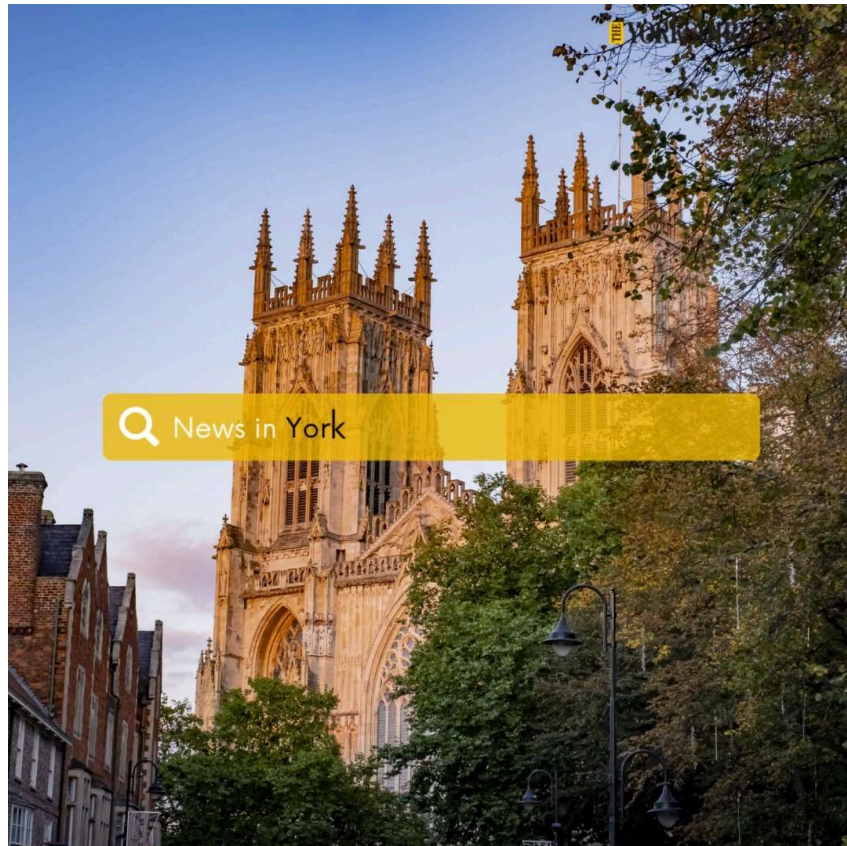


Crime

Leeds domestic abuse charity Behind Closed Doors benefits from National Lottery funding boost

A charity supporting victims of domestic abuse in Yorkshire has benefitted from a major financial boost courtesy of the National Lottery.



By Grace Hammond



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Yorkshire domestic abuse charity Behind Closed Doors was set up by a small group of volunteers more than 26 years ago. Today, it helps around 800 people every year.

Now, amid an increase in reports of violent crimes against women and girls, the Leeds organisation has received more than £870,000 in National Lottery funding to help women rebuild their lives and look

positively towards the future.

Behind Closed Doors has received the grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to support its work helping women once they have escaped abusive relationships and are ready to take the next step in their journey to recovery.



Ruth Davany and Joanne Holdsworth from Behind Closed Doors.

This includes practical support with the likes of personal finance, child contact arrangements and job seeking, as well as emotional support for those battling with poor mental health and feelings of isolation resulting from abusive and controlling relationships.

It is one of 246 charities and community groups across Yorkshire and Humber to have been awarded almost £17 million from the fund over three months (from June 28 to September 29).

The charity was set up by a small group of volunteers over 26 years ago, establishing itself as a confidential telephone line for anyone in the area experiencing domestic abuse. Since then, it has grown to a team of 24, who support around 800 people, including men, and their families every year, and around 250 at any one time.

A report by The National Police Chief's Council shows a 37 per cent increase in violent crimes against women and girls between 2018 and 2023. It's a trend that Behind Closed Doors has also witnessed in and around Leeds area, reporting a 25 per cent increase in incidents during the COVID Pandemic, and a 10 per cent increase each year since.



Behind Closed Doors workers.

Ruth Davany, CEO at Behind Closed Doors, said: “We are deeply worried about the level of domestic abuse we’re seeing now, as a frontline domestic abuse service our help and support as never been in higher demand.

“We see all forms of domestic abuse at Behind Closed Doors including stalking, online abuse, and non-fatal strangulation, as well as financial, physical, and emotional abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour.

“Tackling domestic abuse is everybody’s responsibility, and prevention and long-term recovery is as important as crisis response.”

The National Lottery funding will also help the charity work even more closely with its partner organisations, which include Leeds-based Shantona Women’s and Family Services, which specialises in supporting women from a diverse spectrum of ethnic backgrounds and cultures, and Getaway Girls, which

empowers girls and young women aged 11 to 25 in in the West Yorkshire city to learn new skills, build confidence, resilience and raise aspirations.



Behind Closed Doors stock image

One person who has been help by Behind Closed Doors is Dawn, whose full name has been withheld for anonymity. She experienced abuse throughout her childhood and it continued into adulthood and her relationships. When she first approached the charity, Dawn had ended an abusive relationship where she experienced financial, psychological, emotional, and coercive abuse. Dawn met her abuser during the pandemic, and the abuse escalated once restrictions eased, and he started to use drugs and alcohol.

Making her feel guilty when she wanted to see her friends, he would use coercive control and degraded her by criticising her clothes, hair, and make-up in a bid to keep her at home.

Ruth said: “When we first met Dawn, she was feeling very confused by her experiences and was struggling to come to terms with the relationship she had found herself in. She blamed herself and found it hard to regulate her emotions and understand how she felt. Dawn felt lonely and isolated and was looking for support to rebuild her life and gain a better understanding of her abuse.”

A series of one-to-one sessions at Behind Closed Doors soon gave Dawn the tools to rebuild her sense of self-worth, and it was at this time that she started reengaging with her love of dance, having previously been a teacher.

Dawn said: “My spark is knowing who I am again. My partner went to rehab, and I supported him. He ended our relationship more or less the weekend he came out. Even though he had abused me, I felt abandoned, alone. I’ve somehow picked up some of the pieces by doing the things he didn’t like me to do, things as small as having my nails done, putting make up on and wearing nice clothes.”

She thanked the charity for “helping me to believe in myself again”.

Ruth added that Behind Closed Doors, Getaway Girls and Shantona wanted to say “a heartfelt thank you” to fund and National Lottery players for their support, which “will allow us to help more people like Dawn move on from domestic violence and feel hopeful about their futures again”.

More than £144 million has been distributed to almost 2,500 organisations across England in the three months.

Joe Dobson, head of regional funding for Yorkshire and Humber, said: “Behind Closed Doors is a fantastic organisation that is helping women to reclaim their lives and rebuild their confidence after living with domestic abuse.

“One of our four key missions is to help people achieve happier and healthier lives, and we know that partnership organisations like this that work together for the good of society can have a hugely positive impact.”



