

Reflections and Growth: our CEO's Year in Review



Our CEO Sanja with Gilgal Chair Carly Jones (right) and Vice Chair Sophie Hall (left)

Reflecting on 2024, we do so with a deep sense of gratitude, pride, and determination. This year marked a time of tremendous achievements, challenges, and transitions for our organisation, which has been steadfast in its mission to support women and children escaping domestic abuse. While the road has been far from smooth, our collective resilience, solidarity, and the generosity of our supporters have carried us through. This annual review is not just an account of what we have accomplished together, but a testament to the strength of our community and our vision for a brighter, safer future. It is an opportunity to celebrate milestones, acknowledge challenges, and look ahead with optimism and resolve.

Achievements in numbers

The numbers tell a story of impact, resilience, and hope. In 2024, we received **126 referrals** from domestic violence victims seeking safe accommodation. Despite resource limitations, we provided refuge to **47 women and 28 children** – 75 individuals who found safety and stability within our 19-unit facilities.

Beyond shelter, our work extended to empowering these individuals to rebuild their lives:

14 women transitioned into employment or entrepreneurship, showcasing their resilience and determination.

10 women pursued further education, laying the groundwork for long-term independence and empowerment.

We also actively worked to secure alternative housing

solutions for those referrals we could not accommodate, ensuring no one was left without options.

Among our proudest moments was witnessing each woman's remarkable achievements this year, embodying the resilience and determination of all those we support. Equally inspiring is the progress we have seen in the children, who have begun to recover from their experiences and flourish in an environment of safety and care. Their smiles and successes are a poignant reminder of why we do what we do.

Strategic advancements

This year we developed a five-year strategic plan, identifying key targets to strengthen our mission. These include:

Improving accommodation: We invested in creating a safer, healthier environment, despite the challenges posed by our current facilities.

Expanding our network: Stronger partnerships with our sister organisations, local groups, and other allies have broadened opportunities for the women we serve.

Diversifying income streams: We have created a more sustainable financial foundation by opening a new charity shop, engaging corporate partners, and expanding our donor base.

Upholding our values:

Our family-focused approach remains central to everything we do, ensuring every step forward is taken with care and compassion.

Our ability to innovate, adapt, and collaborate has been instrumental in achieving these goals. From partnering with local jiu-jitsu clubs to participating in the 50th anniversary of Women's Aid, where I was honoured to meet Her Majesty the Queen, we have expanded our reach and deepened our relationships with a diverse range of supporters and allies.

One of our residents taking a carpentry course to improve her DIY skills



Rebranding and collaboration

2024 also marked a significant shift in how we present ourselves to the world. Our rebranding initiative refreshed our identity and expanded our social media presence, allowing us to connect with a broader audience and attract new supporters.

Collaboration has been at the heart of this year's progress. By joining forces with other organisations in our sector, we have enriched the resources and options available to the women and children we support. The solidarity and support from our allies has been a source of strength, reminding us that no organisation can (or needs to!) stand alone.

The corporate sector has also played a crucial role in our 2024 journey. Donations, voluntary work, and business support have bolstered our capacity to deliver life-changing services. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of these partners, whose contributions demonstrate the power of collective action.

Accreditations and excellence

This year we achieved several notable accreditations, including:

- Investors in People
- Living Wage Foundation membership
- Cyber Essentials Plus certification

These achievements underline our commitment to organisational excellence and the wellbeing of our staff and clients. We have also prioritised staff training and development, equipping our team with the skills needed to provide support to those in our care.

Challenges and resilience

Despite our successes, 2024 brought significant challenges. After losing our local authority contract a few months ago, we recently learned the devastating news that we would lose our primary refuge building in March 2025, due to the landlord's decision to reclaim the property because of the loss of the contract.

The building – though never ideal with its shared facilities and limited space – has been a sanctuary for many women and children. Having to start our goodbyes over the Christmas season is testing our resolve, as we reflect on the countless lives transformed within these walls. This loss is about more than the handover of a building; it represents the closure of critical services and the potential homelessness of vulnerable individuals.

