

Oral History Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Margaret Vieira

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Interviewer: Sandra Copland

Time period: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s

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

Roles: Domestic abuse survivor, volunteer (Aberdeen WA), founding member (Grampian WA)

7th of December '16. This is Sandra Copland interviewing Margaret Vieira.

Thank you very much. A little bit about my experiences and involvement actually with Women's Aid; I started [with] Women's Aid, the organisation, in 1977 [interviewer has since corrected this to 1976] after I saw an advert or an article in the paper about Women's Aid. And just to explain that, I had been a battered wife, actually, since the very early weeks of my marriage in 1962. This was something which was absolutely akin to me as a person. I was brought up in the Islands, led a very sheltered life, my father was a senior police officer. To me, violence was something which he, in fact, actually, dealt with probably on a regular basis at the weekend. When, in fact, I married I was absolutely shocked within a first couple of weeks, actually, that I was being knocked around by my husband. He was from a well shod family, boarding school educated, we had our own private rented apartment, he had a good job, nice family background, and the very first incident was we went out for a drink and I discovered, actually, a friend of mine who had been at our wedding was there and came up and said hello, put his arms round both of us, said it was nice to see us and how we were getting on, and suddenly the face changed on my husband and I was ordered out of the hotel and told to get into the car and I was ... we went home and suddenly it was just all fists and pulling around. This was absolutely

shocking; I just didn't know how to deal with this. I thought I had done something wrong. Unfortunately, that mode of behaviour seemed to continue. All the time I was making excuses for him, all the time he was apologising. I felt embarrassed. I felt, actually, I couldn't tell anybody, I certainly couldn't tell my family and, of course, we were back in the city, living in the city, so it wasn't as if there was anybody near at end. During my pregnancy, during my second pregnancy, I had some really horrific situations that happened. One of the situations was he threw me down the stairs, I was seven months pregnant, in the middle of a bad winter, didn't know where I was going, went out into the street, was running around the street and eventually I heard his car – which had quite a distinctive noise – and ran to a neighbour's and asked if I could come in and could I phone my in-laws. Now, my in-laws didn't know anything about this so this was the first time that this had happened [as far as they were concerned]. They came and took me back to theirs and, of course, he appeared all sorry, it had been my fault, it was always my fault. This kind of mode of behaviour seemed to just get worse as the time went on. Deep down I wanted, actually, to leave but I didn't know how to leave. I was embarrassed, I felt I was doing something wrong; it was my fault because, of course, he was always telling me that.

00:04:06 Over the years, it got worse. He didn't want me to have any friends. He was jealous of the children. He didn't like the way I dressed. He didn't want me to be seen talking to the neighbours and, of course, every so often I was having to go out and, of course, I was sporting black eyes or limping or whatever it was. His violence, it was almost as though he just completely and totally lost it for no reason, there wasn't a reason for it. My doctor was the only one that I could really tell what was going on. His advice was, 'Well, I can't tell you what you're to do but you know this is not going to improve any so please think about it wisely'. There were incidents where he knocked me around, left me lying, really, semi-conscious, either behind the settee or behind the door, and he would leave the house. My son in particular – just a little boy – well, one of the times he came and found me and he was stroking my face when I came around and he said, 'It's alright mummy, I'll look after you', and for them ... I mean, it was absolutely, it was so traumatic and very, very difficult, actually, to know ... and I would say things like, 'Don't worry about it, daddy's not well'. My daughter she just clung to me, wherever I went

she was right beside me, going out of the door. He used to come in late on at night. I mean, by this time, as the time went on I realized, actually, he was also womanising. He was very physically demanding. When he went out and came back in again – it didn't matter what time of the morning it was – he came back in but he would then, of course, expect me to be there. One night in particular I was sound asleep, I hadn't heard him come in and he must have spoken to me and the next I knew I woke up to see a neighbour looking down at me, and apparently what had happened is he must have either hit me in the nose or butted me on the nose with his head and he had tried to get me to come round. According to what I understand, he had taken me, dragged me through to the bathroom, shoved my head under a tap to try and get me to come around and I hadn't come round so he panicked – now this is about 3 o'clock in the morning – he panicked and he decided to, I suppose ... maybe that he had really done a damage, so he ran down at three in the morning, mind you, to this neighbour who was a doctor and who also I was friendly with him and he said that I had taken an epileptic fit and, of course, they knew by this time that this was not what was happening. He then decided that the following day he would phone my mother in Shetland and he would tell her that I'd had an epileptic fit and I wasn't fit to look after the children. Of course, I had never been known to have anything wrong with me never mind an epileptic fit, so they were quite shocked. They came down at that time to see what was going on and I had to, kind of, sort of, tell them. Now, this was really the first time that I had said anything to them so they did know by this time. My father, he was, you know, 'Get out of this situation', but I didn't want ... I wanted to make the decision about it and, of course, as I say, having been a nurse I was always expecting that this was, that he was going to [be] better or I thought he was going to get better.

