

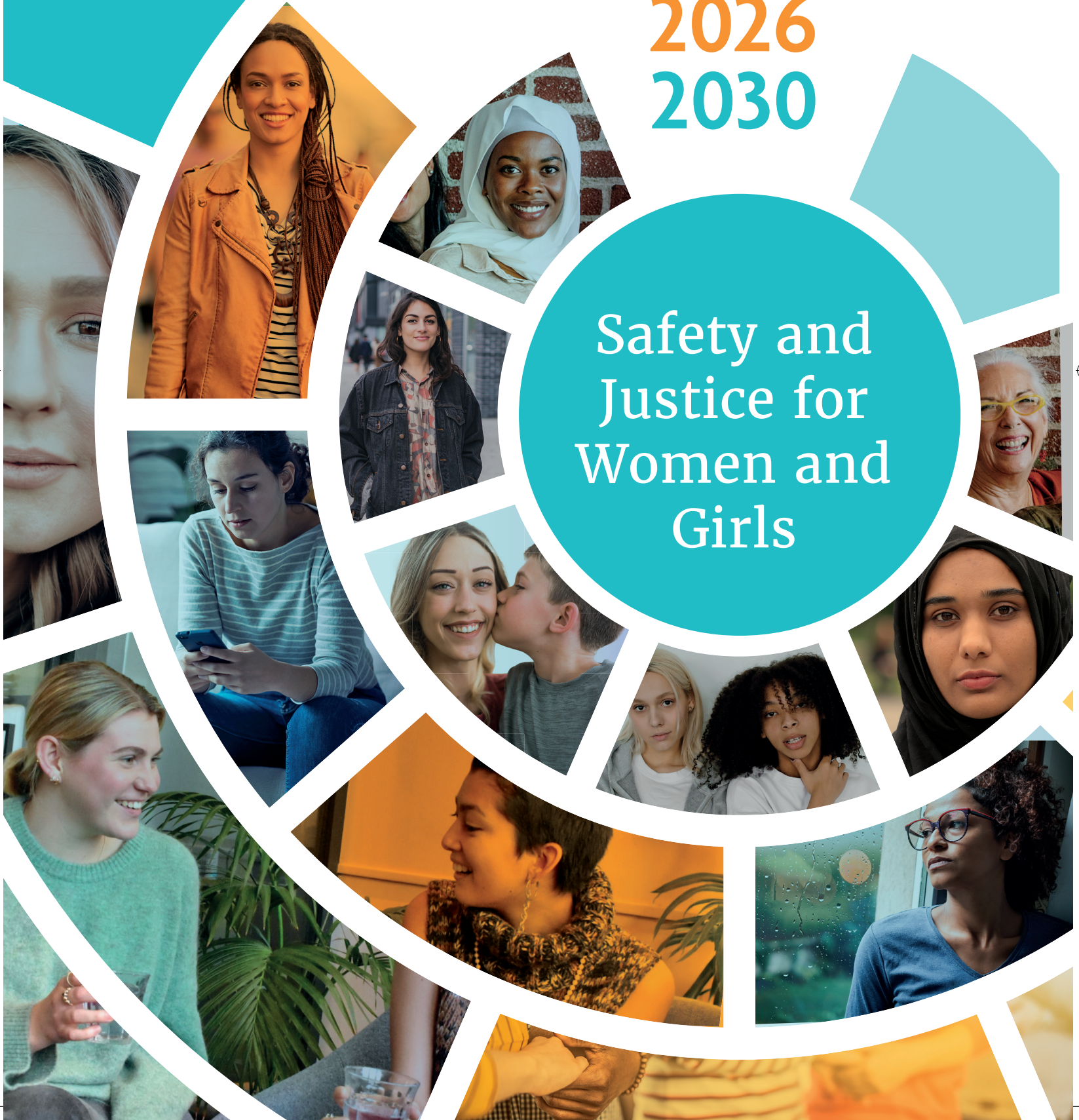


advance

Our Strategy

2026
2030

Safety and
Justice for
Women and
Girls





“We got involved in this in the first place... to change the systems that routinely marginalise the needs of women and children”

Bear Montique OBE and Beryl Foster OBE - Founders

Advance Advocacy and Non Violence Community Education

Advance delivers systems change and trauma and gender-informed community-based support for women and girls affected by domestic abuse, including those in contact with the criminal justice system.

We work nationally through our innovative, best-practice approaches and services informed by evidence and insight.