We must ask ourselves: what is more important – the date of a building's handover, or the preservation of a charity that provides essential services? This situation highlights the urgent need to find permanent accommodation, as charities like ours cannot compete with property developers and large housing associations.

Looking forward

This challenge will not break us; it has made us stronger, and we are already exploring immediate solutions to



The new Gilgal branding in action at our 30th Anniversary party

secure a new building, while working towards a long-term vision for permanent accommodation. With the continued support of our donors, corporate partners, and allies, we are confident in our ability to overcome this hurdle.

Our mission remains unwavering: to provide safety, support, and hope to women and children escaping domestic abuse. The solidarity we have witnessed this year - from local supporters to national allies - reinforces our belief that we can achieve great things by joining forces and pooling resources.

Celebrating achievements

Amidst the challenges, there have been countless moments of joy and triumph:

- We organised more trips and activities for our residents, offering moments of respite and connection.
- We enhanced our facilities, creating safer and more welcoming spaces.
- We celebrated our 30th anniversary with friends, volunteers, and supporters, marking three decades of impact and resilience.

A message of gratitude and optimism

As we close the chapter on 2024, we do so with gratitude, resolve, and hope. None of our achievements would have been possible without the generosity of our donors, the dedication of our staff, and the solidarity of our partners. Your contributions – whether through goods, knowledge, or funds – have been beacons of hope in challenging times.

Everything we have accomplished has been the result of collaboration, open communication, and shared values. This year has shown us that everyone needs friends, and we are grateful for each one of you who has stood by us.

While the loss of our building and contract has been a challenge, it is also an opportunity. What does not break us will make us stronger. With our strategic plan guiding the way, we are determined to secure permanent accommodation, diversify our income, and expand our network to ensure a sustainable future for our charity.

Thank you for standing with us in 2024 and beyond. Together, we can create a future where every woman and child can live free from fear and violence. Let us move forward with determination, hope, and the knowledge that our best work is yet to come.

Women's Aid 50th Anniversary

On the 5th December, our CEO Sanja attended a celebration commemorating 50 years of women's Aid. The event saw Women's Aid staff, supporters and members come together to look back on the incredible achievements of the sisterhood over the last 50 years.

The celebration was joined by Her Majesty the Queen, in a powerful show of the solidarity that unites us all in our commitment to end violence against women. Sanja was honoured to speak with Her Majesty personally, who told her "Continue to fight this fight, even if the battle won't be won in my lifetime".

Also in attendance were many prominent figures within our own community of women's charities, and the inspirational Katie Piper, who gave a passionate speech against gender-based violence.



Gilgal's 30th Anniversary Party



On 4th November 2024, Gilgal hosted a wonderful celebration to mark its monumental 30th anniversary. Over the past three decades, Gilgal has been a beacon of hope for so many women and children within the community, and the anniversary party was a perfect reflection of that journey. We brought together past and present residents, employees, partners, donors, and well-wishers who have been part of the Gilgal family over the years. The event was a celebration not only of the charity's success but also of the people who have made it all possible.

Held at the beautiful Edgbaston Park Hotel, which was decked out in all things Gilgal Green, the evening began with a drinks reception and mingling. After everyone had taken their seats for dinner, the Lord Mayor of Birmingham welcomed us all and told of his personal history with Gilgal; he had been part of the committee that hired our CEO Sanja!

Sanja followed up with a heartwarming, inspiring speech of her own, accompanied by a slideshow of photographs from Gilgal's history. Sanja reflected on the challenges and triumphs of the last 30 years, and thanked everyone who helped us get to where we are today.

Following this passionate speech, guests were treated to a delicious dinner, during which we heard from Women's Aid's Rehaila on our partnership with them over the years, and their hopes for the future of domestic abuse charities. We also had beautiful violin music from the talented Magdalena, which set a perfect tone for the evening.

Further entertainment arrived during coffee, in the form of Janice Connolly, AKA Mrs Barbara Nice. Barbara, who rose to fame on Britain's Got Talent in 2019, is an actress and comedian, and thrilled the audience with her engaging and interactive set. Filled with musical cues, silly prizes and hilarious audience participation, it will be a long time before attendees forget Barbara's Frito Pie raffle!



