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Domestic Abuse Services

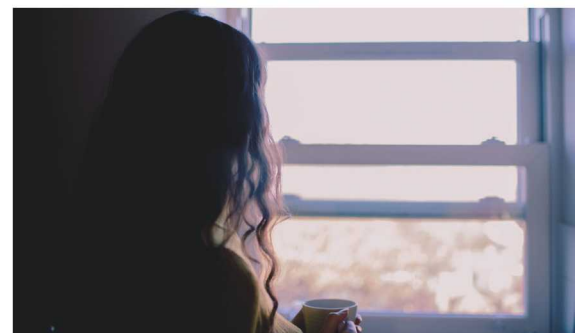
For over 40 years, Housing for Women has been supporting women and children in London escaping domestic violence and abuse.

Improving your homes and services

Happy New Year. And welcome to Connect – your Residents Newsletter for 2022 and beyond.

After a restful winter break, we're back and busier than ever. We've hit the ground running in January and have lots lined up for the year ahead. Our new repairs service delivery partners MCP are now well embedded in Housing for Women and we hope you're seeing the difference when it comes to reporting and dealing with your repairs. Thanks to your feedback we're continuing our work on damp, mould and condensation.

This quarter we're introducing Emma, a new member of our Special Projects and Supported Housing Team, as well as sharing some inspirational prose from a woman living in our Ealing Refuge. Plus we've got tips for looking after your wellbeing this winter, including volunteering opportunities – a proven way to gain confidence and boost your mental health.



Keeping you informed

We always want to make sure we are delivering great homes and services; in fact it is one of our key objectives. An important part of this is the way we communicate with you, in a regular and informative way, which keeps you up-to-date and lets you know what you can expect from us.

Newsletters

Each quarter we publish and print our Residents Newsletter, Connect.



Annual review

Each year we publish our Annual Review, setting out what we have achieved in the previous twelve months.

We'll take a look back at some of the highlights from the year, share experiences from some of our tenants and service users, and publish the figures, which demonstrate the impact we have had while delivering value for money for our customers.

Our website

From ways for you to get involved with your Housing Association and neighbourhoods, and accessing your housing services online through our Customer Portal, to our update and latest news, the Housing for Women website contains lots of useful information about what it's like to live with us.

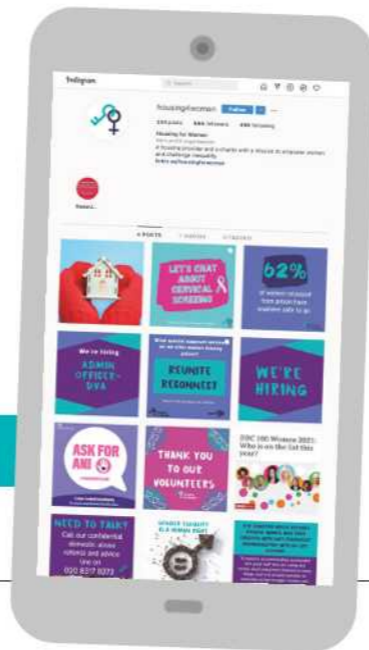
www.hfw.org.uk

Social media

You can stay up to date with community information, Housing for Women's updates, and news from the sector on our social media pages. We're on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.



@Housing4Women



Keep it clear

Protect your family and neighbours from fire!



Help reduce the risk of fire

Please remove any objects that could burn or get in the way of an escape route or prevent the emergency services from getting into your home.

Don't leave rubbish in the way

Please make sure stairs, landings, corridors and garden areas are kept clear at all times.



Zero tolerance

Communal areas must be kept clear. We have a zero tolerance policy to items left in communal areas.

If you see a fire-risk, don't walk by, help keep it clear!



THANK YOU!

Looking out my window

For over 40 years, Housing for Women has been supporting women and children across London escaping domestic violence and abuse. We provide practical and emotional support to survivors. One resident, Genevieve Reid, shares her journey with us, finding salvation and peace while looking out her window.

