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**Organisational summary**

A Way Out is an outreach and prevention charity which aims to engage, empower and equip vulnerable and excluded women, families and young people to live lives free from harm, abuse and exploitation and to reduce life limiting choices and behaviour.

A Way Out has four distinct programmes of work, providing services to disadvantaged, vulnerable and socially excluded groups.

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The **Liberty project** delivers an outreach, engagement and recovery service to adult women who are drug and alcohol dependent, socially isolated, involved in survival sex work and have experienced or are at risk of sexual exploitation.

****The **Blossom project** works with girls and young women aged 13-25 years, who experience multiple disadvantages, to build emotional resilience, improve safety and self esteem enabling them to reach their true potential.

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The **Youth project** works with children aged 8-14 years. It provides a safe environment in which children experiencing social and emotional difficulties can learn new skills, practise positive behaviour and build self-confidence and competency.

****The **Family project** works with the whole family in an intensive and motivational way, supporting and empowering disadvantaged families to discover new skills and confidence and to build resilience to effect sustainable positive change.

A Way Out has established and firmly embedded its four key service areas within Stockton and in parts across Cleveland. A Way Out is more commonly known and associated with its flagship service, The Liberty Project as this service has been established since 2002. As a result, the organisation has developed its expertise and a good reputation for working with some of the most stigmatised, and discriminated members of our community who experience multiple disadvantages along with their families across Cleveland.

Our unique selling point is the tried and trusted outreach and prevention approach to delivering our services. We strive to engage and extend our reach to some of the most isolated and vulnerable women, families and young people bringing the services to where they are stood on the street, in their homes, communities, schools or parks. Our aim and purpose is to prevent harm from taking place, or to prevent further harm from occurring and to help safeguard some of the most vulnerable people in the area.

The strengths of the organisation include staff, volunteers, leadership and governance, along with the support we receive from the community and the Christian churches. There is a commitment to going the extra mile and making a difference no matter how long this may take.



**Values**

We believe that everyone should be able to live the life they choose without experiencing of fearing abuse, harm and exploitation.We prevent abuse, harm and exploitation by empowering women, families and young people to have control over their lives and by tackling the injustice and inequality that they experience.

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**Our values are:**

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Compassionate: using a non-judgemental approach that builds on individual strengths and addresses recent and/or historic trauma.

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Connecting: creating opportunities to access support through proactive outreach and by building trusting relationships

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Caring: providing the right support at the right time in the right place whether someone is in crises, needing support or advocacy to address immediate needs, or ready to make lasting changes.

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Choice: building hope for the future through individuals having the freedom to make informed decisions and opportunities to achieve their potential.

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Community: enabling lasting change and providing support at times of need by building positive relationships with friends, family and the wider community.

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Change: addressing the causes of injustice and inequality, and wider stigma and discrimination, by ensuring that learning from lived experience is used to change the language, behaviour and views, and process and systems, of other individuals and organisations.

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Christian values of love, truth and justice underpin everything we do to support those with a Christian faith, another faith or no faith.

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**History**

A Way Out started in 2002 when the founder, Jessie Jacobs, who was brought up in the town of Stockton-on-Tees, met a young girl walking the streets of Stockton trying to sell her body for sex. Moved by the abuse, poverty and addiction that was devastating the lives of women and young people across the area, Jessie started A Way Out with the aim of providing outreach and support to at risk women and young people.

The organisation became a registered charity in 2004 and transferred its assets and liabilities to a charitable company limited by guarantee in 2010. The organisation moved to its present site at the end of 2008 in order to provide better equipped facilities and a greater portfolio of services.

Today, A Way Out has reached thousands of women, families and young people, supporting them to live healthy, safe and fulfilled lives. A Way Out works collaboratively with partner agencies across Teesside and the North East and is supported by the local community and Christian churches.

**Legal status**

The Charity’s legal objectives (‘The objects’) are:

* to relieve suffering and promote good health and the advancement of education amongst members of the community in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees, particularly , but not exclusively, amongst women, children and young people;
* to provide or assist in the provision of facilities, in the interest of social welfare, for recreation of other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disability, financial hardship or social circumstances, with the object of improving their conditions of life.

**Our aims**

Our 5 key strategic aims are as follows:

* Using ongoing learning to ensure our services are informed by and responsive to the changing needs of our clients.
* Building genuine and influential partnerships that increase our reach, impact and financial stability.
* Changing the beliefs and behaviours and policy and practice of others to overcome the challenges faced by those we support.
* Creating a culture that is empowering and inclusive so that staff and volunteers thrive.
* Providing robust leadership and governance to enable growth and future sustainability.