We deliver wraparound frontline services across the South and East of England, including Greater London.



Charity no. 1086873

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Our Strategy

Our vision is a safe, just and equal world for women and girls.

A world where all women and girls are liberated from violence, injustice and inequality and have the dignity, safety and power to shape and realise their own futures.



Our Mission

This strategy is informed by the lived experiences of the women and girls we support, our wide range of partners, stakeholders, commissioners, funders and sector allies across the country, including our Board of Trustees and the expertise, dedication and insights of our outstanding staff teams across all services.

Women who access our support consistently describe Advance as somewhere they are truly heard and understood, with advocates and key workers who create safety and trust.

Message from Liz Mack Advance's Chief Executive

“ For 28 years, Advance has transformed evidence from women's lived experiences into action; delivering specialist, trauma-informed support for women and girls while challenging the systems that perpetuate abuse and draw women unnecessarily into the criminal justice system.

Through prevention, advocacy, and partnership, we deliver innovative gender-responsive, community-based approaches that reduce harm, support survivors of domestic abuse, and drive lasting systemic change across the criminal justice and wider service landscape. As we approach the next three years and beyond, Advance is focused on demonstrating what works, to build a future where domestic abuse doesn't lead to criminalisation, where women's survival responses are recognised as strength and where early intervention prevents the crises that currently overwhelm our systems.

Our 2026-2030 strategy sets out our response to growing need, and our increased understanding of how systems that affect women operate and our capacity to transform them from within. We remain strategically optimistic because we've seen what becomes possible when women are supported by systems designed for their success, not their failure.



“
*‘I know there's
someone to turn to and
I know I'm not alone’*

Lived Experience Ambassador

The Challenge



Nearly three decades after Advance was established, the systems intended to protect women and girls from violence continue to criminalise their survival and enable perpetrators to extend control, particularly through the criminal justice system.



Increasing demand for support is driven by these unchanged structures, meaning growth alone cannot deliver meaningful change.



Responses to violence against women remain under-resourced and positioned as charitable rather than essential public services.



The Scale of Need

3.8 million

The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 3.8 million people aged 16 and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2025 ¹

30.3%

Nearly one third of women (30.3%) have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 ²

816,493

The police recorded 816,493 domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales in the year ending March 2025 ¹⁴

£66 billion

The economic cost is staggering - domestic abuse alone costs the UK economy an estimated £66 billion annually ⁷

68%

of women in the criminal justice system report experiences of abuse, with the real proportion likely to be much higher. ¹³

Women are significantly more likely to experience high-harm abuse

Women are over three times as likely as men to experience higher numbers of abusive behaviours and impacts—4.1% of women experienced partner abuse classified as ‘Cluster 3’ (highest severity) compared to 1.3% of men³. Moreover, women are more likely to experience higher levels of fear and to be subjected to coercive and controlling behaviours. It is also important to recognise that these experiences occur within deeply rooted structural and societal inequalities⁴. Women are also far more likely to be repeat victims, with 83% of high-frequency victims (experiencing more than 10 crimes) being women³. A significantly higher proportion of people aged 16 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years were victims of domestic abuse in the last year, compared with those aged 25 years and over⁵.

Approximately 20% of children in the UK are living with domestic abuse ⁶

This impacts all aspects of their health and development with long term implications for their wellbeing, relationships and even criminalisation⁸. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognised children as victim/survivors in their own right, and yet too often they are left without services to support them⁹.

Women are disproportionately likely to serve short custodial sentences

Research shows that within the criminal justice system in England and Wales, the majority of women serving these for non-violent offences¹⁰. 2026 updates to the Female Offender Strategy Dashboard show a 23.5% increase since the previous year in those sentenced to custody of less than 12 months¹¹. We know that a high proportion of women involved in the criminal justice system have experienced domestic abuse, coercive control and other forms of gender-based violence, and despite a growing understanding of the intersection of these experiences, this has yet to translate into consistent support and early intervention for women and girls.

Women from minority ethnic groups continue to be over-represented throughout the criminal justice system¹²

The Corston report (2007) written over 20 years ago called for a “distinct radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach for women in the criminal justice system” ¹⁵. The impact of custody and criminal justice responses disrupting women’s lives, homes, families and employment – with the ripple effects of this affecting individuals and families long after their sentence has finished, often leading to cycles of criminal justice involvement through insufficient support, stigma and marginalisation.

