

A year of challenge and change

As I approach eight months in post, I am pleased to share that, following my six-month period as Interim CEO, I have now been formally appointed as the permanent Chief Executive of Gilgal. Co-production and lived experience are central to my values, and I firmly believe that the voices of survivors should shape the services we deliver. For this reason, I was pleased to have a panel of women who are currently supported by Gilgal participate in my interview.

This year has brought significant challenges for Gilgal, but our staff have continued to work tirelessly, supporting well over 50 women and 38 children. Throughout this period, Gilgal Birmingham has remained steadfast in delivering its core services, providing safe refuge accommodation for women and children escaping domestic abuse. Our residents have continued to receive specialist support, advocacy, and counselling to rebuild confidence, address trauma, and prepare for moving out into the community. Our dedicated children's service has offered emotional and practical support, including play-based interventions and opportunities for recreation and development. Across the year, Gilgal has continued to deliver life-changing support, with strong outcomes for women in the areas of financial stability, community connection, education and employment, parenting, and immigration.

We are now evolving our service model to extend beyond refuge provision and deepen our reach into communities. Gilgal is developing new outreach support

and community drop-in sessions in partnership with Bethel Healing, Iridium Practice, West Heath Community Centre, and Small Heath Baptist Church – creating safe and accessible spaces for women to seek support in settings that feel familiar and welcoming. More locations are in development, so watch this space. We are also in the process of establishing our own Women's Hub, an exciting new offer that we aim to open in January, with further details to follow.



In addition, we are partnering with Beyond the Horizon to provide children in the community with access to specialised play therapy, extending our commitment to trauma-informed support beyond refuge.

I want to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to our staff, volunteers, and trustees. Their commitment, compassion, and resilience ensure that Gilgal continues to be a lifeline for women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Your dedication is at the heart of everything we achieve, and I am truly grateful for all that you do.

Elisabeth Sheppard
CEO, Gilgal Birmingham



Lis and the team helping to #OrangeTheWorld for the 16 Days of Activism campaign

When potential meets opportunity: Charlotte's Gilgal story



Charlotte, Support Worker and IDVA at Gilgal

Charlotte is one of Gilgal's dedicated Support Workers, providing emotional support to our residents as they begin to heal from abuse and rebuild their lives. Since stepping into the role in January 2024, she has brought warmth, empathy, and professionalism to everything she does, and confidently passed her probation the following June. But her connection to Gilgal started well before that.

After four years studying a degree in Social Work – a course which took her on travels across Spain, the Netherlands, and South America – Charlotte arrived in the UK full of hope and eager to make a difference. She dreamed of supporting vulnerable children and adults, but soon faced an unexpected hurdle: to become a Social Worker in the UK, practical placement experience is essential, and Charlotte's degree hadn't included it.

Despite her excellent qualifications and academic track record, she struggled to find work in her field. Still determined to contribute and grow, Charlotte joined an agency and soon interviewed for a cleaning job at Gilgal, helping maintain communal spaces like kitchens and bathrooms. She approached the role with the same care, attention, and dedication she had shown in her studies, and her warmth and positivity quickly made her a familiar and appreciated presence around the

refuge. Always proud of a hard day's work, Charlotte found meaning in the role, but she knew she had more to give.

Ready to take the next step, she enrolled in a Level 3 Health and Social Care course. Balancing studies with cleaning shifts at Gilgal, Charlotte remembers the kindness and support of her manager at Gilgal; "She encouraged me every step of the way, and she made sure my hours were flexible so I could keep going."

Then came a turning point.

"Everything changed when there was an away day," Charlotte recalls. "It was all about everyone getting to know each other; all the staff were there, and the Board were there too." The day, organised by the CEO, brought together Gilgal staff and leadership to foster connection. When Charlotte spoke about her studies in Spain and her passion for social care, and her work towards her Health and Social Care qualification, her dedication and enthusiasm were evident. Her motivation and desire to make a difference caught the attention of Gilgal's CEO, who offered her the opportunity to train as a Support Worker.

Looking back, Charlotte remembers how discouraging it was to have worked so hard in her studies only to be told she lacked the "right" experience. But Gilgal's belief in her changed everything.

"When someone thinks of a cleaner, you don't normally think they have the kind of skill or the qualifications necessary for this kind of role," Charlotte says. "But there are a lot of students that are doing their studies and working as cleaners at the same time. I'm so lucky that Gilgal saw my potential and helped me get where I am today."