Driven by Christian values:

**Developments in the past 12 months:**

**A Way Out Management & Governance:**

**Management Team:** The strong focus of the past 12 months has been upon strategic development across all services areas and **increasing A Way Out’s geographic reach,** whilst maintaining a robust focus upon key areas of risk, safeguarding and data protection which remain an organisational priority form part of our core annual training development offer to staff, Trustees and volunteers:

* We have also continued **strengthen our partnerships** and developing our work with Cleveland Police Crime Commissioner (PCC), Local Authority partners and other voluntary sectors agencies
* We have **expanded our service to local schools** and introduced new and exciting collaborative work with partner agencies enabling the offer of enhanced support to our service users.
* We have **increased our Service Manager provision** allowing the organisation to provide our service staff and clients with specific and separate target areas of expertise in relation to adult safeguarding and children & families safeguarding.
* Developed new ways of working in response to COVID 19 restrictions, expanding our digital engagement and other new creative ways in which we can connect and reach out to those most in need
* Improved and enhanced our social media and external communications
* Completed full external evaluations across all service areas
* Implemented and progressed a full scale organisational review refreshing our purpose, vision and mission and how we deliver against this every day.
* As for any charitable organisation securing adequate funding remains a continual challenge and this year we have developed and implemented an **Income Diversification Plan** in order to sustain and develop the services and have identified income generating opportunities around training delivery. We have also developed a **Community Fundraising Strategy** incorporating recruitment and training of volunteer fundraisers.

**Local Influence:**

* A Way Out continues to be an influential member of the **North East Sex Work Forum** and works closely at a strategic level with **Teesside Safeguarding Adults Board** raising awareness in relation to understanding issues around exploitation and sex work.
* A Way Out continues to work closely with and feed into a **Police and Council-led Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked (VEMT)** strategic and operational group.
* A Way Out is also a member of the **RASSO (Rape And Serious Sexual Offences)** panel which is managed by the Crown Prosecution Service to review related cases which have been charged by the CPS but unsuccessful in the judicial process.
* We attend and sit on a number of strategic and operational multi agency partnerships and Boards
* A Way Out hosts the Co-ordinator for the **North East Sex Work Forum** a multi-agency group that supports individuals across the North East involved in sex work and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation, the forum shares good practice and helps to inform local policy making decisions.
* A Way Out has successfully **raised the profile of members of our community who have less of a chance and opportunity to benefit from the economic growth** that is happening in the region, thus providing some of our most vulnerable, isolated and marginalised with a stage to have their voices heard to help influence and bring about local change.

**National Influence:**

*Quote from*

*Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen*

* A Way Out’s CEO, Sarah McManus, **attended a meeting of the Select Committee in Westminster** as part of a dialogue exploring issues around Universal Credit (UC) and links to the increases in survival sex work. A Way Out’s expertise in this area was recognised at a national level and we are hopeful that this representation will help to reshape and bring about change for women, young people and families. We are proud that A Way Out was provided with an opportunity to ensure the voices of our clients are heard and that we can be instrumental in positive improvements to address some of the issues related to UC.
* A Way Out is also now part of a consortium of 5 organisations in the North East and Yorkshire influencing and contributing to research which aims to develop the **first ever national safeguarding framework to support women who have been sexually exploited**.
* Contributed to research papers and reports around sexual exploitation, sex work and trauma informed support approaches.

**A Way Out Governance:**

* This yearA Way Out has been fortunate to **recruit 3 new Trustees** to complete our board in providing areas all areas of expertise as identified as essential areas of knowledge and experience in the Charity Commission Governance code.
* The board have attended **annual safeguarding training alongside governance workshops** looking at strategic growth, evaluation of external markets, gaps and SWOT analysis in order to support the organisation to expand in a safe, structured and managed way.

**Awards:**

* A Way Out’s Liberty Service has been awarded for its work on a regional level in achieving highly commended in the NEPACS Ruth Cranfield Awards 2019 for Good Practice in Rehabilitation
* At a National level the organisation was shortlisted as a finalist in the National Diversity Awards for Community Organisation Award for Gender category.

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**Liberty Developments:**

**Police Custody:**  We have continued work within **Police Custody** building relationships with the **Liaison and Diversion team** and extending our service offer to attend two mornings per week demonstrating an effective increase in engagement with vulnerable women disclosing their involvement in sex workers across the Tees Valley area. The advocacy and guidance provided in custody extends to brief interventions in the community addressing current issues. Workers have accompanied and advocated at safeguarding strategy meetings, at court hearings, accompanied females to hospital for a planned c-section/operations/procedures (as no family were available) and other appointments including as part of a drug and alcohol recovery programme and supported women into stable safe accommodation.