His violence actually seemed to escalate. Now, I had never actually involved the police but the first time that I involved the police I was absolutely shocked because he came into the house in the early hours of the morning and, apparently, somebody ... He had [a] radiator for a car in the back of his car and he wanted ... actually, somebody had stolen it, so he then actually said to me, 'Where is this radiator?', and I said, 'Well I don't know anything about it', and I got up, of course, in a panic because I knew that he was getting more and more agitated as time went on

and, of course, he started to kick the furniture and smash the kitchen door. I ran out the back door of the kitchen, really, just to get out of the house in my nightdress. There was a pitchfork, a garden fork, at the top of the steps and he threw it and it pinned me, actually, by the nightdress onto the grass at the bottom of the step. I wrenched it and ran around the front and as I ran around the front of the house I heard the children screaming and, of course, I must have panicked then, so I ran further up the road to another friend of mine and I got her to phone the police. The police arrived and they said, 'What's going on?'. So, I am out in the street at this time and then, of course, they asked if they could come in and see him. So he opened the door, quite the gentleman, smiling and said, the policeman said, 'What's going on?', and he said, 'Oh, nothing. Actually, it was just a slight disagreement, actually, about her keeping on going out', and the police said, 'I believe, actually, that some of the children, one of the children was screaming', and when he went, the policeman went in, opened the door to put on the light in the children's bedroom and the light wouldn't go on. He had taken the bulbs out of the lights so they couldn't see. Then I discovered ... After the policeman was going away, he left, he said, 'I think you two just better actually calm down, actually. I don't want to be coming back here for a domestic', and I was absolutely horrified knowing what had gone on but how can I prove it, actually, to anybody. I then went into the bedroom in the morning, because I was ordered to get into my bed, went into the bedroom in the morning and discovered, actually, that my son had been picked up, thrown across the bedroom, had bust his nose and that was the reason, actually, that he had taken the light out so that the police wouldn't see that, and my son had been told if they ask you anything don't say anything, so they were now ... I mean, they were the victims in as much as he physically had actually done something. I was then in a total panic, I thought this just can't go on.

00:11:48 *That must have been really difficult when the police were saying that we don't want to come to this. This is a domestic.*

Well, at that time I think there wasn't much rules and regulations with regard to any kind of domestic dispute. In fact, a lot of them used to say ... I mean, sometimes, actually, it's all over and done with and they are the best of friends in the next hour and I suppose really they

probably had some form of instructions or some form of guidance how to deal with it. It was really difficult, actually, to work with. So, those things weren't, in fact, actually good times.

I two or three times made the effort to leave but, unfortunately, wherever I went he always seemed to root me out, he always seemed to know where I was, and the first thing he would do, he would grab the children and he would take the children back and he would say, 'Well, you can please yourself, actually, [but] the children are coming with me and I'll be telling the social workers that you're a hopeless mother', and I mean, all those things are building up inside. I was very lucky that my parents, during the summer holidays when, of course, the children were at home, would, in fact, actually They were to go on holiday there, but we used to have some terrible carry-ons before they even got there; if I didn't go with them or if I was ... because I did decide to get a job, if nothing else just to give me a little bit of independence because he didn't, in fact, provide. In fact, one time that I had used my children's allowance to buy him, because he had been in a bad mood I decided to buy him something nice so I used the children's allowance to buy him a nice gammon steak which he enjoyed and he came in, the children were still up, it must have been about 6 o'clock at night, and he took [it] and he threw the gammon steak and all the trimmings in the bucket to the dogs and I was just absolutely heartbroken because we'd [had] to go without that day, so just to try and please him. He never, really, ever bought very much. I used to have ask him for money and he was always terribly reluctant, but he was still going out, still ran his cars. In fact, we were more likely to get a spare part for a car, actually, than we were to get food, so it became absolutely traumatic. The children were quite stressed about it. My son, his attitude was, 'Well, if I'm out of the house then I can't be blamed for anything or I will not be the person that's damaged', but I was always, sort of, seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and he thought nothing, actually, of knocking me down and beating my head off the floor. In fact, many is the time I thought, 'I'm going to die', because I could feel myself almost being stunned every time and I thought, well, the next time it's going to be too late, but, well, he never got as far as that but, I mean, it was probably more good providence than anything else.

His parents, I was always quite close to them but they never really had much control over him and he hid a lot. He always had something that he would blame if there was a carry on. The number of times that – and, of course, and he was always sorry he'd done it – the number of times that there was a carry-on where he had smashed up the furniture [and] the next day new furniture would arrive to replace what he'd smashed up. Anything that I had that was personal to me or that I really liked, that was a sure sign that they would be the things that would go.

00:16:08 Now, I have to say, he was not a drinker. In fact, he didn't drink, so it wasn't as if the myth that sometimes goes out to you with violence [that] it is because of the drink because that wasn't the situation at all. My doctor pleaded with me to just have serious thoughts about what I was going to do and I went along to make sure ... Well, of course, sometimes I was so badly injured that, in fact, I had to go to the doctor, but then, of course, when I did that suddenly he said, 'I think that you're having an affair with the doctor'. In fact, according to him I had an affair with everybody from the solicitor right down, anybody that seemed to be walking around that was male I was having some kind of affair with them according to him, and no way was that going to happen. I mean, it was bad enough having to worry about him never mind somebody else. His friends, some of them, a few of them actually, challenged him when they saw me with a black eye. He didn't like that, so they were off the list after that. Didn't want me to have any female friends either. I had terrible nightmares how I was actually going to get away from it and, as I say, I did try two or three times but, unfortunately, I was never successful.