Sanja with the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress



Janice Connolly, AKA Mrs Barbara Nice.

After dinner, all-female jazz band Calypso Moon played, and we honoured some of our staff members for all their amazing work.

While the evening was a time for looking back on all that has been achieved, it was also a moment to look forward to the future. With big changes in our imminent future, Gilgal's next 30 years are sure to see some challenges, but we will continue to strive to support women and children fleeing from domestic abuse in our community.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who joined us for the celebration; we could not do what we do without your unwavering support and generous donations. Additionally we would like to thank the entertainment – Magdalena, Calypso Moon and Barbara Nice; our photographers Fifi and Freya; and all the staff at the Edgbaston Park Hotel, who pulled out all the stops to help us achieve our celebration.

Here's to another 30 years of Gilgal!



Violinist Magdalena Olszewska



Jazz band Calypso Moon



View the photo album

Scan the QR code to see a selection of photos from the night.



billy

Sarah's story

From the outside, Sarah* was a normal young woman leading a normal life – she went to work, she had friends, she lived with a loving family. But secretly, for years, Sarah was sexually abused by her stepfather. By the time she hit her mid-20s, she felt strong enough to approach her mother about her mistreatment – but she was not believed. It was then that Sarah knew she had to flee.

Sarah arrived at our refuge feeling overwhelmed; she felt she had lost everything - her home, her job and her family. She was depressed and struggled with confusing feelings and emotions around her situation. Staff provided counselling and wellbeing sessions to support her through her journey to recovery, and after a month with us she felt ready to meet once more with her mother.

The meeting, however, did not go well. Sarah's mother blamed her for the abuse she had experienced, deeply wounding her emotionally and causing Sarah's mental health to spiral and her to begin self-harming.

It was at this point that Sarah began to open up to our support workers; she disclosed that her father had not been her only abuser – her mother had controlled her finances completely, and left her in a state of severe financial debt. She had also been abused emotionally; adopted by her mother at a young age, she was constantly made to feel second-rate - that she owed her parents for taking her in.

After years of suffering in silence, Sarah finally began to talk. She was at last in a place where she was heard, believed, and understood. She worked through her feelings of confusion with our support workers, recognising that while she both loved and missed her mother, she had experienced repeated trauma and abuse at her hands. With our assistance she applied for universal credit and housing benefits, and managed to gain full access to her own bank account for the first time in her life.

Sarah was encouraged to keep a log and write down how she felt each day, and to attend the activities in the refuge, which she credits with helping to lift her out of her depression.

She had always worked before, and now missed the routine and sense of purpose, so her Support Worker arranged for employment training and job opportunities workshops. Quickly, Sarah got herself a job and a new-found sense of independence. Her wellbeing sessions continued, but the topics had changed; from the hurt and pain she had felt, to discussing her hopes and dreams for the future. She decided not to press charges against her parents, preferring to move on and put the past behind her. Within a year, Sarah was able to secure her own property and, overwhelmed with joy, she began to prepare to leave Gilgal.

Sarah is still in her property, which she loves, enjoying her own independence and being self-sufficient. She works 4-5 days every week, is learning to drive, and says she is in high spirits and feeling well in herself. Sarah is hugely grateful to the staff at Gilgal and spoke to us about how she felt she was able to grow whilst with us, and begin the next chapter in her life.



If you need help, or suspect someone you know is in danger, get in touch with us today.

Call us: 0800 008 662

Email us: mail@gilgalbham.org.uk

We offer 100% private, confidential, non-judgemental advice, and 24/7 emergency help.

**name has been changed for privacy*

Solidarity in sisterhood

Gilgal was founded in the early 90s with the help of two local churches and Dr Christine Parkinson. Dr Christine felt she was called on by God to start Gilgal, and later, our two sister organisations Jericho and Bethel.



Gilgal Birmingham offers refuge to women and children fleeing from domestic abuse. We help our residents to overcome their trauma and rebuild their lives; finding new hobbies, discovering new skills, and assisting with housing and employment.

Jericho

Jericho supports people facing extreme challenges in getting a job, from marginalised young people to survivors of modern slavery.



