

Smart Works Strategy

2025-2030

SMART
WORKS



For every unemployed woman, at every stage - trusted support, lasting change.

Founded in 2013,

Smart Works is a UK-wide charity committed to helping unemployed women secure employment and transform their lives. We empower women to face job interviews with confidence and self-belief, through the following range of support:

Career Coaching

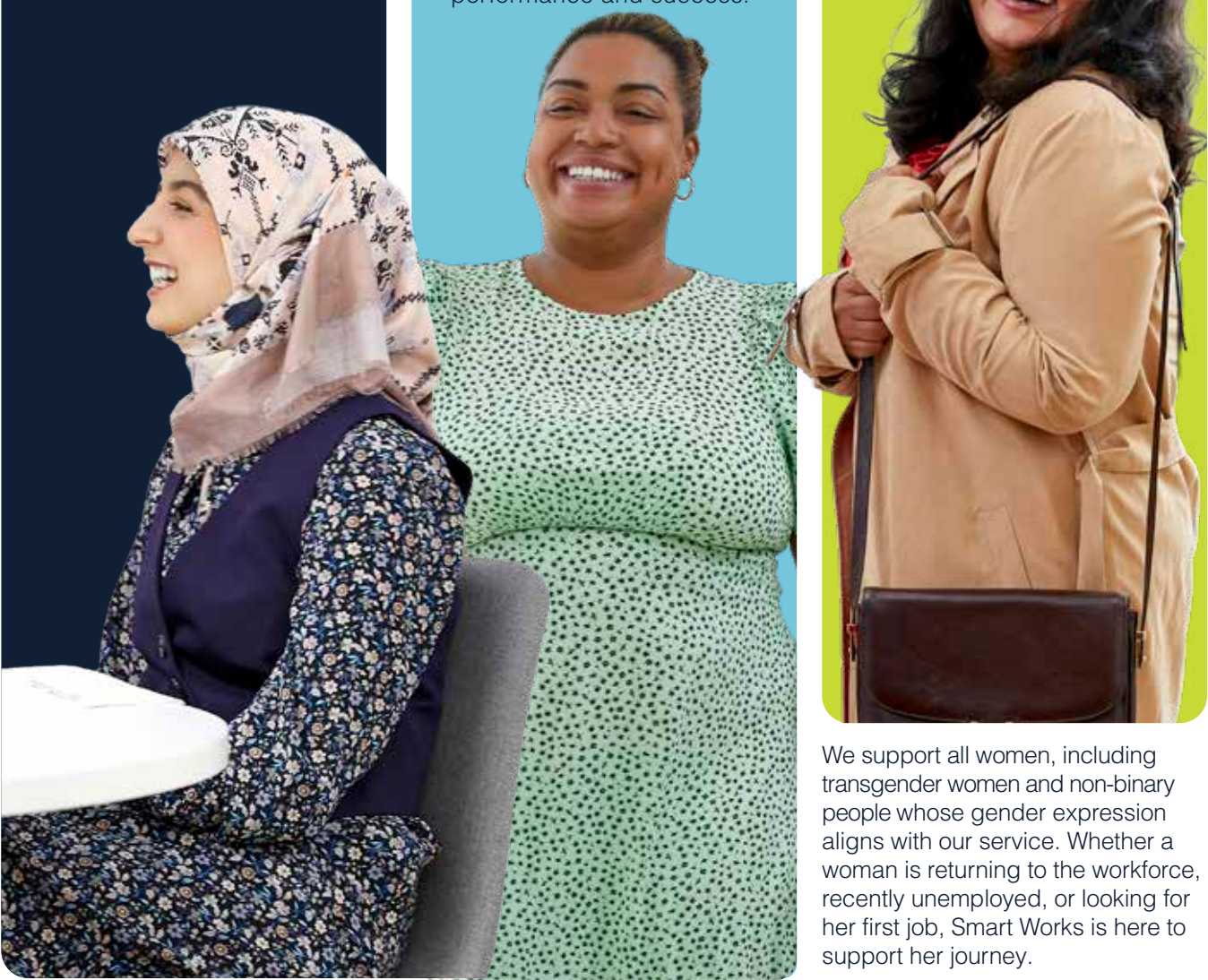
For women who are unemployed and looking for work, we provide dedicated 60-minute Career Coaching sessions to help them secure an interview and take the next step toward employment.