“ Once in a while, I have wondered if I did something terrible in my life for which I am being punished. A long, slow punishment that has unfolded over more than six years. All I ever need to do is think that there are babies with Cancer to jolt me out of any self-pity. Unthinkable traumas and tragedies such as that tend to give perspective to almost everything in life. **Perspective**

And yet, as I look out of my window, I find myself rewarded for any good I have done in my life. My Safe Place in my Safe House is a room on the first floor that I can call my own. A beautiful room full of light and space; a room with an almost 180 degrees of three high, wide windows. A veritable Feng-Shui fantasy. An undulating duvet of green unfolds below me in this secret garden. Magpies navigate the low rooftops, sapphire blue feathers catching sunbeams as they bury their beaks

in the soft green moss looking for treats. A fledgling Magpie totters on the edge of a rain-filled barrel... she looks ugly, dull and downtrodden in this developmental stage rather than cute and adorable but her vulnerability is endearing. Little do I know that a mere two weeks later she will be transformed and.. will transition to the beauty bequeathed to her by genetics. **Abundance.**

And then there is that squirrel. I suppose every family has one: the nutter. He fascinates me but eludes any attempts to video him. A bit like UFO sightings, no-one would believe his antics unless they have visual proof. Camera-shy, he ferrets around in the bark chips which surround the children's play-area like a moat. Each sniff and scabble in the dirt is followed by leaps and pounces in the air in some unique celebratory dance. He reminds me to dance as if no-one is watching. He races up and down the wooden beams of the tree house at break-neck speed, then hurtles back down to the bark moat before ending with a flourish; a bold leap onto the soft emerald grass. **Joy.**



Autumn has arrived; the garden is cooler now than the searing heat I arrived in three months ago; hot, terrified, exhausted and dazed. Two chubby, cheeky robins dart between the cool of the shadowy bushes as I watch paparazzi-like to enjoy their orange chests before they coyly disappear again. Wood pigeons sit sturdily on branches like beefy bouncers in a club watching the party-animals whilst the leaves on the trees sway gently from side to side in a light breeze. **Rest.**

One day, as I looked out of my window, a scruffy tree seemed to glow with life. I looked again, my brain needing clarification. This tree always looked like the invisible girl at a party who never gets asked to dance. Yet here it was, the chosen one today; twenty luminous London parakeets perched in and around the tree. It seemed to vibrate with the phosphorescent feathers, green, yellow and the orange of their beaks. It was a rare, sacred spectacle for me as they feasted for twenty minutes, holding fruity orbs in their feet, eating whilst they performed acrobatic feats, hanging upside down to search for more ruby delights... I watched, aware that I

was being filled, my soul refreshed... **Transformation.**

I have watched, transfixed, as foxes have sniffed their way through the garden in bright sunlight in the mornings, the bark moat doubling as a sun lounger to sleep on after a hard night of surviving... Their world a microcosm of the threats, anxieties, uncertainty and challenges that must be overcome in this life: adapt or die. **Survival.**

I wrap a duvet around my shoulders as I listen to the rain outside my window, the sweetest sound when you have lived in Africa. I watch the silver strands fall and I am drenched in gratitude. This chapter of my story, reflected daily in the view outside, is written in a blanket of peace thanks to souls who think of, and work for, the safety of the vulnerable. They live somewhere outside of this window and yet they are present and 'thank-you' punctuates all of my prayers. As each dawn fills this room with light, so I am filled with hope for a new beginning, for strength, self-awareness, growth and positivity, for courage and stability. **Gratitude. Hope.**

Looking after your mental health in 2022

Entering the new year is a good time for a fresh start and a chance to begin the year with a healthy mindset. You may already have some ideas of what you want to achieve this year, and ensuring you spend time looking after your mental health and wellbeing should be a priority.

1. Spend more time in nature

Spending time outside and breathing in the fresh air can have lots of positive side effects on your mental health and wellbeing by reducing feelings of stress, improving your self-esteem, confidence and helping you to meet and get to know new people in your local community. Ways you can spend more time in nature include growing food or flowers, exercising outdoors, or being around animals. A super easy way to spend more time in nature is grabbing your jacket and going for a brisk walk around your local park.

