

Basis Yorkshire

About us

[Basis Yorkshire](#) was started by a group of church volunteers in 1989 as Genesis, offering support to women (and at the time, girls, on street) in Chapeltown. In 1995 we were officially constituted as a charity, changing our name in 2015 in recognition of the need for a non-faith based, more inclusive identity as the sex industry changed (including increasing numbers working indoor and online¹). Our charitable objectives are: support and advocacy for those who are at risk of exploitation or abuse and work to reduce & prevent stigma and discrimination against sex workers and those who are, or are at risk of being exploited. We work with children & young people who are being sexually exploited in Leeds, Hull and Bradford and indoor, online and street sex workers in Leeds. We are proud that our organisation has achieved national recognition as a leader in our field and for our innovations in practice (recognised through local and national awards from the [National Working Group to End CSE](#), [Child Friendly Leeds](#), [Homeless Link](#), [GSK](#) and the [Sheila McKechnie Campaign Award](#) and the [Royal Society of Public Health](#)).

Position Statement

Our purpose is to empower people to make safer and healthier choices by offering information, support and options. Our work is driven by a sound evidence base, as well as working closely with women and young people to ensure our services are designed and delivered with them, putting their voices and experience at the centre of our work. We challenge stigma and inequality of access to services for everyone we work with. We are proud to be one of a small number of specialist organisations that explicitly recognise and advocate for women's right to work more safely when selling sex, while also supporting young people who are sexually exploited to be safer and free from harm. We understand that for some women and young people, their 'choices' are severely constrained by a range of factors including physical and mental health, substance use, family circumstances and abusive relationships, as we support them in managing the risks and vulnerabilities they face. We recognise people's dignity and agency in their decision-making. Our 30 years of working with sex workers enables us to see the diversity of experiences in the sex industry, including women choosing to earn their income by selling sex (over or alongside other forms of work, without third-party coercion) through to those being sexually or otherwise exploited and coerced by partners, peers, traffickers, employers, landlords, drug dealers etc. We recognise that inequalities play an important part in people's involvement in the sex industry. For example, when women are poor or have migrant status they can be more easily exploited. Attempts to use enforcement to control the sale of sex, as well as the stigma felt by sex workers, means a lack of access to services and resources which abusers can exploit. We support women to exit sex work, but don't compel them or shame them into that, working alongside them on their personal goals and aspirations for the future.

Our Services

Young Person's support workers (Leeds, Bradford, Hull): offering intensive, trauma informed 1 to 1 support to children and young people who are being (or at risk of) sexually exploitation (2 staff in Leeds). We work in partnership with Police, Social Care, NHS and other agencies to support young people and prevent further exploitation, advocating for the young person with other professionals to ensure all services are working together to effectively safeguard. The team work with 35 young people at any one time. More about our work with young people can be found in our [Breaking Through](#) Resources created by young people and adults with experiences of sexual exploitation.

'STAGE' partnership Exploitation worker: offering individual 1-2-1 support and group work to women over 16 years of age who have experience of sexual exploitation, as part of a wider northern partnership of 7 organisations, with the aim of informing government policy via an Influence Group of MPs in Parliament. The work links with [previous](#)² and ongoing partnership work around Police Operations to identify and bring to justice perpetrators of sexual violence and coercion.

¹ Beyond the Gaze: working practices, safety and regulation of internet-based sex workers in the UK
<https://le.ac.uk/criminology/research/research-projects/beyond-gaze>

² Independent Evaluation Supporting 'Historic' Victims/Survivors of Child Sex Exploitation (CSE) in Leeds
<https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL-Evaluation-Report-Historic-CSE-Pilot.pdf>

Adult team specialist sex work outreach workers (7 Case Managers) offering 1 to 1 intensive, community based support to women with multiple & complex needs, with a number of specialist focus areas including: [Sexual Health](#)³ (inc. testing & treatment, contraception, pregnancy and termination support), Health Advocacy⁴ for the women with the poorest health, Managed Area link worker for those in conflict with and problematic within the community, Community Mental Health as part of [Live Well Leeds](#), Housing First⁵, Sexual Violence Advisor⁶ and Community Led Local Development worker (latter 2 in recruitment). We also have a dedicated worker for women working off street, with a focus on reducing isolation, engaging in sexual health services, joint work with the Police for welfare checks and links to the Trafficking Unit to effectively safeguard some of the most isolated women in our city. The team currently works intensively at any one time with 50 - 60 women (fluctuates with funding), although over the course of a year will reach over 170 street and over 400 indoor workers through outreach and other brief interventions.

In addition to 1 to 1 work, the whole team contributes to night time outreach into the Managed Area (3 times per week) and drop in (3 times per week) in conjunction with The Joanna Project. We encourage the take up of services, taking women to appointments, advocating for/with them with other professionals and addressing the stigma they face that causes women to disengage/not attend. Women and professionals feed back that this is one of the most important elements of our service; without our 'bridging' service, women would not necessarily seek out or engage with other agencies. Women are referred or refer themselves to our service through night time outreach, other organisations working in Leeds, by word of mouth or finding out about us on our website.

With our current caseload, we are working with them to sustain exit from street sex work and move into education, training and employment or provide intensive 1-2-1 support on positive changes; to reduce/stop sex work, to stop drug and alcohol dependency, to come to terms with trauma, to access mental health and housing and to move on. All women engaged with our services receive support tailored to their needs and wishes offering; signposting, sexual health interventions, emotional support and diversion from street sex work where there is a risk.