Interview Preparation

For unemployed women with an upcoming job interview, we offer an Interview Preparation session, where the client first works with a dresser to select a full interview appropriate outfit, followed by an interview coaching appointment to build skills. This combination of coaching and clothing builds confidence, enhancing interview performance and success.

Second Dressing

Women who are successful at interview can return to us for a Second Dressing appointment, to provide a capsule wardrobe that supports each client's transition into beginning work.

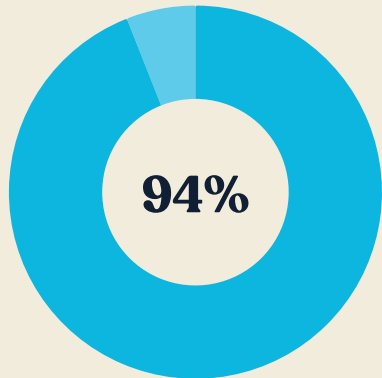


We support all women, including transgender women and non-binary people whose gender expression aligns with our service. Whether a woman is returning to the workforce, recently unemployed, or looking for her first job, Smart Works is here to support her journey.

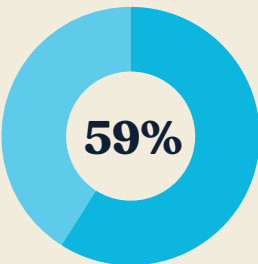
Our impact to date

45,000

Over 45,000 women supported since launch in 2013



report increased confidence after engaging with Smart Works



of our clients are aged 25-29

12

centres delivering services across the UK

67%

of clients secure a job within one month of their appointment.

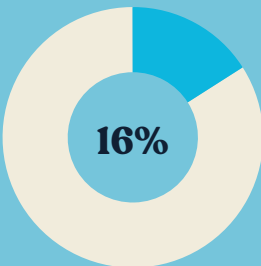
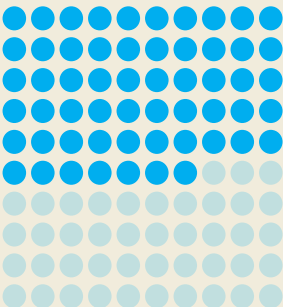


49%

of our clients are parents

57%

of our clients are from an ethnic minority background



of our clients have a disability

Achievements from our last strategic plan (2022 – 2025)

10,600

women supported

We continued to be client centric and launched our Client Champion programme.

We made progress in digitising our service and transformed how we work with data.

We established brand guidelines and a design studio to build a cohesive national brand.

We opened new centres in West London and Glasgow to reach more women, and secured funding to open a centre in Bristol.

We developed our Group function which now provides standardised support to local centres in key areas such as finance, communication campaigns and HR.



Strategic Priorities at a Glance:

Smart Works is building a future where every woman, at any stage of her career, can access trusted, personalised support to secure employment. We aspire to be local in feel, national in reach, shaped by the voices of women, valuing every story and every success.

Reach more women

We aspire to ensure every woman who could benefit from Smart Works can access our service.

1

A trusted 'go to' service

We aim to be nationally recognised as the leading service for unemployed women.

2

For every woman, at any stage

Our goal is to provide personalised, inclusive services that evolve with our clients' needs over time.

3

Raise our voice

We will use our voice to influence public discourse and policy around women's unemployment.

