this and they told me just to go to my mum and dad's until he'd sobered up. Again, [said with a sigh] I was back in the family home again, didn't know where to go, never heard of Women's Aid ... in them days.

00:08:47 During the next incident he actually broke my nose and damaged my cheekbone. I went to ... I had to go to the hospital and my own GP, who's a Dr Scott at that time, gave me this slip of paper. It said, Woman's Aid. It was an organisation called Aberdeen Women's Aid as there was nothing in the area that we lived in at that time. And I put it in the back of my purse always thinking, one day, one day when I have the strength I might go. Again, I ended up being pregnant again and this was our little girl who was born in the March. He picked me up from the hospital and I could tell he was already under the influence of alcohol. Got a taxi back to my home and when I got into the house there was nothing that I'd asked him to buy. He hadn't bought the milk or anything. Hadn't taken the carry ... the carrycot downstairs and I had to do all this. I walked in the same day, down the High Street in the village we lived in which was Fochabers at the time and to my mum's absolute horror she saw me pass the window, erm... to go to the chemist for baby milk. I went in and I said to her, 'You know, he's already left. He's gone out wetting the baby's head', as they called it, erm ... and I had to come down for milk, baby milk. Erm, she was only three days old at that time, erm, and it was March. So it was really quite cold. So we went down for the baby milk [said with emotion]. So this day was the day that I decided that I was definitely going to leave this man, when and how I still didn't have an answer.

When Kim was four and was getting excited about her starting her first school and the nice little village school in Fochabers. In August, the 4th, a few days after we had, actually, been in a caravan holiday to the Nairn, we came back to the house and we ... he decided we were going to visit his sister and brother-in-law in Forres. So I packed a small overnight bag and we went there. He demanded all the money that I had in my purse and he went out drinking that day. He came back and demanding more money, which I said I didn't have. And he managed to find £10 in my purse. So after he decided to pin me against the wall before he decided that he was going to take the money and still looking for more. He punched me in the face and spat right across my face- ... eyes. And this time I decided I can't take this anymore. I picked all the children's things up from his sister's and I decided to go and get the bus home. I boarded the bus in Forres ... tears

running down my eyes and I asked the bus driver how much it was? Where could I go for £12 which was in the back of my purse which was supposed to pay my sister's catalogue on the Monday. He told me it would be £10.50 to go to Aberdeen for the three of us. I said fine. And I went on the bus and sat on the bus with the three little children. Don't know where I was going. Didn't know anybody in Aberdeen and arrived at the Aberdeen Bus Station about half seven at night. I looked for a phone box to phone, 'cause there's no mobile phones in them days, and I phoned Aberdeen's Woman's Aid from the number I still had hidden in the back of my purse only to get an answering machine asking me to leave my telephone number and somebody will call me back. But, you know, in 1989 we didn't have mobile phones and I didn't have a phone number so I didn't know what to do.

00:13:45 After sitting in the train station for about an hour, I saw this sign saying that, you know, contact the Samaritans. So I gave them a call and within ten minutes somebody from the Samaritans office in Aberdeen was at the train station in Aberdeen and picked me and the three children up and took us to their office. They left the phone number for the Woman's Aid to contact us and they took me out to this house called Old School House out in Balmedie. I had no idea where we were going and it was so foggy. I thought, 'Oh my god, what's happening? Where am I going now?'. Just like this morning, you couldn't see. But we arrived at this house which wasn't the best of houses. I remember it really well, erm ... and there was some other women there in the house. So anyway, we felt a bit safer now that we had somewhere to go. I didn't sleep all night and got the children settled and in the morning I thought, 'What the heck have I done!'. But was determined that I just couldn't go back. I remember my oldest son crying and crying because he wanted to go home but I just was so determined that I just couldn't this time. I didn't tell anybody where I was and sent my parents a letter to say, 'Don't worry about me, I'll be okay but I can't tell you where I am'. Obviously, the police came looking for me and, obviously, found me where I was but they only went back to tell him that I was safe and the children were safe but I wouldn't be coming home. And that was the first time I had come in contact with Woman's Aid. Can I stop for just a wee while?

We'll stop recording.

[Laughs] I could not look at ya. I started crying ... crying.

That's okay. Well done for that. Well done.

And there's probably a lot lot more.

Absolutely, it's maybe triggered a couple more questions once we start recording...

Yeah.

I'll maybe ask.

Yeah.

Was it hard when you were thinking about it, what you are going to share?

I think it was harder now. When I was sitting writing this last night and the early hours this morning, I was not finding it ... I was finding it okay but I was sort of doing what I normally do but I think telling it probably ... I mean, I've told it to other people but I think you go....

Recording 2

Okay. That's our recording back on. So thank you for sharing that bit about your experience and about what happened to you. There were a couple of things that you said ... and if we're thinking about what was known about Women's Aid and the connections and other people ... You mentioned that you had gone to the GP with your second pregnancy so I just wondered how the doctors would respond at that time? What was that like?

I remember going to the doctors and with my pregnancy with my second son but I was really scared because I knew at this stage it was the GP appointment which was probably only four weeks before he was born. So I knew that he'd be examining your tummy and things like that.

So I did have bruising on there. So when he said to me to come, get up on the couch and he'll just do a quick examination I burst out crying and he was asking what was wrong. So when I was explaining to him what had happened I think he was probably a bit shocked because he'd known us for a long time, me for a long time and I think the whole village had started knowing my husband as being a bit of a drunk anyway and always in the pub. Especially I think it was a man's thing that on a Friday as soon as you finished work you were in the pub and you went home when you were needing fed and then you were there to probably the Sunday and then you'd sober back up for work Monday to Friday. So he did a real examination and spoke to me about how I was feeling about that, but I suppose even at that time there was not really anywhere to go or anything to do.