Bethel Health & Healing Network supports vulnerable pregnant women and new mums, providing access to both physical and mental health services.

We are collectively known as the Cairns Consortium, and over the years have developed a close bond with our sister organisations, due to the significant overlap in our beneficiaries.

Recently, we met with Jennifer Jones-Rigby – CEO of Bethel Network – to discuss how we might better partner together and share our skills and resources.



Jennifer Jones-Rigby, CEO of Bethel Network

Jennifer has over 30 years' experience in the charitable and social enterprise sectors, with a focus on community health and wellbeing. She is active in her local church community, particularly in addressing the impact of COVID-19, securing funding and leading action teams in promoting health and wellbeing for over 15 years.

She was previously the COO at Health Exchange – a charity empowering individuals to take positive control of their own health and wellbeing – where she worked with community groups supporting those affected by COPD, Type 2 Diabetes, and mental health issues. Her dedication to this area continues now, contributing to research with Warwick University, Kaiser Permanente, and University of West Indies (Barbados) into solutions for better self-management of Type 2 Diabetes in African / Caribbean communities.

Now CEO of Bethel Network, Jennifer leads the amazing team of employees and volunteers who work with the most vulnerable pregnant women across Birmingham, Solihull, and parts of the Black Country. Bethel train and provide a Doula service, which offers vital support regarding birth

planning, nutrition and health, and ultimately survival during pregnancy, birth, and postnatally.

The relationship between Gilgal and Bethel is a close one, with not only a shared founding story, but a real solidarity in values and mission. With so many opportunities for partnership and collaboration, in 2025 we are looking forward to several joint events between the two organisations, from picnics, to the annual Gilgal Sports Day! We believe our clients will greatly benefit from networking with each other; many of the Gilgal residents are seasoned mums with so much wisdom to share, and mentoring a new mum and applying their own extensive experience will not only show the new mum they aren't alone, but will allow our residents to grow in confidence and gain a real sense of purpose.

Bethel are even hoping to train a few of our residents to join their team of Doulas; a truly meaningful way to give back to the community, while gaining a new set of skills that may inspire them to pursue a career in doulaing or midwifery.

Another way in which our two charities partner each other is through shared resources and skill sets. In particular, our two CEOs meet regularly to support each other in the challenges and obstacles that occur when running a small, grassroots charity. Jennifer said "There are a lot of unique pressures in being a CEO for a small charity. Being able to talk to one another as Sanja and I do has been really helpful, and it's something we'd like to continue to grow. It's so beneficial to have a personal partnership as well as a professional one."

We are hoping that 2025 will see a big collaboration project between Gilgal, Bethel, and many other partners whose expertise we can draw on and reciprocate. Follow Bethel Network on social media to stay tuned for updates on what's coming!

Instagram: [@bethelhhn](#)

Facebook: [Bethel Health and Healing Network](#)

X: [@Bethel_Network](#)

LinkedIn: [Bethel Health and Healing Network](#)

The Thrive gardening project

We're always looking for new ways to support the incredible women who come through our doors. When our Resident Engagement Worker Louise first visited Thrive Birmingham, she immediately saw the potential for our residents; gardening, nature, and community all coming together in a way that would benefit their mental health and wellbeing.

Since October, Thrive have been running sessions within our own Jasmine refuge garden, working with both women and children to improve and maintain the space and show what a positive impact gardening can have. It's no secret that being outdoors and engaging with nature can have a huge impact on mental health, but the project with Thrive Birmingham goes beyond just "getting outside". Based on principles of social and therapeutic horticulture, gardening can also improve physical health (like strengthening muscles) and provide meaningful occupation that gives a sense of purpose.

Additionally for our residents, working within our own refuge garden gives them a chance to take pride in where they live, interact with the other residents and staff, and learn a new skill that could be helpful to them once they move on from our refuge.



Planting winter flowers

Painting bird boxes



So far we have:

- Painted planters to brighten up the space.
- Planted winter flowers and learnt what grows best in the colder months.
- Learnt how to care for house plants, bringing nature indoors.
- Got hands-on with crafting projects, like creating wreaths from natural materials.