**Launch a new Criminal Justice Team** who works across Cleveland in partnership with Changing Lives as part of the MOJ Dynamic Framework contract.

**Family Work:** We have a **part time Family Worker** who supports the families of the women who are involved in on street sex work. The Family Worker's focus is to build up the resilience of the families, educate and raise awareness around substance addiction and issues related to sex working, supporting the families to potentially reconnect with their daughter's / sister's etc where this is appropriate.

**Walk and Talk** activity has been developed and expanded due to level of demand and the positive impact on both the clients and the staff. This activity has improved the level of engagement from clients and has informed a redesign in how we connect and reach out to clients.

**Outreach:**

* We continue to focus upon **reduction in harm and exposure to risk** experienced by women involved in sex work by applying **a trauma informed and asset based** approach. We consistently work on increasing staff understanding of the effect of trauma, equipping them with powerful techniques to use when required.
* The service has **expanded its geographic reach to include areas** in Middlesbrough alongside our well established service in Stockton providing essential on-street safety advice, including needle exchange, support and guidance - including harm minimisation, Ugly Mugs safety alerts and sexual health information. This initial engagement is **unique in the area** and enables support and empowerment in making informed decisions in relation to personal safety, increased awareness of available supportive networks and partner agencies and receive advocacy in accessing relevant and quality support when required.
* We have **developed our partnerships** with Terrance Higgins Trust and CGL with each agency providing staff to enhance A Way Out's outreach sessions, once a month. This has the added benefit for the women enabling **immediate access to health care during the evening**, including wound dressing and information regarding screening and treatment for Blood Borne virus's.

**Drop-ins and 1:1 work:**

* We have provided training and information sessions to sex workers attending drop in sessions to **increase awareness and uptake of reporting into the National Ugly Mugs** scheme which exists to report any violence and exploitation which is disseminated to all sex workers registered. Information and intelligence regarding local violence and exploitation hot spots continues to be shared with partner agencies and clients.
* Clients are enabled to continue to make informed decisions about their safety and services can direct resources where necessary. A **range of on line safety sessions** have been incorporated including multiple safety interventions ranging from sexual violence support to online safety; tips and encouragement to report incidents; confidence building around healthy relationships; and what consent is.
* **Key partners continue to attend**; Terrence Higgins Trust provides sexual health clinics enabling a valuable health check and an expedited route to hospital where necessary; CGL; Police Designated Liaison Officer (DLO): ARCH; SARC; Stockton Council: Support for Parents and Carers; Energy Efficiency and Housing providers.
* **NHS, Social Services and Community Support services** have been sourced to respond to need. This has included support for both a heavily pregnant women and her unborn child and support for a particularly vulnerable women who was a victim of hate crime. Such specialist support enables the continued breaking down of barriers to reporting incidents of abuse and harm.

**Psychotherapy Service:**

* Our **trauma-informed In-House Psychotherapy Service**, supporting women with complex needs and struggling with historic issues which has continued to be delivered via the phone and digitally throughout the pandemic.
* **Improvement in self-development and emotional wellbeing** is the focus of the therapeutic 1-1 counselling that enables safe exploration of feelings.
* A Way Out's psychotherapist also runs **weekly clinics within the teams**, equipping them with key strategies for supporting clients.

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**Blossom Developments:**

**Drop in’s –** the twice weekly sessions have continued and developed and have been delivered on line at times aligned to government restrictions .

* The sessions provide a mix of formal and informal approaches with a clear structure incorporating **education and awareness** on a wide range of areas whilst also aiming to**: increase independent living skills**, increase **emotional resilience**, **improve self-esteem and confidence**, learning new skills and expanding social network.
* A large number of those who take part are repeat attendees which demonstrates the positive impact of the project upon the young women who are attending.

**Outreach –** has developed to include a number of activities, established links with two local colleges has promoted the service and increased referral routes.

* **Blossom posters have been placed in public spaces** which were chosen after consultation with the young women – with free wifi being a common denominator in all areas.
* **A new monthly drop-in** has been introduced enabling **young women and professionals** to attend the project together, or independently - with the opportunity to meet our team, view the project space, participate in activities prior to referral stage.
* A **team member is also co-located in a local authority social services department** one morning on a fortnightly basis, this provides an opportunity for joint working and discussion of potential referrals.
* **Outreach in partnership with Youth Direction** has been attended extended the reach to disconnect girls and young women

**Peer Support** – this has been a challenging area in which to engage the young women.

* Whilst supporting each other respectfully within a session setting, their own needs and skills impact their ability to effectively support other group members in a structured way that is both beneficial to them and their peers. The team recognise the long term benefits of peer support and are working with a local MIND project by attending training sessions with an aim of setting up an emotional wellbeing peer support group or working with women individually to develop their skills when they are ready to do so.