In 1974 I decided, actually, that I was going to make a break and I planned it – I thought I had planned I – and I left and I got a flat from a friend, which was to me I thought [it] would be so easy just to move out because he was always telling me to get out. I mean, that was the big thing, 'Get out, it's your fault', and all the rest and I went off and I got a solicitor's letter sent out, said I had left and that I was going to be pursuing for divorce. Then he decided that he was going to go to the Cornhill [hospital] to get treatment. Therein asked for me to attend for counselling with him and I thought, 'I can't believe that they're asking me to attend. What am I going to do? It's him that's got the problem', so I didn't, in fact, agree to what they said.

However, I went, actually, to see the psychiatrist who had written me the letter but I went just privately to see her, and she said to me, 'I can't tell you to leave but my advice is get out before it's too late', and I came away and I thought this is...

00:19:32 *That is really powerful.*

Yes, and I thought, she definitely must see something more than what I'm even taking on board, so I decided I wasn't going to go back. However, he had all sorts of carry-ons. He was going to throw himself into Rubislaw Quarry, and, of course, in way one I wanted to believe that there was a cure but other than that it was horrendous. I didn't have friends, I didn't have money, the children were distraught, I was distraught, the house is smashed up.

Then he decided he was going to sign the house into both our names. It was a privately-owned bungalow, so he got the solicitor, all agreed, all the documents were signed up and this was on the understanding that I was coming back and I think I wanted it, as I say, to be different.

However, it didn't work that way and I did go back and, of course, in my mind I was thinking, well, at least if I got back I've got half of the house. The documents come in and sign the papers and I went along, the day that was appointed to the solicitor, got as far as outside the solicitor and I said to him, 'Right, we'll just go in now', and he looked at me and I always remember the hatred in the eyes and he said, 'There's no way that I'm signing anything into your name', and, I tell you, if he had stuck a knife in me I think it would have been easier, the way I felt, I could not believe it. I just felt I had been totally used, he had used that to get me back knowing that whatever I had actually set up as a reason for divorce was now null and void because I'd gone back. So I came out of there and I was, I don't know, I was just distraught. Anyway, we went back to the house and he, the first thing he did when he came in was he, the punchbag. He didn't want to hit me but he did a few punches on the wall, the wall of the hall, and then he ... I had this great huge lecture of what he was expecting me to do and what he didn't. I was to give up my work and the children weren't to be going to these organisations, anything that was a norm he wanted me not to do, and I thought, after that, I have got to get out of this.

So that took me from '74 up to '76 when I found an article in the paper on Scottish Women's Aid. Now, all the time that these [things] were actually happening to me I think that I believed that I was the only person who was suffering, I thought it was only me and I thought even more so because we lived in kind of an exclusive area that these things weren't happening to other people in the same situation, and I was embarrassed and I was frightened and I had all the fears that went with it; where would I go, what was I going to do for money, would he come looking for me, would he do something desperate to the children. I mean, there were all those questions that arose. Anyway, there was a Women's Aid group here in Aberdeen and I decided, actually, that I would go and ask them, and I went there from sort of late on '76 to early '77, just really as a volunteer more than anything else, and in the February of 1977 I finally left.

00:24:17 *Can I just ask, the article that you first saw was about Scottish Women's Aid?*

It was about Scottish Women's Aid.

Is that how you found out about the Women's Aid group in Aberdeen, through the Scottish Women's Aid?

Yes, but you know that article, it was almost as though it had opened a door for me that I didn't think it was at all possible. I realised that there was somewhere that people could go and you could get advice and you could get help, so that was an amazing article. I went to, as I say, to Aberdeen Women's Aid as a volunteer and then in '77 Aberdeen Women's Aid obviously had a slightly different format and I don't want to make any disrespect to people with how they deal with things but for women, actually, that were coming from the same background as myself it was quite difficult because there was all the other considerations that had to be, money, house, possessions, which with living in a violent situation really are probably not all that important, but in order to survive...

They're necessary.

...it's absolutely essential. We then set up, I don't want to use the word splinter group because that's probably not a very nice way to put it, but we set up another group which we called the Women's Help Organisation because we, by that time, had not affiliated to Scottish Women's Aid, and I ran that ... well, between that and calling ourselves Grampian Women's Aid it actually ran from my linen cupboard. By this time, I had come out, just maybe to recap a little bit on that, when I came out first I went into the refuge, then I had a problem because my son was 13 at the time and we...

00:26:33 *Where was the refuge?*

In Aberdeen.

In Aberdeen, in the city.