No, no.

So ... and it was really probably the second time that I had gone with physical signs of domestic violence that he actually had given me that piece of paper, a really important piece of paper for my life, but there really wasn't anywhere -

No.

- especially when you lived in village life. I suppose if you lived in the city you would have known probably a bit about a Woman's Aid organisation but...

So it was like then your...

Not at all.

...[overspeaking] knowledge that there would be anything.

Not in my general kind of knowledge at that point in time at all. Quite isolated from anything like that in the village and even in Elgin where Moray Women's Aid now exist. They didn't exist back in that time.

There wasn't anything there.

No.

No.

No.

Okay. So it was another visit to the doctor when you got the slip of paper.

The slip of paper.

00:03:28 *So what do you think was different about that time when you got the slip of paper?*

I think it was probably a bit like a ... I don't know. It gave me this kind of lifeline I suppose. I didn't know when I would use it but I probably hoped that I maybe [would] never have to use it, because again you listen to the promises and they ask for forgiveness and never do it again kind of thing, but I suppose in the back of my head I probably ... that's why I kept it because I probably thought, 'Hmm, I probably will need this one day to protect me and the children'. Social work were never involved like they are nowadays so you didn't really get help from anybody. Even health visitors didn't have the same impact as they do now which is a good thing, and I suppose I never even ever spoke to my health visitor about...

About events going on.

No. So the lifelines that you did have then were really, really...

So, I suppose that made that piece of paper quite powerful for you -

Yes.

- the fact that you put it in your purse.

Yes.

The other thing that you mentioned was with the police, that you had one time where the police came and their response.

Their response. I mean that was just one of the times. I suppose neighbours had called the police a couple of times but it was always just, 'Okay, you just go to your mum's when he's sober ... he'll be fine in the morning when he's sobered up'. That occasion when he was throwing all the furniture out into the front garden it was like a joke about, 'Oh, Billy I didn't realise you'd been in ... you started a removal business'.

So they didn't really see what was going on, they just saw it in the terms of your husband and what he was doing -

Yes.

- and made that into, like, a -

Yes.

- joke.

Joke. He was drunk again and he was throwing the furniture that I was ... I didn't ... I mean, it wasn't even anything I was wanting to take but ... And one of the things I always remember was the clock, the white marble clock that my sister gave us as a wedding present, because she was bridesmaid and she gave us this beautiful white marble mantel clock, and I think I was more devastated about that than anything else that he was throwing out. But there are so many incidents that it would take about...

So at that time, with the police you didn't feel like they were -

No.

- seeing it as how it was or could be a way that you could get help.

And they never ever gave me advice about what to do or where to go. It was always just, 'It's just a domestic, just go to your mum's for the night. He'll be fine in the morning', but it's how many times you could do that and most of the time I would never have went to my mum's anyway.

No.

So I ended up just staying in the house waiting for [overspeaking].

00:06:57 *You mentioned at one point your parents didn't want you to go to their house while you were with him. Do you want to say a bit more about that?*

Yes, when ... they were never happy that I'd married him. He was ... they were ... his family were so ... not that my mum and dad were snobs or anything but his father was an alcoholic and his mum had gone through very similar but stayed with him right through, never ever made any effort to leave, but my mum and dad have always been a good mum and dad. There were six of us, and they were quite a respected business ownership. They had a shop in the village of Fochabers. So I always remember when I told my dad that I was ... when I did pick up the courage to tell them, the first thing he said was, 'Oh my god, what are my customers going to say?' and I thought, 'Customers, I don't really care', but it was very old school that you made your bed, you lie in it. It didn't matter what was going on either in them days, but -

Do you think that was...

- they didn't want him there, they didn't like him being there. They tolerated him probably but for the sake of us and the children at that time. My other son was the first grandchild and they

did adore him, but no, they just didn't want him really being there and as the years went on our wedding anniversary would have always fallen between Christmas and New Year. The first few years we used to always have it as a family meal, we used to go out because always my other siblings would be home from down south and it was always something in between Christmas and New Year, but as the years went on it started never being an event and you always felt that you weren't invited to things because of him, because he'd always get drunk and fall out. So ... and sociably I never went out at all because he'd embarrass you or start fighting with you.

00:09:46 *Okay. So you kind of got to the point where you'd gone to the Old School House Centre at Balmedie which was a refuge -*

Refuge.

- and that was Aberdeen Women's Aid.

Aberdeen Women's Aid.

So what was that like?

Horrendous [laughs]. Yes, I mean it was a godsend I had a roof over my head, I had somewhere to go. It wasn't very well looked after and I think in them days the woman who was running it, in my opinion, was only there to get the money. There was no support. You didn't have the support like I know we try to provide for the women now. You were basically left there. You saw somebody maybe once a week and they were out to collect the money for your electricity, never really ... you maybe saw ... There was one woman who was what they called in them days a homemaker and she came out and just had a wee news with you and she'd come out and maybe changeover the bedrooms when maybe somebody new [was] coming. But people would turn up to the refuge that you hadn't met before, they came without a worker, they were just told where to go and they turned up. I used to...

Wanting to move in?

Wanting to move in -

They were moving in.

- in them days. When I was there I opened a door on many occasions to a woman who had just been sent to the refuge in them days and they thought I must have been the worker. So you had a lot of, I think, supporting each other more so in them days.