The number of women recalled to prison has almost doubled in the last year¹⁶. Ministers, including Lord Timpson and Shabana Mahmood, have acknowledged that “prison isn’t working for women”¹⁷. A different approach is needed supported by evidence showing a 7% rearrest rate for women in Advance’s Diversion service compared with a national average of over 20%¹⁸

Women are disproportionately experiencing all forms of VAWG (violence against women and girls)

A significantly higher proportion of those aged 16 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years were victims of domestic abuse in the last year, compared with those aged 25 years and over¹⁹. Young women under 25 make up just 10% of the female prison population but are more likely than any other group to have experienced trauma such as homelessness, time in the care system and domestic or childhood abuse²⁰. Additionally, Rates of self-harm in women’s prisons are more than eight times higher than those in men’s prisons, with young women aged 18–24 most affected²¹.

7%

Rearrest rate for women in Advance’s Diversion service compared with a national average of over 20%

Rates of self-harm in women’s prisons are more than

8 x Higher

than those in men’s prisons,

The Funding Crisis

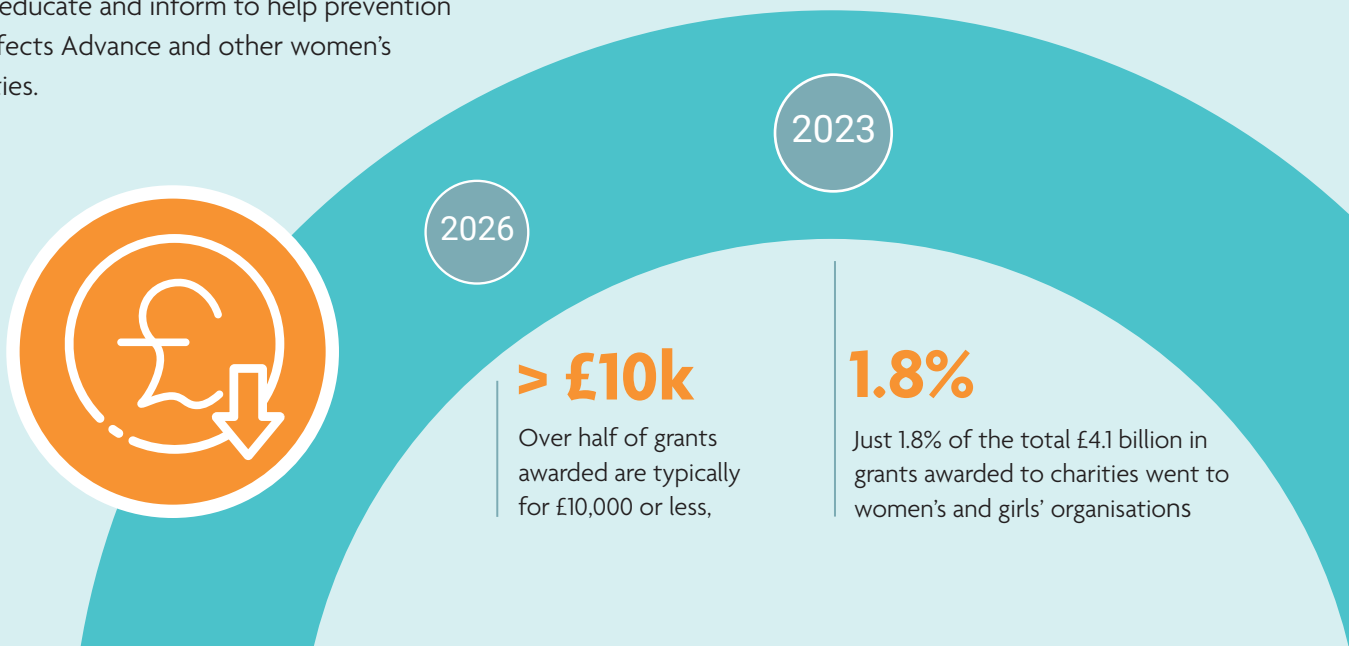
The women and girls’ sector in the UK is in urgent need of investment and support. Over half of grants awarded to women’s charities are typically for £10,000 or less, indicating a reliance on small funding amounts that cannot support sustainable service delivery or organisational infrastructure²².