He was 13 at the time, or 13 and a half, and he wasn't allowed to be in the refuge because he was an older male child, so I had to send him to Shetland. Now, my son was totally distraught because he was worrying about mum. My parents were brilliant with him but it was the fact that he didn't have me, so he eventually came back and I was given the opportunity through a friend to stay with her. In fact, before that I had probably stayed with a few folk but because I didn't qualify for a house ... Although I had made an application to Aberdeen District Council, as it was at that time, but I couldn't in fact get a house and they said that I wouldn't be considered until 1) that I had full custody of the children, which, of course, was going through a pretty rocky legal carry-on, and also until such time as my divorce was through. That was just something else, you felt you were taking one step forward but then taking two back. I lived, actually, with this friend and after eight months of being homeless I managed to get the offer of, funny enough in the same week, two different new houses, both new houses, and I chose, actually, one of them, a house but, of course, I had nothing. I had nothing because he wasn't paying the money or he paid in dribs and drabs when a solicitor's letter went out. He was using all sorts of things to hinder the divorce. He was under the impression that in ten years I would be back to him. He fought every inch of the way causing problems with the legal aid, said he had given me money.

He followed me around, he stalked me. When I used to park my car he would either reverse into the front of it, if could impact on [the] front. If he was driving along and I was in front, happened to be in front of him, he would drive just about two inches I felt between us, which was all pressure all the time. He told stories, every possible thing that possibly was detrimental to me, how I wasn't a good mother, I was an alcoholic although I never even drank, I was going with other men and I wouldn't have dared, just everything, anything he could think of he, in fact, actually, tried.

So you got physically away from him.

Sorry?

So you got physically away from him but what he was doing didn't stop, that just went on?

Oh yeah, all the intimidation that was there was horrendous. So, as I say, from that, actually, I started the Grampian Women's Aid, we became affiliated to Scottish Women's Aid.

00:30:01 *Can I backtrack a wee bit to the refuge, would that be okay? When you were volunteering with the Women's Aid...*

Yes.

...when you left in February '77, you went into the refuge accommodation?

I went into the refuge, yes, because they knew the situation. You know, it was a funny thing, it was almost – when I came out, now this is probably pride to some degree – it was almost as though I didn't want to believe it was happening to me. My parents wanted me to come home to Shetland. I didn't want to go there because in a small place, although my father used to say it's only a nine-day wonder, but I felt, actually, that I had made my roots to some degree and I had a small business which I was running so I didn't really want to have to almost undo all the, sort of, what I felt was a bit of progress. So, when I came [to Women's Aid], it was almost, the

volunteering bit was more or less almost like saying, 'Well, I have been through it but I am not really taking it on board that I was a victim. I want to help other folk', and when I look back on it now I think, actually, it was therapeutic for me. Instead of probably feeling sorry for myself, which, I mean, I had every reason to feel, I was in fact actually trying to help others. When I started at Women's Aid the one thing I did find was that women in similar situations to myself, from families, maybe the better off families, who were, in fact, actually going through that did, in fact, come because it was almost as though I had come out so they felt it was alright for them to come out. Of course, the one thing that we didn't have, we had no refuge accommodation.

So the Women's Aid group was Aberdeen Women's Aid?

Yes.

And you were in refuge with them?

Yes.

And then you moved out to stay with a friend?

Yes.

Would you like to tell me a wee bit about what that refuge was like?

About?

00:32:26 *About what the refuge was like when you were there.*

Well, the refuge that I was in, it was a small bungalow with three bedrooms in it. We had a woman with a family of four, myself and my two – well of course there was only the one as my son had to go to Shetland – and there was a small box room and a lady on her own. Now, because I, actually, had a small business obviously I was out quite a bit of the day. I know

because [of] different backgrounds of families there often was conflict with the women and I think that, you know, they say more than one woman sharing a kitchen, and, of course, the woman that was on her own was joined by another lady who was a single person and, of course, these children were obviously running the gauntlet. I mean, they were all just young children, mother was trying to cope with her own feelings about it and so it wasn't easy. It wasn't so bad for me but, I mean, I only stayed there actually a month because I had to take my son back.

[Inaudible 00:33:52].

Yes, I was there for a month, but, as I say, I went ... when I went out I had to, obviously, go and stay with a friend because I had a 13-year old but I was still going visiting the refuges. I mean, there were...

How many refuges were there at that time?

Well, we had the one in the city and then we had one out on the outskirts at that time and they were trying to get another refuge at the same time, but the need for people wanting the space was great, really, at that time and I think the fact that Scottish Women's Aid had flagged up their organisation, women were actually seeking help.

So the word had started to get out and women were getting more aware...

That's right.

...that there was something there for them?

But, you know, when I started Grampian Women's Aid we had to battle against all the myths that went with it.