Because there wasn't ... the staff weren't in.

You had no support plans that we have now, we had no risk assessments, there was nothing like that.

So you said the refuge wasn't looked after. Do you mean physically, the actual fabric of the building?

Yes.

Yes.

00:11:59 I don't know if you'd know where the Old School House in Balmedie is, but even coming in there was ... into it on ... which would have probably been ... you had to come in through what would have been the playground of the old school. It was full of rubble, broken glass and you've got children playing there. It wasn't well looked after and it was really old inside and the furniture was awful. There was no central heating. There was one occasion where it was running up to Christmas time, well it was December, it was very cold and I was the only person living in the house at that point and it was so cold and the children went to Balmedie Primary at that time and I left the radiators on, which were a bit like that oil filled radiator things, quite old fashioned, but I left them on in the house during the day while I went down and if you didn't get the bus first thing in the morning there was no bus service for the

rest of the day so you walked the two miles down to Balmedie to the ... I had a meeting at the school. So ... and I got the school bus back up, but when I came back up the house was locked and the strange thing about the locking of the door as well was the key was left inside a broken bit on the wall, you put the key in there when you left the house in case anybody else came. So the key wasn't there when I got back and I thought, 'Oh!'. So, no phone in them days, 'What do I do?'. There was a little cottage just at the end of the road so I went there and the people there very much welcomed me in and let me use their home phone and I phoned the Women's Aid and they said that they didn't want me to go back into the house until they spoke to me because I'd left the radiators on and they had taken the radiators out of the house. So there was no heating at all left in the house because I'd left the radiator on, which was just horrific. So somebody came back to the house with the key and only gave me one radiator instead of the three or four that were there. So I had to go from bedroom to my living room -

Take the heater with you.

- take the heater with us and this was a massive house.

How many rooms did it have?

It had six bedrooms -

Right.

- a living room, big kitchen, two bathrooms, one downstairs and one upstairs. It did have a pay phone in it but that was it. That was your only source of phone.

00:15:23 *Did you have a room for yourself and the kids?*

I had a room for myself and the kids. It had a double bed and a set of bunk beds in it. We also had other little visitors that used to live with us as well, little ... lots of mice. So ... as well when I

phoned and said the mice had been eating the bread they said, 'Oh well they must be hungry' [laughs], and there was never anything done about it.

No.

You just had to live with it. I suppose out in the countryside as well but it wasn't the best of places.

No.

The curtains were a bit dilapidated and ... but there was never really much support and I suppose they did everything that they could in them days, just glad of that, and...

So it sounds ... I suppose it was about the roof over your head and a place that women could go -

Go.

- but I suppose being supported ... What you're saying is that you were just kind of there -

Yes.

- and you just stay there.

You're just kind of there. You had that...

Yes, you had to then manage everything.

Yes. You had to find out a lot about things yourself. The Job Centre, you'd end up going yourself and it was all like the other women would, basically, tell you things, how to go...

So a woman that maybe had been there for a wee while -

Yes.

- so that's the women were ... had to help each other.

Had to help each other. Definitely had to help each other and you did try very hard to build relationships with the women that were in the house just so you had that support. People came and went. I always remember one woman came through the Women's Aid but then one night just turned up on her own because she knew where to come -

Right.

- and turned up at the door because she'd been maybe a month before that and again you couldn't phone people because there wasn't -

No.

- much communication then either and how to get hold ... So you had to wait to the morning until the office was open to say that lady that was here a month ago or whatever had turned up.

So you had no way of contacting any of the workers -

No.

- outwith when the office would be open.

Outwith ... yes.

So where was the office?

The office was in Aberdeen, in the city. Now the name of the street ... is it Wellington Street? Just sort of ... the street just off of Crown Street. So they had a big office there. So you could go there if you wanted anything and I always remember going there and there was about three or

four workers that worked in the office plus the lady who was running it and there were just rooms and rooms and rooms of donations but [I] was never offered any of it or the house was really ... could be doing with some of it, like curtains and bedding, and I always ... I remember the bedding was like that nylon sheets. I couldn't stand nylon sheets, but I asked a few times could I get more flannelette sheets even in them days and great big hairy blankets but no, no duvets and that then in that house, but no it was never seemed to be handed...

00:19:28 *And at that time were you aware of how Aberdeen Women's Aid ran itself? So you said there was a woman in charge and there were other workers at the office.*

There was a woman in charge, a woman that was running it. Is it okay to say names?

If you want, yes.

The woman in charge, she was a woman called Sandra Eddie and then I think her sister-in-law worked there as well. There was one really nice woman. I think she was probably the most sympathetic out of them all and she was always the one you hoped to get if you were in the city and you went to pay your electric [bill] there because she would sit and have a chat with you and asking how you were doing and all that kind of things. But [I] didn't know anything about it because it wasn't until years later that I realised ... You were never told it was being run ... There were directors and if you had any problems you could go to them, you were never ... had that information.

So you didn't know that.

No, nothing like that. There wasn't the leaflets that you could get now, information. You were basically just a ... Everything was written down on a bit of paper and that was it. All your information was gathered like that.

Okay. So you were at the refuge in Balmedie, so how long did you stay?

We went there ... I went there in August the 5th, always remember that date, and I left a few days before Christmas and I got my first flat in Garthdee and it was a three bedroom flat and I'd never lived in a flat before because village life is more ... it's always houses there's never ... not a lot of flats. So moved into this flat, it was just, like, huge. I just thought, 'Oh my god, look at all the space I've got to myself'.

And that was an exciting time or...