Despite this, the sector continues to face structural funding inequalities, including short-term funding cycles, commissioning practices that disadvantage specialist women-led organisations and chronic underinvestment in core infrastructure and leadership. Lack of funding to support survivors and develop activities to educate and inform to help prevention especially affects Advance and other women’s sector charities.

Systemic Pressures

Women’s organisations are experiencing sustained increases in demand driven by domestic abuse, poverty, housing insecurity, mental health challenges, rising misogyny, racism and the systemic criminalisation of women. Women and children face complex, intersecting harms that require coordinated, specialist, trauma-informed responses rather than short-term or single-issue interventions.

Workforce pressures are intensifying due to high emotional demands, increasing complexity, and limited support for staff wellbeing and development.





The UK Government's VAWG Strategy ²³

The UK Government's VAWG Strategy was published in December 2025. We have always been, and remain, a community-based organisation which engages with services supporting victim survivors, including housing, health, and social care. This approach directly complements the Government's priorities to build a whole society response to domestic abuse and ensure timely, accessible support for all victim/survivors. Our work is closely aligned with the Government's commitment to improving the justice system's response to women and girls, recognising that they can be both victim/survivors and justice involved.

We provide trauma informed support and work to reform the systems that fail women seeking safety and justice, including when survivors are inappropriately criminalised. Through early intervention with children, young women and girls, we disrupt intergenerational cycles of abuse and prevent escalation into crisis. We are piloting group work that explores healthy relationships with boys, examining beliefs and attitudes towards girls and women that cause harm, supporting the Government's vision for positive models of masculinity.

Alignment with UK Government's Strategic Priorities

Advance's strategic priorities align directly with key government frameworks, positioning us as essential partners in delivering the systemic change these strategies envision.



The Female Offender Strategy ²⁴

Advance provides specialist, holistic, community-based services through our Women's Centres for women experiencing domestic abuse and multiple disadvantage, addressing housing, mental health and substance use needs. Women's Centres also absorb increased demand from suspended sentences and community orders to prevent re-off ending and to address the root causes of off ending that short sentences fail to address. The goal is for early intervention, services that prevent escalation before women reach crisis point, addressing the priorities outlined in the Female Offender Strategy to reduce the number of women entering the criminal justice system. These services operate as effective alternatives to custody,

In addition, we advocate for gender-responsive system reform and sustainable commissioning, ensuring that criminalised victims are protected, and that policy and practice are informed by evidence of what works. We welcome the recently published commitments within the 2026 Womens Justice Board report ²⁵.



The National Youth Strategy ²⁶

Advance's work is closely aligned with the National Youth Strategy: Youth Matters (2025), which seeks to ensure that every young person has the skills, opportunities, relationships and safe spaces necessary to thrive.

With 28 years of specialist experience, Advance contributes to the development of a skilled workforce and integrated, community-based service models that provide trusted adults and consistent support. Our preventative work with girls disrupts intergenerational cycles of abuse, while our emerging programmes with boys address harmful gender norms and misogynistic influences, supporting a commitment to fostering positive pathways for young men.

Through Women's Centres and holistic community provision, we provide the safe spaces and integrated support that many young people report lacking in their local areas. Our violence against women and girls (VAWG) work further addresses the disproportionate safety concerns experienced by girls and young women, promoting respectful relationships, consent and healthy attitudes, while ensuring specialist support is available when harm occurs.

What We Doand Why it Works

Our Services



Specialist Support for Survivors

Advance provides specialist, trauma-informed emotional and practical support to survivors of domestic abuse, women in contact with the criminal justice system, and young women and girls enabling increased safety, wellbeing, housing security, and knowledge of rights.



Prevention and Community Engagement

Advance works to prevent and reduce domestic abuse through public education and awareness raising, community engagement and collaboration with voluntary and statutory agencies, including specialist work with children, young women and girls.



Women's Centres

Our women's centres are safe, private spaces where women and girls supported by Advance can access emotional and practical support, meet with their keyworker and take part in a variety of activities, as well as access to broader support services in one location.



Domestic Abuse Services

Our Domestic Abuse Services provide crisis support and safety planning for women and girls through our Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA) services. Advance's expert teams and partnerships manage safety risks and create a tailored support plan for every woman to protect her from further harm, including homicide and suicide.



Criminal Justice Services

Through our Criminal Justice Services we provide women with support at the point of arrest, in the community, on probation and upon release from custody. Our support is both practical and emotional, with expertise from specialist partners.