00:35:04 *So what would the battle have been then?*

Well, I mean, I had a few quite hard-booted times actually with people who had been ... Well, when I went, actually, to do talks sometimes, because I started to do talks myself, actually, and a sheriff came in to quite a bit of debate and dialogue about who or the kind of women that were battered – I use the term battered – and very foolishly, I would say for him, he said, ‘Well, we know the kind of families, actually, that these things happen in’, and my mouth fell open and I thought, ‘This is a sheriff that is saying this’, and it was a meeting with professional people there and I said to him, ‘Excuse me, I think you’ve got that wrong’, I said, ‘I was a battered wife’, and he looked at me and he was mortified that he had said that and he was so apologetic but it was just ... I mean, you hear it still a little bit, you know, people say, ‘Well, it just happens in such and such families’, and it’s not good, it just makes my blood pressure boil when I hear it, and you still ... I mean, when I...

So the attitude of that sheriff was maybe ... Do you think that was kind of a general way of thinking then that he was voicing?

Yeah, but I found, actually, when I went first to do police training ... I understand how they saw it; they would go to a domestic, try and – well, as they classed a domestic – try and deal with the situation, it might have been through drink, I don’t know, but the next day they may have just, they might have tried to solve it all or separated them or whatever happened, and the next day the two are coming down the road happy as can be. My attitude to that was when you fall out, actually, with your wife or your girlfriend or partner, do you just walk off and say, ‘That’s it I’m never going back’? I said, ‘No, I don’t think so’. There was a lot of training, actually, that needed done on it.

So that was just about the understanding of what the abuse was?

Yes, it was...

And misconceptions of what is going on and the dynamic of that relationship?

Yes.

00:37:59 *So it sounds like they were seeing it as an argument between a couple and not really seeing it, using the word abuse or anything like that, would you say that? And, I suppose, what you're saying is the battle is, was having the understanding that you have...*

That's right, they would immediately have done lots of role play in situations like that. But eventually, I mean, things have changed. Although recently I have been at an event which I was quite surprised, actually, to ... Somebody sitting alongside me said, 'Oh, but we know the kind of families this happens, this violence happens in', and I had to respond to that. I said, 'I am quite interested to know what kind of families you think, actually, this is happening in', and it was kind of a negative thing. I think the person probably realised that maybe they had actually spoken out of turn, but I just thought that was kind of sad, actually, to think that still people see it happening...

I suppose the same thing as that sheriff was saying in the late '70s.

But, you know, I found, actually, that it's more difficult for women from a better background to ... Well, I don't think it's a case of admitting it but to seek help for it because the ones that I can think about, I dealt with, were ones that, you know, for better ... ministers, policemen, doctors, and really these people, these women were having so much more that had to be lost, even if it was down to ... Sometimes, I mean, the financial situation was so mixed up that it was really, really bad actually to be able to advise them what to do with it, and then maybe the children were at boarding or private school, what happens to the kids' education...

Circumstances, I suppose much more of a barrier of what would have to be sorted out.

There were some really bad cases that came with that, but it's ones that we had to work with and did work with through Grampian Women's Aid...

Can I ask you, so what year would you think you could you say that Grampian Women's Aid started?

Grampian Women's Aid started '77.

1977.

'77 was when we called ourselves WHO but it was Women's Aid and that was before we actually got our affiliation to the Scottish Women's Aid.

00:41:01 *Scottish Women's Aid, so when would the affiliation have come? I am just trying to get the timeline, so it would have been WHO [in] 1977 and then it kind of evolved into Grampian Women's Aid?*

It was just a ... What we did was in '77 we made [an] application but obviously it took a little bit of ... We had Dr Fran Wasoff that came up and we had a bit of dialogue, actually, with ... Well, Aberdeen Women's Aid were part of Scottish Women's Aid and then we became part of it because they disaffiliated, so we kind of took over that but there was a little bit of unrest that went there, so we kind of took over and became affiliated in '78.

Okay, that's fine, thank you. I just wanted to try and keep up with you there. I suppose one question is if you want to say anything maybe about the relationship. You say there was a bit of discord, there were some issues because I suppose now what Aberdeen has got two Women's Aid groups running simultaneously, where one was affiliated with Scottish Women's Aid and disaffiliated and then the group that you were running then were able to apply and become affiliated. Am I keeping up?

Yeah.

00:42:32 *Is that...? I suppose I would be interested in asking about something about that, what was going on with that or what were the challenges or...? As an outsider looking in and looking back it is like what kind of things could cause something like that?*

I think the main thing, the main difference, was probably because ... I was part of the committee of Aberdeen Women's Aid. Obviously there were lots of little problems that was happening there, conditions of the refuges, probably the support that was given to the women, and the person that was in charge of it did not want to work with me eventually and asked that I should, in fact, or announced to the committee that she, in fact, actually, did not want to work with me, and so I just stepped out, but at the same time, actually, another three stepped out as well, and we were the basics of that. Aberdeen Women's Aid then, actually, decided to take a court action against us for a letter which was sent, confidentially, to Aberdeen District Council, but it was thrown out, it was eventually thrown out, and Scottish Women's Aid tried to get involved with that but – if nothing else to try and sort out the problem – but it wasn't one that was sorted out. So, really, I mean, there was always that little bit of conflict. Grampian Women's Aid weren't really all that interested in the conflict they just wanted to get on with the work that was happening but it was kept up, the whole issues were kept up. It was supported in the paper umpteen times, you know, there is two Women's Aid groups and there is conflict between them and that, but we just, our interest was what was happening to the women and children and we were really busy. I tried to probably keep it, fly the flag, actually, for the organisation because at that time it was still all these sort of myths flying around and so I tried to keep it as high profile as possible and we did lots of things with it and we worked a lot with the families and tried our best for them.