It was an exciting time but it was worrying because I had nothing, no furniture. They did tell me that I could apply for a grant. So you applied for this community care grant so I did get quite a few hundred pounds at that time, which was a lot of money, and that was to ... got some carpets and everything for the flat and then just sourced second hand stuff, second hand beds. So by the time you bought some carpets and some other things and bought some second hand stuff that was the grant finished. I wasn't aware of anywhere else. We've got quite a few organisations now that you can source stuff from. So it was, basically, just looking in the paper at people putting adverts in for things, browsing through some of the second hand places trying to get stuff for the flat.

00:22:52 *Can you just go back maybe? You were saying that Derek was quite upset when he was in the refuge?*

He was...

I was just wondering how it was for the children?

Yes. The children were devastated. They loved their school in Fochabers, really loved it, got on really well in school there. Out of the two of them, the two boys, Derek always came across as a copper and although Colin was the naughty one he was more emotional as well. So to see Derek really emotional one day in the refuge was really heart-breaking and there are times where you just thought, 'Do you know what? Let's just go home'. There were a few times I just thought, 'Let's go home. I can't cope anymore in here'. He was really emotional. Although they really

settled well into Balmedie Primary and I always hoped that, I think, when I was applying for the house I would maybe get a house out there in Balmedie because I didn't want to change their school again, but that didn't happen and we didn't get a house out there. So it meant in the January again, within the space of six months and my youngest daughter had just started school that year in the summertime, so they were having primary one and we had to change schools again.

Would the school have been aware of the Old School House and what that was about?

They were really ... yes, they were aware of ... because ... and you even gave the address as the Old School House when you went to school. It was near the ... and I suppose now, knowing what I know, it was probably really quite shocking, actually, that you were disclosing the address of the refuge.

Do you think ... so the local community roundabout it would have known?

Knew. I remember going in for ... with a couple of mums once at ... I think it was something on at the school so we went to have ... we thought we'd go down and we'll just get a bite of lunch and then we'll go to the thing it was in the afternoon. So I remember the waitress was saying, 'I haven't seen you before, are you living up at the Old School House?'. So you just, kind of, think, 'Oh my god, we must be branded on our foreheads with this stamp' or somebody knew they must be at the Old School House.

00:25:41 *Was that difficult or -*

Difficult. I think -

- how it was?

- it was difficult because you'd hidden the fact that you'd been a victim of domestic abuse and now all of a sudden you were being portrayed as these women that are living in this Old School

House, I think. So, yes, it was, it was really strange but you just smiled and kept going, didn't say anything to her. I remember one of the girls said, 'Where?' as if to try and hide the fact that, yes we actually are up there. She said, 'Well, never heard of it'. Okay, we're only three women in having our lunch. As well you used to have to walk all the way down to the post office and your income support book was stamped Old School House, Balmedie so they knew when you went in the post office and you were like -

That's, aye.

- you were biding there. I suppose they saw a lot of women that had to come down to there. So, did a lot of walking, it kept you fit because you were walking up and down that road two miles down, two miles back, no bus service there. So, no, it was ... So when I got the ... I suppose when we moved from there and got the flat in Garthdee and having to change the schools again, Derek was already ... He was going into ... He was 11 so he was already doing his primary seven in primary so it was quite difficult for him to change again and not knowing what high school he was going to be [going to], because before that their lives were all set out. They went to Milne's Primary and then they were going to go to Milne's High School, which were the schools that I went to when I was a child, went to Milne's Primary and went to Milne's High School and that was the way I always saw their lives to be as well. That that's where they would go. So all of a sudden they were at Balmedie Primary, now we went to Aberdeen. When I moved there I met my neighbour who was a bit older than me but she became a really good neighbour to us and was really good to the children and she advised me ... asked me, 'What school you putting them to?' and I said, 'Well, I don't really know because I don't know the area. I'll have to source where the school is'. She said, 'There is a school just at the bottom of the road but', she says, 'It's not a great school', and she'd said to me that she'd actually put her children, who were grown up by this time, to Broomhill Primary and I said, 'Oh well, I can-, I'll go there', and I said, 'Well, it's not far to walk', because you're thinking of money as usual, I could take them there. So anyway, I took them to Broomhill to get them enrolled and they enrolled them no problem, and so that

was the three of them going to start there in the January, yes, after the Christmas holiday period. That first Christmas was hard, really hard.

00:29:19 *Did you have any connection with Women's Aid in that time afterwards when you left the refuge and got your place?*

Nothing.

No.

No. There was no support, nobody came with you to see the flat, you went yourself, you met the housing officer at the flat. So there was no support to go and do that really either and after you left they never gave you any follow-up. There was no follow-up offered. I remember I left one black bag of stuff in the refuge so it was taken to the office. I always remember going to get it and I gave them the key back and although I'd been staying at the flat they charged me another week's fuel -

Really?

- because the bag was still there.

Oh, right.