The children have also enjoyed helping out and learning about nature



But there's more to come! As we move into spring, we're planning to wrap up the gardening project with sustainable activities like growing vegetables and learning how to maintain a garden - skills that the women can carry with them long after the project ends.

As with any new project, there have been challenges along the way. One of the biggest hurdles has been helping residents see the value of gardening. It's easy to think of gardening as an "old-fashioned" hobby, but the truth is, it's incredibly useful! From growing their own food to learning how to care for plants, these skills offer both practical and emotional benefits for our residents.

There was also some trepidation at first. Many of the women were wary of getting their hands dirty, especially during the colder months. The community and group aspect of the project, while very rewarding, was also daunting to some of our newer and shyer residents. Staff worked hard to promote the project, putting up posters and sharing as much information as possible. They even led by example, with staff pitching in and, in turn, benefiting from slowing down and enjoying the mindful activity.

One of the most exciting aspects was the opportunity to create a child-friendly outdoor space, where the women can enjoy the fresh air with their children without leaving the safety of the refuge. We were looking forward to reaping the rewards of the project over the warmer months, with perhaps another Thrive project planting summer flowers. However, our recent news that we will need to leave our Jasmine refuge in March means that we will also have to say goodbye to our garden.

Despite not being able to enjoy the fruits of our labour next summer, the Thrive project has been rewarding for the women involved and we are still thrilled with our partnership together. Our Holly refuge also has a garden (where we recently grew our very first tomato!), and wherever our Jasmine refuge relocates to, we hope to continue working with Thrive; perhaps for one-off activities such as indoor plant care if we are not again blessed with a large garden space.



Did you know that activities like the Thrive gardening project are entirely funded by generous donations?

Help us to keep our partnership with Thrive flourishing.

Scan the QR code or visit www.gilgalbham.org.uk to donate now.



Making Christmas wreaths



Gilgal

CHARITY SHOP



The Gilgal charity shop is open!

We'd love for you to get involved.

Visit us

You can find us at:

1688 Bristol Road South
Birmingham
B45 9TZ

We're open Monday-Saturday, 9.30-16.30.

We have a wide range of high-quality items at affordable prices - new products added daily!

Volunteer

We are on the hunt for volunteers who can help us sort donations, organise stock on the shop floor, manage the till and interact with customers.

If you'd like to get involved, please email shop@gilgalbham.org.uk or visit www.gilgalbham.org.uk/volunteering for more information.

Donate

It's always a good time for a wardrobe clear out! We accept men's, women's and children's clothes, toys and games, and non-electrical household items.



Visit www.gilgalbham.org.uk/donations or scan the QR code to see the full list of items we're after, along with more ways to donate to Gilgal.



The Gilgal shop team



Follow us on social media

for a first glimpse of new and exciting items



Facebook: [Gilgal Charity Shop](https://www.facebook.com/GilgalCharityShop)



Instagram: [@gilgalcharityshop](https://www.instagram.com/gilgalcharityshop)



TikTok: [@gilgal_charity](https://www.tiktok.com/@gilgal_charity)



Did you know you can shop with us online? Check out our Vinted wardrobe: [@gilgalcharityshop](https://www.vinted.com/charityshop)



Thank you to every Friend of Gilgal.

We are grateful to every single person, group, and organisation who has helped us this year.

There are so many ways you have all got involved in 2024; monetary donations, sharing of expertise and resources, volunteering, assisting us with opening our charity shop, attending our 30th Anniversary party, sending gifts to our residents, and unwavering moral support.

Thank you to our corporate partners, grant donors, individual donors and fundraisers. We appreciate every pound raised, every call taken and every item donated to our shop. We would not be where we are today without you.

We know that we have a tough year ahead of us in 2025, and that we will have to work even harder to continue to offer the same high quality of service to our residents as they deserve.

We may not be certain where the future will take us, but we know we can rely on your continued support. Thank you for cheering us on and believing in the vital work that we do.

2025 will continue to be a year where we offer support to women and children fleeing from domestic abuse; a safe shelter where they can be seen, heard, and supported.