We finally were granted ... Well, after my office in my linen cupboard we then moved to one day a week that we had at Queen's Cross Church. We then moved on and had one day that we got at the Voluntary Services, Aberdeen, and at the same time we had the use of the Torry Information Centre for a session there. We had various ways that we tried to get out to women; we had what we called the 'Flying Squad' with the police and that was if the police were called out to a domestic at night and if the woman needed refuge we would go out and pick them up and take them to wherever it was. Now, it has not been unknown, actually, for me to have a woman, her mother and her four children in my house over Christmas and New Year, so it was a case of just responding to the needs of the families. That wasn't an ideal situation and it was

one that was either more difficult for the housing when they had to rehouse them somewhere but anyway, those are all just little, you know, sort of memorable things that happened during the time of it.

We were given a small refuge in the middle of town which was a small flat, not ideal; the gentleman who was in the next flat was an alcoholic and would come rolling home at night, hammering on the door of the flat which, of course, you can imagine women who have come from violent situations did not want that happening, so that was not the easiest thing. We had huge support from organisations and from solicitors and Procurator Fiscals, you name it. If we had anywhere that we could use and we did, and really we just built up a tremendous support system for the families. As I say, after the one refuge we were given the use of the gentleman next door [his flat] when he - I don't know where he went - but we were given that flat as well and then we were granted another house in Aberdeen for families.

00:48:02 Then I went on – we had been given a lot of support to women and children from the Moray area – and I went on, actually, to set up a women's group there. I had been travelling on a regular basis once a week through to Elgin to support women and children there so we set up a group there and it became Moray Women's Aid. We had lots of women who were coming from the Gordon district. Gordon district were very supportive and, in particular, one councillor, the late Jim Cullen, who was absolutely just top marks as far as we were concerned, and we were taken out to see various properties there. I chose probably the biggest one of the lot, when I come to think of it, but it had been an old hospital and we were able to have four individual little flatlets and a communal area, kitchen and a launderette. I was then, actually, given £26,000 to go out and furnish that refuge which we, our workers actually travelled on a regular weekly outing there, we had a children's worker who was in there as well. I then had, because of my connections with Shetland, had had lots of queries, actually, from Shetland so I went to, on one of my holidays, and I negotiated with the social work department and various others to volunteers really to set up Shetland Women's Aid, all of which, well Shetland Women's

Aid is still on the go, Moray Women's Aid is still on the go, Grampian of course, yeah, which I am absolutely delighted about.

I mean, Women's Aid has come a long way up here but it was just people constantly being reminded it does happen and it doesn't matter who you are, you know, from the real problem families. We had various workers that came to us who ... MSCP [Manpower Services Commission, non-departmental public body that funded employment and training opportunities] where we got students that came along from the social work department, health visitors, we had a refuge health visitor; anything that we felt, actually, that was required, we had. We had a children's worker who worked in a bigger refuge with children and that was really good. The children, I have to say something about the children; the children, I mean, who see what's going on, or who hear what's going on, there are very few of them that don't come through it without marks. I know my own family, my son after we left, he didn't want to know anything about his father. My daughter she was, I suppose, really she was bought back, and that was quite sad. Most of the ones that I still know tell me how they have been affected and I do keep in contact with a lot of the ones that I actually worked for. In fact, people come up to me and say, 'Do you remember me? I was in the refuge at such and such at time', and when I think of the, all the hundreds and hundreds of women that we counselled and that...

I set up, in that group, I set up a sexual abuse group which was Grampian Action against Sexual Abuse, and that was another quite an alarming experience in lots of ways. Some people are only ... something triggered off; we had one particular family that was in the refuge and she came as an abused wife but during the time that she was there her husband committed suicide and when the police woke me up at 2 o'clock in the morning and I went with them to the refuge and they were asking about the family, and she said the only close family she had was her father, and they said, 'Well, we will get hold of him', and suddenly she just absolutely broke out into the most horrific state and said, 'No, I can't go to him, I can't go to him', and they couldn't understand that, and I took her, actually, through into the office and I asked her what's happened and she then, actually, disclosed that he had abused her for years and that was

something else, that was something that I had never experienced, and so there was all these sometimes disclosures of sexual abuse. We had another one, she was deaf and that was another, a huge case in some ways, the language of course. I mean, I could speak sign language, very little, BSL or anything, but she used to come into the office and [if] I wasn't there she would have gone into one of the rooms and she would have sat on the floor behind the door until I came in so that she could speak to me. So, these are all new experiences for us as workers but we did, in fact, actually take on somebody to be a sexual abuse worker as well, but it's all quite traumatic and, of course again, it's another one people don't want to disclose or discuss or anything else. There were lots of little things.