So, no, there was no follow-up after that. Collected the bag and that was, basically, the last I'd seen or heard of Aberdeen Women's Aid at that time and just soldiered on trying to ... I remember when I was hanging my curtains in the living room window and I looked out and across to the flats across the road and realised that the woman that was standing in the window of one of the flats across the road at the kitchen window was actually a cousin of my ex-husband and I just thought, 'Oh my god, how could that happen?'. So he did find us a couple of times, he came a couple of times but I was stronger then, I suppose, and I just called the police on the two occasions straightaway that he came to the house. The first time he came it was early in the

morning, it was about eight o'clock, half eight in the morning, and the kids were downstairs and I had been working the night before as I'd found myself a couple of part time jobs, and I was working down ... I was still lying on my bed although I was semi-conscious and I had been wakened and I just thought, 'I'll get up at nine', because I'd been working until about 11 the night before waitressing, and I thought ... I heard this voice and I thought, 'God, am I dreaming?'. And then I heard him saying again, 'Where's your mum?' and I thought, 'Oh my god, it's him at the door'. I got down and he was trying to entice the boys to go with him because he had all this money in his hand and out of nowhere I remember flinging his hand with all the money in and I remember it going all over the hallway and told him just take his money and go and get ... He moved back out of the doorway to pick this money up [and] I closed the door, locked the door and phoned the police. So the police came [and] he was wandering about outside shouting. He was still full of alcohol, to this day I don't know whether he'd been in Aberdeen all night or ... Anyway, he knew where to come and find us.

00:33:07 *How was the police response this time? How did you find that?*

It was better. They came and they took him away and arrested him, took him away and he was charged with a breach of the peace, there was no thingy of violence that day. Where I found the strength from that day I don't know because I would never have done that before, I would have probably just frozen. He would have been in the house and ... but where I found that strength from that day I don't know and I suppose that was maybe the start of me becoming stronger. Although sometimes it didn't feel like that because it was hard, really hard, trying to bring up the three kids on my own, being out there having to work, went to court and we did get some money which was because he didn't give it willingly. So we did get some money every week from him through the court but it wasn't a lot and I didn't want to not work and I suppose the jobs that I was doing I would probably ... I don't know, probably have been just as well off, unfortunately, not working and getting my rent paid but I didn't want to do that either. So, I wanted to ... He never allowed me to work the whole time. I mean when I had Derek you didn't get to keep your job or he didn't want me to go back. Although my work were good with me at

the very beginning and did say to me, 'Take some time off, have a few weeks off but come back', because I was six ... well, I was still only six months pregnant [so] I could have went back. They didn't keep your jobs open in them days once you left for maternity, but I think I was embarrassed to go back and I didn't go back to my work. Then I tried to work a couple of times. I got a wee part time job in the mornings in the local hotel. Because after we moved out the caravan we rented a wee cottage in Fochabers, my mum managed to find ... knew the old man who had it, and that was the week before Derek was actually born because the caravan was freezing and things like that and we managed to rent this wee cottage and my younger sister came round in the mornings and looked after Derek and I went out to work. But he wasn't happy about that. That only lasted a few months.

So later on having the job was important because that was -

It was important.

- something that you had...

Really important and I worked in the mornings and it wasn't the kind of work I'd ever done before but I was out cleaning in the mornings which brought in money and I waitressed in a small hotel in Great Western Road at that time in the evenings, doing the evening meals and that. Derek was only about 12 at the time but he was really mature for his age and, I suppose, in them days you didn't even think that much about that because I think I always looked after my siblings and he looked after the other two while I went out at night, gave them their tea, made sure they were okay, and I left to go to work and came back about ten. He's always been that kind of young lad so it was cool.

00:36:59 *So you went to ... Moving on with things and I know that another thing you were going to speak about, so it's just making me wonder how you got in contact with Women's Aid again?*

Okay. So time moved on and there was a period of my time, I think probably about, let me think, eight years later I was going through a hard time and I was always crying a bit and I was

thinking, 'What's wrong with me?'. So I went to see my GP here and my GP here was actually really good, went to the GP's here and registered and, anyway, about eight years later I thought, 'I'm not feeling...'

So this must have been in the early '90s.

00:37:54 This must have been in the '90s, yeah, early '90s. Went to see the GP and she said, 'Look, we've got something new going on in our practice at the moment. We've actually got a counsellor who's working within the practice', and she says, 'I think it might be good because with what you've gone through and everything and you've probably not dealt with it'. It was the first time I'd really heard anybody actually given me some proper advice about it, because you just ... To be able to move on, to be able to go on you had to just kind of try and push it all into the back of your head and try and do the best you could for the kids. I thought, 'Okay, I'll give that a bash', and I think I was with her for about nearly a year -

Right.

- and I got this counselling and it was just being able to talk and being able to tell somebody what had actually gone on, actually ... and, I suppose, took that heavy heart away being able to just discuss how I felt and how it made me feel, how I managed to cope from the day I left my home town. I think that was devastating to me that I, actually, left my village where my mum and dad lived, where...

So it wasn't just leaving ... getting away from your husband -

Yes.

- or leaving him, it was leaving life really.

Leaving the life I'd known. I'd been there since the age of five. I suppose I'd gone through ... there was ... I suppose in between that time in 1993, Derek was about 14/15 ... 14 yes, and Kim

was about eight, we got this knock on our door and Derek came through and said, 'Mum, you're not going to believe this but Nana Grant is at the door', which was his mum and I hadn't really had much contact with them since I left, although the kids, we'd go through ... through the court the kids had to go to Elgin every second weekend. So that was difficult for me to do as well, but anyway it worked out okay but the kids were starting to get fed up with it anyway because he always never let them go to their own house which would have been their own house. He always took them to his mother's and then it started getting that he'd go for a few pints and his mum was left looking after them. So that didn't work, but anyway this night that his mother and his sister were at the front door and this was to tell us that he was in intensive care in Aberdeen on a life support machine. So I was like, 'Do I go with the kids? Do I not go with the kids? What do I do?'. So anyway, Derek went off with his mum and sister and everything and Colin wanted to go as well, although I wasn't happy about him going because I thought he's just still a bit too young, he was about 12, nearly 13, I suppose, at the time. So off they went and then they came back with them. So they didn't even come in and let me know exactly what had happened. I, basically, relied on Derek to tell me what was happening and they said that they were going to come back for him in the morning and that they were having to make a decision whether they would turn the machines off or not.