All you really need is a pen and a notebook to keep all of your thoughts together.



2. Try journaling

Regularly reflecting on your thoughts and feelings throughout your day and what you are most grateful for can help increase your self-awareness and understanding of what you find most meaningful. There are loads of books and free apps (e.g. Headspace, Calm, etc) available for journaling, but all you really need is a pen and a notebook to keep all of your thoughts together, you can also use the notes function on your phone.

3. Limit your tech time

Technology helps us stay connected 24/7. However, constantly being attached to gadgets can increase feelings of loneliness because we are social creatures who need physical interactions. So put your gadgets down and go for a walk or grab a coffee with your friends or family. Spending time away from technology also enables you to be more present and live in the moment, which can help you be more mindful by gaining a better perspective on life.

4. Share your worries

It's normal to feel worried or overwhelmed in life. Opening up to people you trust and voicing your concerns can help combat these feelings. Sharing how you feel with others can help release built-up stress and tension that can affect your mental health and wellbeing. There are several helplines and online forums (e.g. BetterHelp, Talk Space, Teen Counseling, etc) where you can find a listening ear if you don't feel comfortable talking to friends or family.



5. Do something for yourself

It's easy to get swept up in the busyness of our daily lives and not have any time left for yourself. It's important to make sure you are doing things that make you happy, such as learning a new skill, trying a new hobby, spending time with loved ones, or simply taking time to run a bath and relax. Taking up a new hobby at the start of a new year is a good way to open you up to new things, shake up your usual daily routine and introduce yourself to a new group of people.

There are lots of big and small ways you can support your wellbeing as we start a new year. The most important thing to remember is don't put too much pressure on yourself and be kind to yourself always.

New year, new challenge

Do you fancy taking on a new challenge this year? Would you like to meet new people and gain some new skills at the same time? Why not volunteer with Housing for Women?



We're lucky enough to be working with amazing volunteers, who share their time, passion and energy, and make an enormous contribution to supporting our services.

From telephone befrienders, to welcome volunteers, or even gaining experience with the property services team, we're always on the lookout for enthusiastic and energetic volunteers to join our team.

For information about how to volunteer with us, contact our volunteer Co-Ordinator, Maria Galan via volunteer4us@h4w.co.uk



For updates on current volunteering roles please visit: <https://hfw.org.uk/support-us/volunteer-with-us/volunteer-vacancies/>



Get out and about for free in London

Thanks to an unseasonably sunny January, we've kicked off our new year by spending lots of time outdoors and reaping the benefits for our mental wellbeing. We've found some great ways for you and your family to get outside for free this winter.

Parks & Gardens

London is home to lots of lovely parks with breath-taking views of the city that are great to visit if you want to get some fresh air and feel at one with nature.

- + **Greenwich Park** offers a stunning panorama view of the city and is home to a small herd of deer which if you're lucky enough you might see on your visit.
- + **St James' Park** surrounds Buckingham Palace, so you can coincide seeing the changing of the guards outside the Palace while at the park.
- + **Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park** has lots of free trails to help you explore the park, including a wildlife, art and London 2012 Olympics trail.
- + **Queen Mary's Rose Gardens** is home to all the main types of roses so is great to visit if you like the idea of being surrounded by pretty colours.



Self-guided walking tours

Around London, there are lots of free self-guided walking tours for you to choose from based on your interests! You can explore the city's past with a historic walk, see the city's spooky side and discover the ghoulish spots or search for iconic movie set locations around the city. Check out **Self-guided walks and trails - City of London** to see what your next adventure could be. If you are a fan of art, there is lots of street art in Spitalfields and Shoreditch that is defiantly worth searching the streets for (there are lots of free street art tours available online).

The Barbican Conservatory

If you don't feel like being outside, hidden on the third floor of the Barbican centre is a beautiful conservatory filled with lots of tropical plants, cacti, colourful flowers, Koi Karp and Terrapins. Spending time in the conservatory can be a great way to escape daily life and enjoy some relaxation. It's completely free you just need to book a time to visit online (it's good to note they only release tickets a week in advance). The Barbican centre also holds free culture events and workshops, so it's worth keeping an eye out for any that may interest you.