**Transition Worker**

* A specialist worker funded through the OPCC as part of the CSA Transformation partnership has been recruited to work with young women across the transitional stage into adulthood and adult services to better understand their needs, what is working and what is not in terms of the current system and processes. The information informed by lived experience will help shape a toolkit and specialist programmes of support that will be needs led, minimising risk of sexual exploitation to help improve outcomes for the young women.

**Specialist Case Worker:**

* We have firmly integrated the additional needs service into the Blossom project to inform needs led 1:1 support sessions, drop-ins and outreach to young women and girls (aged 13 – 25) who have a disability, learning disability, learning difficulty or who present with additional needs that have not been diagnosed.
* Engagement over the past 12 months has proven that the current engagement methods including a consistent approach and a higher level of support are benefiting the young women. Clients have reported that they benefit from the flexible, fun and creative approach.
* Young women wanted to know more about exploitation exploring the different stages in the grooming cycle and associated behaviours.

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**Youth Service Delivery and Developments:**

The Youth Project continues to deliver excellent services to children and young people living in areas of high deprivation in Stockton.

* Since October 2018 we have **commenced work with a central Stockton Primary school** in an area which is amongst the **10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country** and among the **10% most deprived for income deprivation affecting children**.
* A number of children accessing our services in this area are **asylum seeker and refugee children** who have struggled to engage with education due to **learning disabilities or language barriers.**
* We have also, based on feedback from young people attending RELOAD sessions, **expanded our age range and work with Year 7 Students in a local Secondary Schoo**l. This was due to a number of reported incidents of young people not managing well with the transition from Primary to Secondary School.

**1:1 mentoring support for young people:** Personalised mentoring– Using an **asset based approach** continues to enable young people to identify and address specific issues and particularly to teach **coping strategies and build resilience** (identifying when they need support and/or a safe place to go) to enable lasting changes.

* Referrals to **partner services** further enables young people to address the challenges they face and to reach their potential. We work in partnership with statutory organisations and other charities that support children and young people (including Stockton Council children/young people social care teams and youth service (Youth Direction), Stockton CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), and charities including Barnardos and the partners to Youth United Stockton to coordinate support and to share learning to inform future service development

**Group Work: Reload/Evo** – Young people are involved in the planning for these sessions and over the last year topics have included body image, bullying, internet safety, personal safety and ways to manage negative emotions.

* Evo is a new session started in Northfield Secondary School in September. Young people attending designed their own project name and logo. Feedback from parents of young people from Evo has been extremely positive. We know empowering these young people to make choices about the sessions ensures they are listened to, understood and builds self esteem.

**Social Action community projects: HALO** (Helping And Loving Others) has been very successful pre the pandemic with a variety of initiatives such as:

* helping in a **local foodbank; Litter picking; supporting a community allotment.**
* Young people helped to make **chicken coops, feed the chickens, collect the eggs, plant/pick fruit/veg**, getting to taste them and being able to take them home to their families.
* We have been working in partnership with **BELP** (Billingham environmental link programme), teaching the young people about the **fresh produce of allotments.**

**Health and Fitness Programmes: Get Active** provides opportunities to engage in a range of **sports and information about healthy eating** in order to **improve wellbeing** and **increase confidence and self esteem.**

* Our service works in **partnership with Durham University** to deliver this project, using their sports facilities. This is an opportunity for young people to take part in an activity away from their usual environment.

**School Holiday Activities:** This year we have offered activities for children during the school holidays.

* young people attended our **summer holiday programme** which included visiting local attractions, working with music groups, educational visits by Cleveland Fire brigade.
* Activities have incorporated access to breakfast facilities and the provision of packed lunches in order to **address the issue holiday hunger**.

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**Family Service Delivery and Developments:**

Our Family Intervention Worker works alongside our Youth Service delivery with the whole family in an intensive and motivational way, supporting and empowering disadvantaged families to discover new skills and confidence and building resilience to effect sustainable positive change. **One to one parenting support** is offered on a weekly basis, times can vary based on the need of the parent, parental availability and the intensity of support required.

* By taking **a whole family approach** the service has seen a **positive improvement in family relationships**. The Family Intervention Worker focusses upon and **addresses relationship issues** within the family between parents, grandparents, co parents and the children.
* Work is done **individually or as a whole family together**. By assessing relationships via the family outcomes star we are able to see the progress made based on the parents view.
* The family service is **tailored to meet the individual needs of each family** supporting and advocating in liaison with local **partner agencies**.
* The family nurturing programme is a 10 week course that we plan to deliver again later on in the year.