Young Women and Girls Services

Advance's Young Women and Girls Services provide support for families and children from five years old and girls and young women from 13 to 24 years old affected by experiences of domestic abuse. We also deliver specialist support for girls 15 years old and over in contact or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system, who are often victims of abuse including online abuse and violence themselves, demonstrating the importance of gender and age informed models like Advance's Bloom Hub.

What We Do.... and Why it Works

Our Approach



Advance achieves impact through delivering and advocating for holistic, community-based and gender-responsive responses that address root causes of harm, prioritising early intervention and integrated services over short custodial sentences.

Through partnership working and system-wide collaboration, Advance delivers coordinated responses that reflect women's societal barriers and intersecting identities.

The Evidence Base



Evidence demonstrates that women-centred, trauma-informed approaches deliver substantial social and economic value.

Recent research estimates the lifetime economic cost of sexual violence and abuse against children and adults in England and Wales at over £400 billion²⁷.

Research shows that trauma-informed organisational approaches can reduce costs significantly, including a 92% reduction in costs associated with restrictive interventions²⁸. This evidence highlights the critical opportunity for strategic investment in women-centred services to achieve sustainable provision, systemic change, and long-term prevention that delivers both social impact and economic return.

“

‘I’m glad there is an organisation like yourselves because I don’t know where I’d be if I didn’t have the support and help I’ve had along this way’

Lived experience ambassador

”

Advance's Three Year Strategy

2026-2030

We provide community-based, trauma-informed support for domestic abuse and for those in the criminal justice system as well as where the intersection of these systems affects women and girls disproportionately.

Delivering this strategy depends on having the right foundations in place. Alongside our programmes and services, we will invest in the people, partnerships, systems, financial resilience and governance needed to enable excellence, innovation and sustainable growth. These enablers ensure that Advance can respond to increasing need while maintaining quality, safety and impact.



Our Strategic Priorities

Deliver safe, effective and impact-focused services

Disrupt the pipeline through prevention and early intervention

Maintain the excellence of our specialist services, delivering meaningful, measurable improvements in outcomes for women and girls.

Break cycles of harm and create lasting impact by addressing root causes earlier. Collaborate with specialist organisations at the earliest opportunity to identify and understand how women face intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage.

Provide community-based, trauma-informed support to women experiencing abuse, and women in the criminal justice system.

Prevention as a priority, ensuring provision which disrupts cycles of abuse and systemic failure for women and girls.

Provide specialist approaches at the intersection of domestic abuse and criminal justice.

Prevention focused delivery for women at risk of, and involved with the Criminal Justice system, through empowerment and a person first approach.

Scale evidence-based Children and Young People Model recognising the need to support children and young people in their own right, aligned with National Youth Strategy.

Develop and deliver prevention work with men and boys through a systemic lens, contributing to the reduction of violence against women and girls supporting long-term cultural and behavioural change.

Influence policy and drive system-level change

Build a sustainable, high-performing organisation

Use evidence, insight and the voice of lived experience to shape effective and equitable systems. Combine knowledge and data with specialist partners to advocate for how identities intersect to create unique systemic barriers, and how to overcome these.

Ensure financial strength, operational resilience and a culture that empowers and retains talented people.

Be a credible, authoritative source of front-line, lived-experience informed evidence on women and girls' experiences of domestic abuse, and the criminal justice system, and what happens at their intersection.

Create a sustainable financial future through the diversification of income streams to enable unrestricted spend on innovation.

Deliver longitudinal research demonstrating the successful prevention of criminalisation, generational patterns of abuse, the effectiveness of trauma-informed alternatives and the resulting societal and economic impact.

Invest in building an organisational culture where people feel respected, supported, and able to do their best work. Create an environment that prioritises psychological safety, open communication and a shared sense of purpose, with wellbeing as a core organisational priority.

Support the implementation of government's VAWG strategy to reflect community-based, trauma-informed approaches and address criminalisation of victim-survivors.

Build quality infrastructure that enables excellence through technology and systems.

Our Strategic Priorities

Deliver safe, effective and impact-focused services

Disrupt the pipeline through prevention and early intervention

Service provision grounded in a contextual approach to Safeguarding at the core of all practice.

Develop and deliver programmes on Digital Safety and Literacy.

Co-design services alongside those with lived experience, developing provision that meets unmet need.

Work with Community Groups, Employers and First Responders - Extend Prevention Reach Beyond Statutory Services.

Commitment to an intersectional approach to delivery with specialist organisations to offer the most effective services.