Training and awareness raising:

We deliver [CPD accredited training](#) to Social Workers, the Police and other professionals from the third and public sector about how to recognise, engage with and reach out to with the women and young people we work with based on national and regional research and our own evidence base⁷. We also actively engage in research and evaluation to ensure our services are robust, effective and evidence based and to share best practice locally⁸ and [nationally](#). Our campaigning work is funded to challenge the conditions, practices and policies that create harm for those we work with, centring their voices in the development of responses to sex work, exploitation and abuse.

Barriers to improving health, safety and wellbeing for sexworkers

Whilst some sex workers, particularly those working on street, have multiple & complex issues (substance abuse, mental and physical health, domestic abuse), there are number of other factors which makes it particularly challenging to work with them to improve their health, safety, wellbeing and opportunities to exit. These are a

³A "managed approach" to sex workers' health in Leeds <https://www.bmj.com/content/365/bmj.l4219.full>

⁴ An Evaluation of Leeds CCG Vulnerable Populations Health Improvement Projects <https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Vulnerable-Populations-Report-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ Exploring patterns of Housing First support: Resident Journeys - Homeless Link https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Exploring%20patterns%20of%20Housing%20First%20support_Sep19.pdf

⁶ MoJ Press Release: Organisations awarded funding from the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund 2019–22 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806808/organisations-awarded-funding-rsarf-2019-22.PDF

⁷ A service user led Theory of Change <https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Service-Use-Led-TOC-Report-FINALJune2018.pdf>

⁸State of Women's Health n Leeds https://www.womenslivesleeds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/state_womens_health_leeds_final.pdf

significant challenge for any organisation in the city to overcome, which is why Basis play an active part in improving the partnership response both historically and currently;

Safety & protection: partnership work with the Police has been critical to developing a response that has shifted from enforcement, to protection of those women and girls most vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse in the city. Basis piloted the first 'Ugly Mugs' scheme in 1998 with a subsequent roll out nationally ([National Ugly Mug](#)), taking reports of crimes from women and enabling them to share details of dangerous perpetrators between one another when women were fearful of the Police and unwilling to report crimes to them. The joint work on the Managed Approach and support to indoor working women has been critical in identifying those who have been victims of sexual violence and other crimes, bringing perpetrators to justice and targeting those coercing and exploiting women, as well as creating access to services for women to engage and be fully supported. Our case managers work jointly with the Managed Area Team, CID, Safeguarding (CSE), Trafficking Unit and the CPS to identify perpetrators and bring them to justice. Basis work proactively with the National Police Chiefs Council to consult on and develop the Policing response, sharing the work on the 'Leeds model' nationally as 'good practice' with our partners.

Stigma: many women experience stigma from professionals compounded by their experiences or work, past or current. Stigma deters women from seeking or receiving adequate health or housing support, impacts on sustained employment, seriously affects self-esteem and mental health and prevents women from finding routes out of sexwork keeping them socially isolated. More dangerously it 'gives permission' to dangerous offenders to target and harm women⁹. It also deters them from reporting crimes to the police and affects their progress through the criminal justice system (including outcomes in court).

Housing: There is an acute lack of safe and supported and private sector [housing for women with multiple and complex needs](#)¹⁰. For women who are sex working, this is a particular issue as this leaves them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, as they seek out the 'least worst option' in terms of shelter, at times with an exploitative male. Basis have been instrumental in securing gender specific housing for sex workers in the city, working proactively with LCC on the development of the women-only *Somewhere Safe to Stay* provision (St Anne's), as well as with [Women's Lives Leeds](#) (as part of our third sector partnership) for longer term and more extensive options for vulnerable women, using evidence from our Housing First pilot work to inform the development of services.

Mental Health: a high percentage of street sex workers (over 80%) face severe mental health issues & trauma, which complicates engagement with substance abuse programs and sustained housing; indoor workers experience low level mental health issues due to stigma, isolation & fear. Mental health services are severely limited in their capacity, particularly for those who have never been recognised as being in need of support or are excluded due the nature of their issues (i.e. complex and compounded trauma). Mental health issues can be as a result of violent incidents, childhood abuse, or the trauma of removal of children in to care, for which women receive no support other than from Basis or other women's charities such as Women's Lives Leeds.

Benefits and social care: The implementation of [Universal Credit](#) is a critical issue for women, in some cases forcing women to enter, increase or return to sex work around the country. Sheffield and Doncaster services reported a 60% increase in street sex work, with Basis proactively dedicating additional resource to mitigate this risk in Leeds. Adult Social Care is problematic in terms of access for sex workers with multiple and complex needs, being more designed to support people with age related issues or those with disabilities ('eligible care needs'), leading to an effective exclusion of those we work with despite clear issues of frailty, mental health and/or learning disability.

⁹ "[Just cleaning up the streets](#)" – Yorkshire Ripper to his brother while in prison

¹⁰ University of Leeds An Evaluation of Basis Housing First Pilot <https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Basis-Housing-First-Final-Report-March-2018.pdf>

SUMMARY

Key to the work in Leeds is the active part that a third sector organisation like Basis plays in stimulating change with partners on all the challenges above, securing strategic national ([Esmee Fairbairn](#), [Lloyds Foundation](#), [Tudor Trust](#)) and local investment to support this. Leveraging in funding to the city, for the majority of services that we provide, over many years, has been key to strengthening the offer for women and girls who need support to reduce harm and exit. Work with partners has led to a radical shift in the response to street sex work with additional investment in the capacity of our services, significant, sustainable and positive outcomes in the numbers of women supported and able to exit, prevention of continued abuse and exploitation of girls and boys as they reach adulthood, increased reporting of crimes & the development of trust between Police and women, alongside improving responses from mainstream services to the needs of some of the most vulnerable women and girls in our city. We aim to have a transformative effect on the response to women and young people in our city, reducing the need for our services and enabling the realisation of their goals and aspirations.