00:54:50 *You've mentioned getting money and getting workers. I was just wondering how it was to get money to have staff and that kind of thing?*

Well, that is a big situation which caused me a lot of grief at times. From the time that we started we had no money. 1992 I think, well 1990 I started ... well, I had been asking forever a day for support from social work but there was nothing forthcoming, and then about 1990 I was thinking of retiring, after all this time I was thinking of retiring, and I asked for money and I got this letter back which more or less just said because of the huge voluntary input that there was no money, and I'm afraid, actually, [I] just saw red at that point and I put on my coat and I took off for Woodhill House at a great rate of knots and just sat there until the director spoke to me. She was in a meeting but I just sat there, I wasn't going to move anywhere until they told me the reasons why. But it was down to a couple of councillors who obviously had a bee in their bonnet about women and violence, but anyway the following meetings I got money and we employed an administrator to take over for what I had, but I had been chair everything else, general dogs body...

And all things.

...so I was, and I stayed on for a short time as just advisor to the group but then I could see that they were managing fine and they obviously had ideas, they had their own things that they

wanted to do and that was fine, you know, I felt that I'd done my bit, but I am so delighted actually that Grampian Women's Aid is still going.

00:57:14 *One thing I was wondering about was about other things that were going on at the time. I am wondering if there was anything you were aware of, for instance in politics or with other organisations, was there any kind of thing going on, because I'm thinking I was young in the time that you're describing is, you know, the women's movement and the rise of feminism and stuff, where do you think that the work that you were doing would fit in with those kind of things?*

I have to say that when we started, well when we started first ... In fact, I think the Scottish Women's Aid started first there was very much that people saw ... We were labelled to some degree, we were feminists, we were men haters, anything.

So the word feminist was a negative word?

Yeah. Well, I mean, I think, actually, when women were trying to get through the message, and, of course, it was all women that were trying to say we don't want this, we are putting our feelers out and it has got to stop. I think that, of course, everybody saw us, actually, as the bra burning wild women so I think, it did a lot of damage up here, it did a lot of damage up here because, and especially because there was a little bit of a rift and we had to kind of get over that and we had to make people realise that we were just human beings being badly used, saying we are not accepting this any longer, but I mean there was still, it is probably not so long ago, actually, that that attitude has kind of changed. Somebody said to me the other day, 'How can you still be defending women when you see on Facebook women knocking seven bells out of one of the other women?'. Apparently, it was something that had been on Facebook and it had been this woman, this young girl absolutely kicking the living daylights out of another one, and I mean violence is not acceptable whoever it is and it doesn't look very good, so I think, actually, there is still people picking up on that and saying, 'Oh well, the women are tough', or you will hear somebody say, 'Well, I wouldn't have blooming well, actually, chanced my luck with her', but those things ... I mean, we were just trying to let people see that we were just normal

families, and, as I say, I would take them out, actually. To those that wanted to be we could go on a picnic or raise money and 22 went to Italy on holiday and we had two holiday caravans in Morayshire and we were just normal human beings, but there was still actually... well, I just explained the situation about the sheriff. He probably was real glad that he didn't have to face me too often but it was just some of these things, actually, that you wanted to change. People still say, and this person that was sitting next to me said, 'Well, if somebody battered me I would just be right out of that door', and I just think to myself, 'Well, maybe it might not actually happen', but there is no excuse for it and okay, if it is going to happen let there be facilities out there to make it easier for folk to... Housing is obviously a big thing. When I moved into my house a friend came in and took my few personal belongings that I had and I had one camp bed, two sleeping bags, three floor cushions, a guitar and two teenagers, and I set the things on the floor of the lounge and I wept, I thought, 'What am I doing here, I have nothing', so those were hard days. Now, I mean, now there are facilities available that people can, in fact, be provided. My parents came down and they were the ones that bought me my suite and carpeted the house but it was hard going but you strive, actually, to make it a better life, and I always think, actually, the determination to help others was probably the thing that made it easier for me because I was always keeping thinking of that others and not really myself.

01:02:58 *In some ways you are saying that you had the drive to do that but that was also to help yourself...*

Oh yeah.

...and focus and move forward.

Yeah, but, I mean, you know, I have not come through it unscathed because health-wise I have suffered in lots of ways. I had lots of injuries which, of course, it has not helped; I have high blood pressure and, you know, damage that's been done and that. At one time, he broke my thumb and I jumped into the car, or I ran out of the house, jumped into the car and I drove and I drove through a red light at the top of Hoburn Street and this policeman stopped me and, of

course, I was ... the tears were just tripping me and he drove me to Woolmanhill [hospital] and he said, 'Do you want to press charges?' and I said, 'No, I just want to get it sorted', but just things like that, it wasn't good.