Charlotte is deeply proud of her Social Work degree; it gave her both the knowledge and mindset that have helped her flourish. "I love this role, I love it here. Support Workers and Social Workers are quite similar, but I feel in my current role, I can offer more day-to-day support, which is just as – if not more – valuable to the residents than the responsibility of a Social Worker."

Her journey from Cleaner to Support Worker is a testament to her determination, and a powerful example to the women she now supports. Many are surprised to learn she began her time at Gilgal cleaning the very spaces they now share. Her unwavering positivity is an inspiration. "You have to work for success, but it is very possible," she says.

**"You have to work for success,
but it is very possible."**

Alongside her day-to-day work, Charlotte has continued to grow professionally within the sector. She has completed a range of role-related training, including mandatory modules and a group session delivered by Women's Aid on trauma-informed practice – an approach that now shapes the way she supports residents. Most recently, she achieved her IDVA qualification, marking a significant step in her development. Charlotte puts this new qualification to good use working alongside our sister organisation Bethel, supporting women within their network who are experiencing or fleeing from domestic abuse. These sessions strengthened her skills even further, and



deepened her commitment in providing meaningful support to women during a critical time in their lives.

Charlotte plans to stay at Gilgal for the foreseeable future. "When I came to Gilgal, I knew I wanted to stay. It wasn't just a job, I love my work, the other staff are so nice, and I have the opportunity to do something I'm really passionate about."

To many of our residents, Charlotte is much more than a support worker; she is a lifeline, a source of strength,

and a symbol of what's possible. She brings compassion and hope to everything she does, and her story is a living reminder that dreams can be realised, even in the most unexpected ways.

**"It's amazing to see young ladies
dreaming again and succeeding. I
love it. That's what I want to see."**

Are you in need of support, or worried about a friend?

Abuse can take many forms, and reaching out for advice is the first brave step toward freedom. Charlotte and the rest of the Gilgal team are here to listen, support, and guide you.

**We have extended our support out into the community with
Trusted Community Contact Points.**

These drop-in sessions will provide safe, welcoming spaces where women feel comfortable to seek support for a range of needs. Visit www.gilgalbham.org.uk/drop-in-sessions to learn more, or scan the QR code to get emergency help today.



Introducing our new Practice Lead

Keshia Harper joins Gilgal Birmingham

I'm delighted to introduce myself as the new Practice Lead, having recently joined Gilgal this past September. A lot of my career has been in the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector, rooted in a deep commitment to feminist principles and survivor-centred practice. I join the organisation at an exciting time of transformation and further expansion of our services. My role will be focused on supporting the team through this transition, leading on best practices, increasing our learning and specialism on VAWG, and preparing Gilgal for its Women's Aid Accreditation.

As we begin to expand our services and reach out to women and children in the community, it's a key time for Gilgal to reflect and build on its existing specialism. From my short time in the role so far, I have heard so many testimonies from the women here on how the Gilgal team has made such a positive impact in their lives. It's a privilege to work with such knowledgeable, dedicated and compassionate women, and I look forward to growing alongside this incredible team as we navigate this next chapter.

Keshia Harper
Practice Lead, Gilgal Birmingham



Our new Practice Lead, Keshia Harper

Women's Unity Walk

by Keshia Harper, Practice Lead

On Sunday 16th November, I attended the Women's Unity Walk in Walsall. The event was organised by Roshni Birmingham and attended by many other VAWG organisations from the West Midlands, and members of the community.

The atmosphere was one of strength and hope, as key speakers addressed the crowd on the growing attacks against women in the west midlands. The past few weeks have seen several sexual, racially-aggravated attacks on women who were simply trying to go about their everyday life. These attacks have left many in the West Midlands fearful for female friends and family members, and scared to leave their own homes.

The Unity Walk focused on the power of community and standing against all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). It was an honour to stand alongside so many courageous women – many survivors themselves – and hear them speak out, loud and clear, that women will not be silenced or scared into hiding. The walk was attended by a wide range of people from different backgrounds, ethnicities and religions, showing unity and defiance against those who believe that abuse against women and girls is acceptable. It was a powerful reminder not only why organisations like Gilgal are so vitally needed, but that together we are stronger.