00:41:57 Now what had happened to him, he'd come out the pub in Fochabers after a day of drinking and had fell and banged the back of his head on a wall. So when the police saw him lying on the pavement [they] just thought, 'Oh, it's Mr Grant again drunk', picked him up, threw him in the back of the police car and took him to the Elgin police station and although he became a little bit semi-conscious they ... He gave his name, he was quite well known, and they put him in a police cell and it wasn't until the morning shift came on at six o'clock in the morning that they realised that there was something seriously wrong with him, which he was probably clinically dead then. They rushed him to Aberdeen and he was on a life support machine. There was nothing there. So I had all that emotions that day they switched off the machines and he died. So I think from that day, I think although I tried to push everything to the back everything was coming to the surface again. I had really mixed emotions, the kids were crying and crying

and I was trying to think, oh my god, and in my head I'm only thinking of the bad things and thinking well maybe it's what he deserves, but the kids were crying because he'd died and trying to deal with all that emotions as well. 'Do I go to the funeral? Do I take the kids to the funeral? Do I get my mum and dad to take them to the funeral? What's the best thing for me to do? Should I be there supporting the kids? How am I going to feel when I'm hearing him, the minister saying beloved father of Derek, Colin and Kim? Am I going to be able to cope with that?'. I'd probably have to stand up and say, 'Beloved father'. Anyway, it ended up as my mum and dad took the kids to the funeral.

He always worked, he was always in employment. He was a good worker. He worked in construction and at the time he was working with a local firm which was a company called Duncan & Sons, who had this massive construction company plus farming in Fochabers, and then when he died he had this thing through his work that there was money going to come for the next of kin and even his mum tried to even claim the insurance and that because she did not feel that she wanted the kids to have it because they thought that I would have it anyway. But anyway through ... They'd gone to a solicitor who, actually, lived in the village of Fochabers who knew that ... Actually, I knew his wife quite well going to nurseries and things like that. So that way the kids got the money that was put in trust for them. It wasn't a lot of money, it was a few thousand pounds and it was put in trust for them. So, I suppose, dealing with that in 1993 and a few years later, I think I was really not coping really well and went to see this counsellor.

00:45:43 So after that I really was starting to feel really strong and I then met my husband now and I suppose I'd always said I'd never marry again because I didn't want to trust anybody and I was starting to become strong. I was working. I was in a better place. I was in a good job running a bed and breakfast up in Great Western Road at that time through a girl I'd met. Well, I'd started off working as their cleaner and became really good friends with ... who's still one of my friends to this day, and I helped them manage the three bed and breakfasts that they had. So, I was in a good place, earning good money at that time and wasn't dependent on benefits at that time either. So anyway, I'd met my husband, who I'm married to now, and I was 37 at that

time and everything was going well and a year later he said, 'Okay, shall we try for children?' which wasn't in my agenda at all at that time, but anyway we had our first son and I was working I remember in Evans, the retail store, at that time because my friend and her husband from the bed and breakfast had separated and things were all split up and the bed and breakfast kind of went.

I saw an advert in the *Citizen* paper saying that Aberdeen Women's Aid was looking for volunteers and directors and I said to my husband, I says, 'Do you know, I think now I'm really strong now, I think I could maybe put something back in and I would like to go back and see now how Aberdeen Women's Aid is running'. I must admit I was a little bit horrified when I did go back and when I made contact and they invited me along to the committee meeting, which was held once a month, to find that Sandra Eddie was still running Aberdeen Women's Aid and it hadn't really moved on much further. I met her on the first meeting and in my heart I was thinking, 'Oh my god, I wonder what these refuges are like now? What are these women living in?'. So after that she went on long term sick and I started off being one of the volunteers on the committee and then I was voted on to become one of the directors, which I felt really proud of at that time, and this woman was never coming back and never coming back so we had to make the decision that is she going to come back and they came up with a deal for her because she was not fit to come back to work at this time.

00:49:24 The woman who was acting manager took on the role as the manager then, not known to me at that time that she was actually her sister-in-law. So anyway, we thingymed on and we tried to really, really bring these refuges up to standards, introducing ... Along with the supporting people who had come on board at that time, getting support plans in place and all that, and through time the manager left and a new manager was then put in place, but again through a few years I started realising that I still couldn't accept some of the ways that they were still managing to run the organisation. By this time I'd decided to become a support worker and I wanted to be more working with the women.

Working with women. Okay.

So there was a short period where I was wearing two hats -

Right.

- so ... until I see if that was what I really wanted. So for two months I was still a director but then I decided I would try and see if that was what I wanted to do. So once I got into that post and was really working hard with the women I thought, yes, this is definitely a role I wanted to do and gave up being one of the directors, but again I was seeing practices being kept in place and it was really hard to make changes. I think there was so much history, old history with [Aberdeen] Women's Aid, that I wasn't agreeing with some of the things, some of the ways they would be treating the women, some of the ways they were ... and it ... expecting the support to be ... One of the things that I did when I went to become one of the volunteers, one of the things was to clear out the office that was in [Aberdeen] Women's Aid. There was so much archive stuff, it was just lying about and one day when we were clearing out, I came across my file -

Right.

- from 1989. It was just lying there. I must have been quite a quiet person in the refuge because some of the remarks that were written and some of the things were horrific, really horrific that they'd written about some of the women.

