

# South Wiltshire Domestic Violence Forum

## Salisbury Women's Refuge

**“As I walked through the door, for the first time in many years I felt safe and secure”**

*- a victim of domestic abuse arriving at the Refuge*

As the name suggests, the primary function of the Refuge is to provide a safe haven for women and their children fleeing domestic violence. Residents can arrive at the front door via a number of routes including the Police, hospital A & E Departments, Social Services and, on occasions, self-referral.

Once settled and through the initial trauma of their own personal circumstances, the next goal is to assess a resident's individual needs and provide a tailor-made support package to enable them to reach the ultimate goal of independent living. This may involve training in life skills, IT literacy, CV building and interview techniques, legal help and support as well as accessing benefits. Whatever the solution, it is only ever implemented following consultation and agreement with the client.

All this is very disruptive and worrying for the children so there is a need to bring a level of normality to their lives as quickly as possible. Of utmost importance is ensuring that their educational needs are met, and to this end support with schooling provision is offered along with weekly homework clubs and, if needed, the luxury of individual tuition. The Refuge has access to the Educational Welfare and School Liaison Officers who understand the very special needs of children in these difficult circumstances.

A major goal for residents is to secure their own accommodation. This is achieved through regular housing surgeries at the Refuge, where Salisbury District Council housing advisors visit to provide practical support and advice, including information on the availability and types of property in and around the Salisbury area. The average length of stay at the Refuge is currently around 6 months. When residents leave, the Refuge continues to take an interest in their progress and ex-residents who have successfully made the transition to independent living will often visit to keep in touch and offer peer support to those who have subsequently arrived.

A recent extension to the services offered by the Refuge is the provision of an Outreach Worker. This service is available to all former residents. The facility offers support with matters such as helping with tenancy agreements, utility contracts, schooling provision, local doctors and dentists and, if needed, Health Visitors. Outreach visits are maintained until the client feels she can once again cope without this support.