Carol's story

Safety, dignity and a home that meets her needs

Carol arrived at Gilgal in April 2025 after fleeing abuse from someone no mother ever expects to fear – her own adult son. Her experience reflects a hidden but devastating pattern: according to the Femicide Census, **one in 10 women killed by men in the UK over the last 15 years were mothers killed by their sons.** Carol knew she could no longer stay safe in her own home.

At 59, she had always been independent and had even worked in the support sector herself, making it incredibly hard to accept she now needed help. On top of the emotional trauma, she lived with chronic pain, arthritis, and reduced mobility, which made the prospect of moving into a refuge seem both physically and mentally exhausting.

Settling into safety

Carol said she felt welcomed straight away, with both staff and the other residents helping her to feel safe as she settled in. Communal living wasn't always easy; having always had her own space, Carol found it difficult to cope with the practicalities of shared accommodation; especially when her pain was worse, or she felt particularly overwhelmed due to potential OCD or ADHD. Staff supported her patiently, with frequent check-ins and practical adjustments so that daily life felt more manageable.

Getting her benefits back on track

Moving to our refuge meant navigating a tangle of paperwork – updating addresses, sorting Universal Credit and PIP, and completing housing benefit steps. Carol's health issues sometimes complicated the process, and conflicting advice left her anxious about her rights. Gilgal stepped in to liaise with services, explaining each step clearly and making sure her income was stabilised. Carol later said she felt she had "all the support needed", and especially valued having someone to listen, help her to write letters, and "keep her spirits up" throughout the long rehousing process.

Supporting Carol's wellbeing

Carol carried a deep mix of grief and guilt. She still loved her son, but described no longer being able to live "on eggshells" at home. Through keywork sessions, wellbeing check-ins and counselling, she began processing the trauma, rebuilding her confidence, and



developing what she called a "new mindset," focusing on boundaries, calm, and her own safety.

Housing was central to Carol's recovery. She wanted to be close to her daughter, her main carer, and needed a property that suited her mobility needs. Gilgal assisted with her housing application, supporting her in gathering medical evidence, and clarifying her rights whenever there were confusing or difficult moments.

A home built for healing

In October 2025, Carol accepted an offer of a bungalow – the perfect property for her. Gilgal supported her through the move, including follow-up floating support to ensure a smooth transition and continued recovery. During these check-ins, Carol confirmed she was happy, settling in gradually, reconnecting with her daughter's support, and enjoying a home that finally worked with her body instead of against it.

Carol told us she felt safe during her time at Gilgal, appreciated the diverse staff team, and felt her disabilities were treated with respect and dignity. Above all, she felt seen, heard, and supported.

If anything in Carol's story has resonated with you, get in touch today.
Call us on 0800 008 6622 or email us on mail@gilgalbham.org.uk

16 Days of Activism: What we shared, why it matters, and where to get help

Over the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, Gilgal joined organisations across the world in calling for an end to all forms of violence against women and girls. Across our campaign, we shared information, statistics, lived experiences and practical advice, with one clear message: abuse is widespread, often hidden, and no one should face it alone.

We began by setting out the scale of domestic abuse globally, nationally and locally. One in three women worldwide will experience gender-based violence in their lifetime, and every ten minutes a woman is killed by an intimate partner or family member. Here in the UK, police record a domestic abuse-related crime every 30 seconds, yet fewer than one in five women ever report what is happening to them. In the West Midlands alone, more than 84,000 domestic abuse crimes were recorded in 2024, making it one of the most affected regions in England and Wales.

Behind every statistic is
a real woman, a real family,
and a real story.

A central focus of this year’s campaign was digital abuse and the way technology is increasingly used as a tool of coercive control. We explored how abuse can take place through phones, apps, social media, email, online banking and location tracking, often continuing long after a relationship has ended. We shared practical steps women can take to protect their privacy online, guidance on “digitally breaking up” with an abusive ex-partner, and information on image-based abuse, including survivor rights under UK law. Crucially, we highlighted that online abuse is rarely “just online” – it is often linked to escalating control and real-world harm, including femicide.

We also shared guidance for parents and carers on keeping children and teenagers safe online. From grooming and coercion to sexting and “sextortion”, the risks facing young people are serious and evolving. Throughout, we emphasised the importance of open, honest conversations about consent, boundaries and what healthy relationships should look like, alongside practical safety measures.