00:52:17 *So in what way? So this would be notes in a contact with a woman?*

Notes in their contact, calling women a drunken whore, scrounger, all these kind of things and I thought, 'Things have got to change in this place'. So we raided all that out. I did think, should I keep my notes or not and then I decided not to. I thought to myself, 'Will I read these notes?'. And it took me a few weeks to decide I wouldn't read them. There was also in the files a no-no book.

A no-no book?

A no-no book. It said on the front 'No-no'. These were women's names that had been in refuge that were never allowed to come back again.

Right.

They obviously upset them or did something that ... I always remember when I was in the refuge there were a couple of girls ... There was a refuge as well in the city which is a house now but it's on the dual carriageway, it's right across the road where Northsound Radio is now, it sits in the corner, that was a refuge as well but there'd been a small fire there -

Right.

- and a couple of the women from there had come out to Balmedie and when they came out there they'd alerted the papers about the state of the house and everything there. So they were on the no-no list. There were lots of women...

Right, because they had gone to the press -

Because they had gone to the press.

Yes.

There were people who'd maybe done something that they didn't like or ... But they were never given another chance if they'd maybe gone back to their partners, things like that they were on this no-no list -

Right.

- in this file. If they'd been asked to leave the refuge they'd be on the no-no list, these women's names were, like, branded about this file. So things changed and the refuges came up to a really quite good standard.

00:54:40 *And it was still Aberdeen Women's Aid at that point?*

Still Aberdeen Women's Aid at that time, but the new manager that came on board I felt her thingys were going back the way, to the way it was, support plans were very much, kind of, well, do you know, just get them in, do this, do that and then she had an assistant manager who was very eager and willing just to throw a woman out if they wanted to. I was working with this family who had three children and one disabled little girl and she was behind with her fuel payments and this assistant manager turned up to the refuge while I was working there with the woman from ... now the name escapes me, but it was with ... and I think Dorothy was in charge of that project, it was about the children.

Right.

I'm sorry the name escapes me at this moment -

Okay.

- in time, but anyway there were two workers...

There was a project that worked with children.

There was a project that was working with children. So these two workers were in the house at that point in time and I was speaking with them, with the family that they were going to be working with, the children that they were going to be working with of this family, and the assistant manager came in the front door and went up to the office and went straight to the room that the other family were in that were due to meet and gave her to the following morning to leave the refuge. No ifs, buts, she was now asked to leave. Didn't matter what I

said. This woman, where is she going to go with this disabled little child? The two girls ... of course this woman came out crying once she'd gone and the staff from the project were there and were horrified and I went to the office and I spoke to the manager and said, 'This can't be right, we can't ... we must be ... have to look at ways of how we can help this woman rather than ... Where's she going to go?' but no, my thingys weren't taken into account. This was a decision that the management had taken and this woman and the three children had to leave the refuge the following morning. I took them to the homeless hostel, the children were crying, she was crying.

So did you know the reason that they were leaving the refuge?

Because they hadn't paid their...

The management, just because they hadn't paid their -

Yes, there were in arrears of -

- fuel bill.

- their fuel.

Okay.

No debt management, nothing like that, and I thought, 'I can't do this anymore'. So that went into a bit of a disagreement in the way that they spoke and I thought, 'Can I be part of an organisation that was treating women still like that? I don't know if I can'. By this time I had been communicating quite well with Grampian Women's Aid.

So that was Aberdeen Women's Aid -

Women's Aid.

- but Grampian Women's Aid had started as well?

Yes, they were already ... they were still at the same time but I didn't know about Grampian Women's Aid -

Okay.

- in them time because I think they started up roughly about the same time -

Right.

- in the '70s.

Okay. So the two would have been running...

So there were two being run alongside –

Okay.

- each other in them times.

Okay, okay.

00:58:24 So, I jokingly said, 'There's not any jobs with you?' and they said, 'Well, keep an eye on the paper, there might be'. So anyway, I went into discussion with Aberdeen Women's Aid manager and I said, 'I'm not sure if this is what I can do anymore because I'm not agreeing with the way the women are being treated, blah, blah, blah', and by this time was the start of, as well, the Care Commission -

Right.

- being more involved in Women's Aid.

So there were changes in hand -

There were changes as well.

- organisations were inspecting.

There were a lot of changes in this the way the Care Commission was starting to become part of the organisation and, anyway, I decided that there was no point me staying there and having to work and do things that ... and I actually applied for the post that came up in the paper with Grampian Women's Aid. I decided to put my notice in to the Aberdeen Women's Aid and left there. Fortunately, I got the post here and I started here on the 9th of June '98. Yes. It wasn't until, I think, a few weeks later that I'd heard that that family and her parents of that family had gone to the Care Commission -

Right.

- and then there was being quite an investigation into the practices at Aberdeen Women's Aid and then just after that we'd heard that the whole organisation was closed down.

Right.

So I was glad that I'd left when I did because I wouldn't have been wanting to be part of, I don't know, very demeaning towards the women because that was not what my idea of helping women in Women's Aid and the main reason I went back to become a volunteer at the Women's Aid was to make sure that the women were actually getting the support, because I'd read a lot more by this time I was really looking into how other organisations were working and I really wanted to make sure that Aberdeen Women's Aid had moved on.

So we're interested to know, I suppose, so it was Aberdeen Women's Aid but there was also Grampian Women's Aid.

Grampian's Women's Aid.

So would there have been any kind of relationship between the two?

There's a lot of history.

Right.

Once I'd been on board there was a lot of history because I think the two women who started up the Women's Aid kind of...