There's plenty more to discover, and Visit London <https://visitlondon.com/things-to-do/budget-london/101-free-things-to-do-in-london> have put together a list of 101 free activities you could do.



Meet the team Special Projects Manager

EMMA



Emma joined us recently as our new Special Projects Manager, overseeing the running and day-to-day management of our supported housing and special projects. We spoke to Emma about her background, what attracted her to the role, and how she's getting on.

Tell us a little bit about your background and what brought you to your role at Housing for Women

I grew up in the Midlands and my career began by studying Criminology and Psychology at Coventry University. I did lots of voluntary work during this time for Witness Service, PACT in prisons and abroad which resulted in me wanting a career working with women and helping those disproportionately affected by crime and injustice. I worked for the British Transport Police for a few years in a variety of roles and then began work in the women's sector for Refuge and Victim Support over a further few years, working my way up to a Senior Operations Manager level overseeing women's refuges, IDVA services and a range of other projects. I enjoy managing people and working at a strategic level to support others to deliver life saving/changing services for women.

What is your role and what are they key things you are responsible for?

I am the Special Projects Manager for Housing for Women, which means I am responsible for overseeing the running and day to day management of ReConnect, ReUnite, Safe Space, The Housing Pathway Co-ordinators (HPCs) and our Bronzefield Outreach Project. I am responsible for managing the budgets, signing off the reports and KPIs, recruitment for the projects and any other day to day management tasks that arise. I manage the team at Safe Space and Bronzefield. And I'll help mobilise our new service in Haringey.

What does a typical day at work look like for you?

A typical day for me usually includes a couple of meetings, a check in/1:1 with the staff I line manage and reverting to an ever growing list of tasks that need completing, such as recruitment (interviewing, inducting), updating KPI targets, chasing outstanding issues within the services, responding to emails, auditing, the list goes on. If I am on site, then I tend to get less admin completed and do more supporting staff with anything they need my assistance on, but a large portion of my work includes my computer, emails and spreadsheets.

What is most challenging about your role?

At the moment, I would say the most challenging part of my role is trying to get to grips with all of the different services and prioritising which issues I need to address first. I am naturally very organised and I like things to work perfectly and efficiently, but in my kind of role it is inevitable that some tasks will need to wait as I run out of hours in the day; I struggle with accepting that.

Tell us something you love about your job

So far my favourite part of my job has been getting to know and working with all of the staff at Housing for Women. Everyone has been so helpful and friendly, and there is so much to learn from everyone I have met so far. I am also enjoying learning about the projects and making plans with my teams about how we can build on the services and help them to reach their full potential!

Ways to pay your rent?

Your rent is due each month in advance. It is due on the first day of each month. You can use any of the following methods to pay your rent or other charges:



Direct Debit or Standing Order



Online via the Customer Portal

Visit my.hfw.org.uk



Online using Allpay

Pay online at www.allpayments.net



Telephone

If you have an Allpay card you can call their 24-hour payment line on **0330 041 6497**



Cheques

Please make cheques payable to Housing for Women. Please put your tenant number and address on the reverse.



Shops

You can pay at any shop displaying the PayPoint, Post Office or allpay.net signs



Internet banking

If you bank online, you can set up either a standing order or a one-off payment. Please ensure you quote your tenant reference number as the reference. Please quote Sort Code: **30-00-09** Quote bank Account: **00025164**

Top tips for Universal Credit Claimants

Universal Credit is a new type of benefit which replaces Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Working Tax Credit.

These are our top tips for being organised and making sure that your claim for Universal Credit goes as smoothly as possible.

Accept Your Claimant Commitment

When you make your claim for Universal Credit you must accept your claimant commitment online within 7 days otherwise your claim

will be closed and you will need to start your claim again.

Changes in Your Circumstances

Once you are claiming Universal Credit you are required to maintain your claimant commitment to find work, increase your hours and/or engage in work related activities with your Work Coach. This is called conditionality and if you do not complete it you may face a reduction of your payments.