Deliver early intervention which supports prevention and addresses root causes.

Influence policy and drive system-level change

Build a sustainable, high-performing organisation

Establish national visibility through innovation, raising awareness and knowledge sharing in reference to both domestic abuse and online abuse support and women's experiences of the criminal justice system, specifically via the realisation of the Female Offender Strategy and Women's Justice Board strategy.

Scale sustainably to meet unmet need, responding to organisational requirements.

Lead gender-informed responses to criminal justice reform, informed by a long-term understanding of women's progress through the justice system.

Support service user needs and build a sustainable high-performing organisation through responsive community-based delivery.

Influence policy change around the importance of women's centres as critical infrastructure, resourced sustainably and contributing beyond individual support to community transformation.

I felt like someone understood me, and I felt heard. I appreciate your help.

Lived Experience Ambassador

Stakeholder Feedback & Themes

“
Advance are the glue between services; without you, people fall through the gaps.
 Local Authority Commissioner



Advance as Trusted Partner

Stakeholders consistently described Advance as a vital, trusted partner bridging the gap between the domestic abuse and criminal justice systems. The organisation’s dual expertise gives it credibility and enables visibility of cross sector priorities and practice.

Systemic Barriers and Sector Gaps

Stakeholders pointed to persistent gaps: housing and mental-health provision, inconsistent diversion pathways, racial disproportionality, and an over-reliance on under-resourced voluntary services. Re-integration and continuity of care remain vulnerable times—especially at custody-to-community transition points. A key theme that emerged was to develop support around digital and online safety, particularly for young women and girls.

Partnership and Equity: From Transactional to Transformational



Many partners celebrated stronger collaboration in recent years and called for deeper co-design, transparent communication and power-sharing with “by-and-for” organisations, to model equitable, feminist partnership practice across the women’s sector..



Workforce Capacity and Wellbeing, Sustainability and Growth

Funders recognise that Advance’s impact depends on a resilient, supported workforce. There are sector constraints leading to the need to secure unrestricted income to enable working with women and girls in innovative ways, for as long as they need us. There was staff recognition for the need to develop systems which create the conditions for the most effective delivery.

Evidence, Influence and Voice

Stakeholders encouraged Advance to build and share a strong evidence base: via a triangulation of clear outcomes data, lived-experience insights and proactive messaging across media and policy spaces. The organisation’s feminist voice is seen as credible and influential, and needs to be amplified further across national forums, and media channels.



Informing Our Strategy Development

“
I’m teaching my boys – I’ve broken the cycle.
 Woman with lived experience
”

Breaking Cycles Requires Early Education and Generational Change

Women who have survived abuse are committed to preventing it for the next generation. They want to teach children—including boys—different ways of relating to others and see this prevention work as essential to their own healing and legacy. Stakeholders and staff teams recognised the importance of early intervention and close working with education, families and youth settings.

Training and Skills Development Enable Long-Term Change

Women who benefited from peer mentoring describe it as uniquely empowering and received as a core element of all that we do; however barriers exist including statutory vetting requirements. Women credit Advance’s comprehensive training programmes with giving them both practical skills and the confidence to build new futures.

“
Training was phenomenal”
 Peer Mentor
”

“
Really important part of the work – I left school with no qualifications, now I can support others
 Peer Mentor
”

“
23 years of violence and emotional abuse never leaves you
 Woman with lived experience
”

Trauma is Long-Lasting and Requires Sustained Support

Contributors emphasised that recovering from domestic abuse is not a linear process. Incidents of violence and control remain with women for decades and cannot be resolved through short-term interventions or simple advice.

How You Can Make a Difference to Advance

Collaborate with us

Collaborate with us. We value partnership and whole systems approaches to create lasting change in women's lives.

Follow us

Follow us on our social media and repost to learn more about our work and to raise awareness of our approach and why it works to help influence UK Government policy on the issues and systems that affect us most.

Support us

Support our fundraising efforts. As a supporter, as a person of influence or as a major donor, you could support Advance to significantly impact women and children's lives. With your philanthropic help, we can continue to grow and reach more women and children to deliver our mission of a safe, just and equal world for women and girls.

Amplify our voice

Tell someone about our work and our research that uses practice-based evidence to identify and develop responses and amplify the voices of women with lived experiences, to raise awareness on the issues associated with domestic abuse, and women involved in the Criminal Justice System.



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