There was a split -

There was a split -

- in the...

- in the two women who started up the -

Okay.

- organisation and then it was a Margaret Vieira that started Grampian Women's Aid -

Right.

- and this Sandra Eddie who ran it.

Before she came to Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen Women's Aid in the very beginning. So they both started roundabout the 1970s but this is all information I learned after.

So, I suppose, in the scheme of the community in Aberdeen and in Grampian there would have been two available -

Two available.

- for women.

The Aberdeen Women's Aid had three houses, one of the refuges still lies empty on Queen's Road to this day.

Right, right.

A big house in Queen's Road. They had the John Street house ... or was it just two refuges? Maybe just the two refuges. John Street and ... no three. John Street, Queen's Road and the Bucksburn Farmhouse.

01:02:43 *And Bucksburn. And Balmedie?*

No, Bucksburn.

Bucksburn.

Just on Howes Road.

Okay.

So they had three big refuges and Aberdeen Women's ... Grampian Women's Aid had the ones that...

When you were ... I suppose you were a director at Aberdeen's Women's Aid and you mentioned there started being changes for organisations and how they, I suppose, conduct their business -

Yes.

- get inspected, whatever. I'm just wondering where they fitted with other organisations and other things that were going on like the police and social work and that kind of thing. Do you think there was a relationship there or did they have a reputation or anything like that?

I think, knowing what I know now, I think Aberdeen Women's Aid did have a reputation, one that they didn't keep the houses up to standard which would ... really got them up to standard.

A negative reputation.

Very negative reputation. So we worked hard, there was money in the pot so we got ... The Bucksburn Farmhouse was taken right back up to a nice standard. We had a big open day inviting Grampian Women's Aid and all that to the houses and it being totally refurbished. I remember going in first of all and the carpets, you could stick to them with your feet they were that old and thingy, but anyway, the whole place was refurbished. Queen's Road wasn't so bad but it got a small refurbishment and John Street was [a] Langstane [Housing] property so that was probably the best one out of them all. We got them so that they were running better, there's ... put all the support plans in place, starting to work with the Care Commission with what they were expecting but still there was so much history it was really difficult at that time to get it all working together. Some of the directors were still very old school as well.

So change was difficult.

Change was really difficult. Really difficult at that time.

So you had gone into support work ... I'm just trying to recap -

Yes.

- to keep up with you. So you had been on the board at Aberdeen's Women's Aid and you wanted to venture into directly helping the women.

Yes.

So you went into the support side and then over time you left Aberdeen Women's Aid -

I did.

- and the support work and you got a job in Grampian Women's Aid.

Women's Aid.

Of course we're speaking in Grampian Women's Aid today. So you're still working -

Still working at Grampian Women's Aid.

- with Grampian Women's Aid. So is that a good place for us to be coming up to the finish of our interview? So you're a support worker.

Support worker, yes, with Grampian Women's Aid now. I've been here eight and a half years nearly and so I now have my SVQ in domestic abuse, it's three which is the new one, a technical breakthrough [laughs], so it's really good. Here you get training, it's so available if you need it, you keep your training up to date.

01:07:03 *So, I suppose, what I'm thinking is that the journey you've spoken to me about, it started in the '80s as a victim of abuse from your husband and then your journey to escape that and then as you got stronger your interest in domestic abuse with the local Aberdeen Women's Aid and volunteering and being on the board and then going into it as a career is quite a journey I suppose and experience in learning. So, I'm just wondering, going through that journey where it brings you today as a support worker, I suppose that experience for a woman today, I suppose, how is it different? What's better? What's not better? I suppose these are questions.*

I mean the support that the women get now, I suppose there's always room for improvement and there always will [be] and things will always move on, policies change and everything can change out there, but I think the support that the women get now is so much better. The support from, I think, even the police is a lot better than it ever used to be. We've got the domestic abuse liaison officers through the police which would never ... they're so much more qualified to what domestic abuse is.

Do you think the police learn more about domestic abuse, have a better understanding?

Definitely. Definitely, and things are always progressing through organisations. I think the partnership working, the working with other organisations, whether it be social work, GPs, even the training that Women's Aid offer as well ... the Grampian Women's Aid offer to health visitors, any organisation that's looking for training. I think even that is such a successful thing as well. I think the understanding of it...

So, do you mean then that Women's Aid would be, I suppose, the experts in there, would have influence maybe?

Absolutely and I think because ... I think one of the things that you hear, and you still hear to this day, [is] why don't women just leave? People who have never experienced or haven't had the training don't understand that and that's one of the obstacles that women do have is how to leave, where to leave to, how to get the support and there's definitely a lot more out there than it ever used to be, adverts, advertising. I just heard an advert on the news when I was just parking my car this morning, they're going in today – this afternoon isn't it? – to try and get the emotional abuse as a chargeable thing? I mean, how far change...

01:10:39 *So changes in legislation.*

- changes in legislation.

It's massive.

How massive that is and how further on. It used to be that you couldn't even get a charge against your husband because it was a domestic, it was only you and him so even getting a charge ... often domestic abuse was never ... I mean, even in all the assaults and everything that I experienced as a victim of domestic abuse many years ago I think probably only one stuck as an assault not as a domestic abuse. So it's just, it has gone forward. I'm sure there's always going to be room for improvement and we're moving on with even housing, better housing for the woman as well if they're victims of domestic abuse because I think leaving the family home is one of the hardest things. So it is, it's all moving forward I think and I hope I'll be here to see more changes, better changes in the future for these women.

Okay. We'll just finish up there then.

End interview