01:04:07 *This is a question; what kind of impact then do you think that Women's Aid has had for women and their children?*

I think that Women's Aid has actually been a godsend for some women coming from these situations. I know through cases I worked for, some were successful, some women were so conditioned that they believed it was acceptable for the way that they were treated. They might have come once and they might have, I don't know whether they heard what they wanted or they might have decided it was too much of a problem to get out and they have just remained in it. Women always were told the choice has to be theirs. We have had very sad cases. We have had women who have committed suicide, we have women who've been really badly damaged, we have women who died as a result of their injuries, we have had many, many sad, sad cases that I can think of, but we always hope that women themselves actually will have enough strength and I always – well, maybe whether I am right or wrong – I always used to feel that sometimes when I was able to say to them, 'But I do know what you're going through. I have been there myself, that sometimes that has given women strength, actually, to move on. I met a young woman the other day who came up to me and she looked at me and she said, 'You don't remember me?', and I went, 'Face is familiar but I can't remember your name', and she said to me, 'I was at Women's Aid', and she said, 'My mum used to ring you every day to see how I was when I was in the refuge and she said you were my life saver', and I just thought how nice that was. It was nice to know that she's out and she's in another relationship and very happy, but she says that her son has had severe problems about his relationship with people because of the experiences he had and that's where it all gets a bit sad.

01:06:57 *I know that you have recently reconnected with Grampian Women's Aid, so I was just wondering if you had any comment or any thoughts or, I suppose, hopes and aspirations for the future of Women's Aid?*

I have to say, actually, I was a little bit apprehensive because I thought it was such a long time since I had actually – although I have seen people from Grampian Women's Aid – since I had actually been in contact and I wondered, actually, how I would feel about it, but I really ... I mean, I was so comfortable going back into it and I had been someone who was a victim going back into that atmosphere I think it would have done me a lot of good, but as a person, actually, who had been so heavily involved in it I was absolutely delighted; the lovely warm feeling, the genuine feeling, actually, [of] these women. I'm sad that it is still required but it's good to see the Grampian Women's Aid has survived, that it's helping women out there and I hope it will be there for as long as people need it. I think you are all doing a wonderful job at Women's Aid. One side of me, I want to know more, which is I don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, and will certainly be there to support them in anything that I possibly can but no, I think actually that it is necessary. I am pleased to see that things are moving on although I also realise that a lot of the things that I was saying way, way back when we first started it is only getting through now, which is kind of sad really. The police have taken on quite an active role which is good because I feel, actually, when I started there was a bit of negativity about it. The legal system I am not sure about. I sat three years in the court recording the Matrimonial Homes Act and in some ways that, that's, it's good, it's moved on in some ways but there are other little negative things. Somebody said to me the other day, 'Oh well, the timescale for anything legal is just so long now', and I suppose legal aid and all these other things, actually, that are required it's not any easier, it's not any easier to get. Benefits, well they are always changing the benefits, you don't know whether it's going to be helpful or not.

My one concern now, there is a lot of foreign nationals in here and I know some of them are going through real bad times. I am not quite sure where that all fits in actually with Women's Aid given that if that they have not been in for five years they don't get, well this is just ordinary people, don't get benefits or housing benefit, and I hear a lot of that through my involvement with the foreign nationals, and so I am a wee bit worried about that, where it all goes. We've had, when I was there we had people from different countries that came and had to work quite

hard, actually, with it. Sometimes it was language difficulties, sometimes it was them wanting to go home and not having any money and where did we get money from, and I remember one woman wanting, actually, to go back to her parents in New Zealand and we had to wait until money came from her father before we could then arrange how she was going to get out of, well, it was a caravan that she stayed in, and get her back. We eventually were successful in that. It's just, you just wonder, actually, how much has changed with it. We had some pretty difficult experiences as workers with Women's Aid, looking back on them now, at the time they were a bit stressful. At one time I got a parcel delivered to my house and when I opened it I thought it was a purse from my sister in Australia, although I hadn't looked at the outside, but I discovered it was a dead rat and this had been sent by one of the husbands.

01:12:21 *Of the women you were supporting, one of the husbands of the...?*

Yeah, one of the, yeah, this one of the... the only thing is that he blotted his copy book because he went somewhere one night and he was overheard by another member of the Women's Aid, or a person that was being helped by Women's Aid, that he had sent this to me and that he had a whole deep freeze full of them to send, so the police, actually, found that quite amusing but at the time it was a little bit scary. We sometimes, we had some really good police officers who were on hand if we needed them; often we were challenged either in the street if they recognised us or outside the office, or one time actually we had emblazoned over the front of a white board that was outside one of our offices graffiti, not very nice I have to say, slamming us for the work we did. So there was lots of kind of dicey situations but we got through it, we got through it. But no, Women's Aid, if it hadn't been for Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid and that article I would not probably have known where to go or what to do but to me it was just a lifeline that was thrown when I desperately needed it. As I say, I married in '62 and it just never stopped, and even after I left he seemed to ... Only once did he say, 'I realise I have been a fool' – he must have been having a better moment at that time – but I think he was always thinking, of course, that come time I would go back but no, it was not good times. Strangely enough,

there are some things that ... I mean, like if I watch the television and there's violence I can't watch it, I have just got to switch it off, so it's got...

It stays, somewhere it stays.

Yeah [inaudible 01:14:50].

Okay, is that a good place ... I think that we are just going to finish up. Is that alright and I will stop the recording?

End interview