If you are unable to carry out your claimant commitment due to a change in circumstances, please let your Work Coach know as soon as possible so they can temporarily amend your agreed duties.

Thought about paying your rent by Direct Debit?

Set up today to be automatically enrolled into a £50 gift card prize draw. A new winner will be selected each quarter! To set up visit www.hfw.org.uk/resident-area/rent-charges to download the direct debit form and return it to us.



Paying Your Rent

Paying your rent on time should be a financial responsibility each month. It forms part of the tenancy agreement you have with us. Whether you pay your rent yourself, or it is funded by someone else such as your local Housing Benefit office, it's your responsibility to make sure that your rent gets paid.

Customer Portal

Don't forget you can pay your rent, and book repairs through the Customer Portal.

Sign up now at www.hfw.org.uk/residents/customer-portal



Service Charges

Housing for Women as your landlord is reviewing your service charge, the process for setting it and the consultation with you before any service charge demand is made. You'll only be charged for the services you use. We'll also ask you if there are specific other services you want us to provide.

As soon as your service charge is set we will contact you to discuss any changes.



Problems paying your rent?

If your rent is not paid the money owed is called 'rent arrears'. Rent arrears are a priority debt. Your rent arrears is a priority debt because there are more serious consequences if you don't pay them. The result of not dealing with it could mean losing your tenancy.

Our job in the housing management and income team isn't only to ensure that your rent is paid, but that you have access to all of the support available to enable you to be in a position to do so.

If you are having difficulty paying your rent, you should contact your Neighbourhood Officer on **020 7501 6120** Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, or on Facebook, and Instagram.

Our approach will be caring, empathetic and sensitive.

Your Neighbourhood Officer will inform you were to get:

- + debt advice
- + budgeting advice
- + benefit support, advice and appeals
- + employment support
- + advice on welfare reforms and access to support

If you don't pay

As your landlord we may seek a court order to ensure you pay your rent as and when due. We are here to help you get back on track to clear your rent arrears.

Get in touch today, don't delay!



TAKE NOTE!

Customer Hub

Our new telephone system will make it easier for you to contact us, get through to the right department, and have your questions answered.

As part of the new system, our Housing Officers will no longer have individual mobile telephone numbers. Any previous contact numbers are no longer in use.



All calls need to go through our main number, **020 7501 6120**, so you can get all the help you need.



You can also reach us via email, if this is easier for you:

For general enquiries:
housing@h4w.co.uk

For repairs enquiries:
repairs@h4w.co.uk

Using these specific mailboxes will ensure your questions can be more readily answered by the right department and person.

Visiting your home

We are committed to keeping your home safe and in a good condition, as well as meeting the legal standards required of us as landlords. In order to do this, we will sometimes need to visit you in your home to carry out safety and compliance checks. We are also carrying out a home condition survey to assess the quality of our properties and plan any necessary improvements to your living conditions.

Please help us when we need to come to your home by:

- + Allowing our staff and contractors into your home at an agreed upon time and date
- + Letting us know if you are unable to give us access to your home for any reason
- + Keeping your contact details up-to-date on your records so we can arrange appointments with you.



Complaints and compliments

We aim to provide you with good quality services, but we can only be sure we are succeeding if you let us know. 2020 gave us new challenges in supporting you and delivering our services, and we are always pleased to hear how we helped or how we can improve.

There are a number of ways you can get in touch to give us feedback or make a complaint:

1. Completing the online complaints form:
www.hfw.org.uk/contact-us/complaints-compliments/
2. Emailing us at:
complaints@h4w.co.uk
3. Via the **Customer Portal**
4. Contacting us on **social media** – We will reply via Direct Message to obtain your name and contact details so we can help. Please remember never to share your personal details publicly.

What is 'Connect'?

'Connect' is designed for you, and so if you have anything you would like us to cover in future issues or you have a comment to make, please do let us know by writing to: Connect Editor, Housing for Women, Sixth Floor, Blue Star House, 234 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9SP or emailing **communications@h4w.co.uk**.

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Housing4Women

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