Lived experience remained at the heart of the campaign. We shared Carol’s story, which highlights the often-overlooked reality of abuse by adult children, and Sarah’s story, which showed how financial and digital abuse can strip someone of independence and choice. These stories are sobering reminders that abuse does not always look the way we expect – and that recovery is possible with the right support.

We also acknowledged that digital and domestic abuse do not affect all women equally. Women facing racism, migration insecurity, disability, homophobia or transphobia are at greater risk of targeted abuse and face additional barriers to safety. In light of recent attacks in Walsall and Oldbury, we stood in solidarity with marginalised communities and signposted specialist, culturally informed support.

GLOBALLY

**ONE WOMAN
EVERY 10 MINUTES**

is killed by an intimate partner or family member

IN THE UK AND WALES

**A CALL FOR HELP
EVERY 30 SECONDS**

is made by a woman in distress to the police

IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

84,702 CRIMES

related to domestic abuse were recorded in 2024

#16Days #OrangeTheWorld



femicide census

According to the
Femicide Census,

**1 in 10 women
killed by men**

in the UK over the last 15 years
**were mothers killed
by their sons**

#16Days #OrangeTheWorld





See the whole campaign on our Instagram - @gilgalbirmingham or scan the QR code.

Alongside awareness-raising, we took time to come together in solidarity. Gilgal staff attended a Birmingham City Council event held under the Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy, joined a two-minute silence to remember those lost to abuse, and added our pledges alongside partners across the city. We also marked Orange the World by wearing orange to our team meeting as a visible show of support for survivors everywhere.

As the campaign drew to a close, our message was simple: if anything we shared resonated with you, help is available. Gilgal offers free, confidential support through drop-in sessions and one-to-one advocacy, delivered by qualified IDVAs and ISVAs, in safe and welcoming community spaces.

While the 16 Days of Activism may have ended, the work continues. Ending violence against women and girls requires ongoing awareness, action and solidarity. By sharing information, supporting specialist services, and speaking out, we all have a role to play.



Gilgal’s Trusted Community Contact Points

Small Heath Drop-in

Held at:
Small Heath Baptist Church,
14 Jenkins Street
Small Heath
B10 0QH

West Heath Drop-in

Held at:
West Heath Community Centre
Hampstead House
Condoover Road
B31 3QY

Whether you’re looking for support, information, or just someone to talk to, our sessions are open to all women. There’s no need to book or call ahead.

For more information, visit www.gilgalbham.org.uk/drop-in-sessions

Jessica's story

Rebuilding safety and stability for a young mum and her son

When Jessica arrived at Gilgal in June 2025 with her two-year-old son, she faced a different sort of challenge to many of the women we support; she was fleeing abuse from her brother within the family home. Leaving meant stepping away from the only home she'd ever known, and creating a painful balance: protecting her child while managing family pressure, guilt, and long journeys back and forth to check her mum was doing okay.

Moving into Gilgal's refuge offered safety, but it was also a huge change.

"I was really worried about being out of my usual area and away from family," she told us. Jessica's little boy struggled to sleep and settle, and she worried about his development with the impact of so many sudden shifts.

At Gilgal, Jessica found space to breathe.

Staff welcomed her into the refuge community, offering a mix of emotional support, practical help, and the everyday kindness she needed to feel less alone. Creative activities, like arts and craft sessions, became moments where she could relax and reconnect with herself.

One of the biggest turning points was securing long-term housing. Gilgal's support with the bidding process, evidence letters, and the endless paperwork involved meant Jessica never had to face it alone. When she was finally offered a two-bedroom flat, staff stood beside her through every stage; from dealing with delays to excitedly preparing for move-in day.

Financial support also made a huge difference. With staff's help, Jessica was able to access the Household Support Fund, Housing Benefit, and a gain a Bettle UK grant, allowing her to furnish her new home and create a warm, comforting space for her son. Refuge staff even helped organise purchases and deliveries so that the flat felt like their own from the moment they walked in.

Alongside this, Gilgal supported Jessica to navigate nursery options, advocate for her son's needs, and link in with health services – reducing her worries and

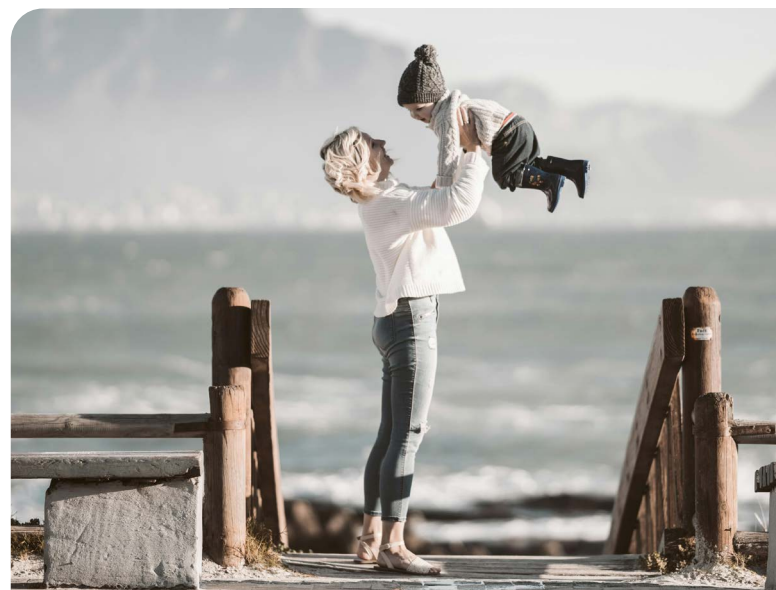
helping her build a stable routine for him. A key part of their journey was the support of Gilgal's Children's Worker. She took time to get to know Jessica's son, offering ideas to ease transitions and giving Jessica reassurance when things felt overwhelming. "The Support Worker was always available when I needed her help." This specialist, child-focused support made Jessica feel heard, guided, and never alone in advocating for her little boy.

In November 2025, Jessica moved into her new home.

She describes it as her and her son's first "magical Christmas"; safe, quiet, and full of the small, ordinary moments she had been longing for.

Today, Jessica is settled, and watching her son thrive in his new routine and environment. Her home is a place of calm and possibility, built step by step with her own determination and the support she found at Gilgal. She is continuing to study her degree in Criminology & Psychology, which she never gave up on despite all the other changes in her life.

This is Jessica's new beginning, and we're all so proud of how far she's come.



Specialist support like Jessica and her son received at Gilgal is only possible thanks to the generosity of our donors.

Help us keep offering this vital service - donate today. Visit www.gilgalbham.org.uk/donations or scan the QR code.



Supporting children through play and healthy living at Gilgal

At Gilgal, we recognise that children affected by domestic abuse require care and support tailored to their experiences. Our Therapeutic Play Practitioner Faye provides Play Therapy - a method of therapy that allows children to communicate without words - both to the children living in our refuge, and in the wider community. The sessions use tools such as sand trays, puppets, art and craft materials, clay, and musical instruments to help children express emotions in ways that feel safe and natural. Play therapy allows children to process trauma at their own pace, supporting their emotional development and wellbeing.



Meet Faye, Gilgal's Children's Worker

Hi, I'm Faye, and I'm a certified Therapeutic Play Practitioner and Play Therapist.

I have a dual role; working within a school delivering therapeutic play sessions with children who are struggling in education; and working with the children in Gilgal's refuge who have experienced domestic abuse.

With 18 years' experience, I have additionally supported families on child in need plans, children in foster and residential care, and preschool children and their mothers through sensory stay and play sessions.

We are also pleased to announce that Gilgal has been awarded £1,500 through the Tesco Stronger Starts programme, following an in-store vote. This funding will enable us to deliver healthy food workshops for children living in the refuge, giving them the opportunity to learn about nutrition, practical cooking skills, and the importance of wellbeing. Tesco Stronger Starts supports community initiatives that improve children's health and learning opportunities, and we are grateful for the support that will directly benefit the children in our care.

Stronger Starts.

These initiatives reflect Gilgal's commitment to providing holistic support for children, helping them to heal, grow, and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.



Thank you to our donors

We are so grateful to every individual, group, and organisation who have donated their time, expertise, and funds to us.



We'd love to stay in touch!

Don't forget to sign up to our newsletter to join the Friends of Gilgal community and receive regular updates like these and more.

You can sign up now by visiting
www.gilgalbham.org.uk/newsletter

or scanning the QR code