4

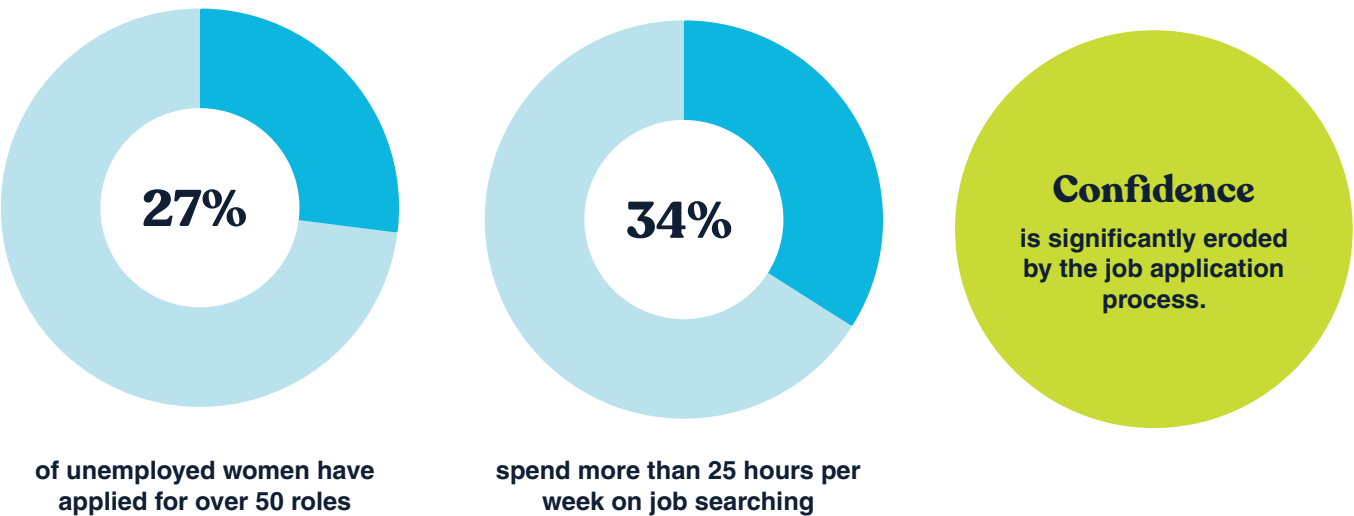
Strengthen our foundations

We will build the infrastructure, culture, and funding model needed for sustainable growth, grounded in equitable practices and continuous improvement.

5

The Growing Need

Each year we publish the Smart Works Unemployment Index, which explores the collective experience of almost 5,000 of our clients. In 2024, we found that women are applying for more jobs with less success – sending on average 38 job applications per role, compared to 28 in 2022.



Wider context: gender inequality in employment

- Women are still more likely to work part-time or in insecure work (ONS, 2023).
- The UK gender pay gap remains at 14.3% (Fawcett Society, 2024).
- Women face barriers to progression, especially in sectors where we know many Smart Works clients seek roles. This issue disproportionately affects women from minoritised backgrounds and with protected characteristics.
- Discrimination in recruitment persists, especially for mothers, ethnic minority women, women with disabilities and older women (EHRC, 2023).

- The pandemic, economic uncertainty and rising living costs continue to have a detrimental impact on women.”

Smart Works addresses these barriers by giving women the tools, confidence, and resources to overcome them.

Despite our growing footprint, public awareness of Smart Works remains limited in many areas – meaning thousands of women who could benefit from our support still aren’t accessing it.

1. Reach more women

We aspire to ensure every woman who could benefit from Smart Works can access our service.

Year 1–2:

- Review, explore and build our Career Coaching offer
- Develop our data and insights, and continue to listen to client feedback, to develop our service

Year 2–3:

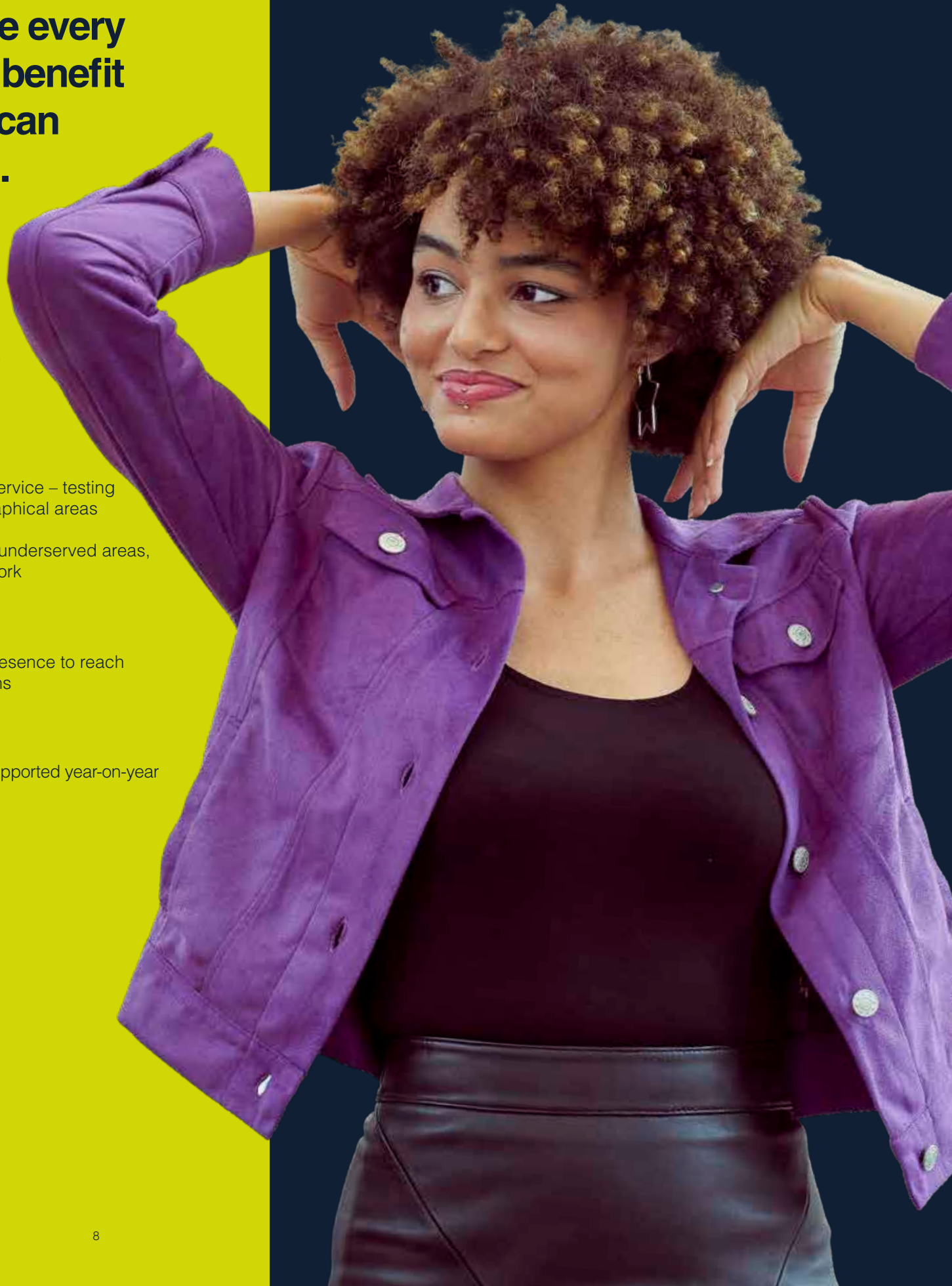
- Review, explore and build our virtual service – testing new approaches to reach new geographical areas
- Test new approaches and outreach in underserved areas, within a financially sustainable framework

Year 4–5:

- Expand our physical and / or digital presence to reach more women across the four UK nations

Success Measures:

- Maintain and grow number of women supported year-on-year
- Job success rate remains above 65%



2. A trusted go-to service

We aim to be nationally recognised as the leading service for unemployed women.

Year 1–2:

- Review our ways of working and quality assurance frameworks to ensure consistency of service and impact across all centres
- Explore the potential for a client-led self-referral pathway to increase accessibility
- Use low-cost methods to build awareness, such as community outreach, partner referrals, and organic social media

Year 2–3:

- Strengthen peer learning and resource-sharing networks
- Strengthen our network of connections and relationships by developing an alumni community

Year 2–5:

- Secure funding to increase awareness, in line with anticipated demand

Success Measures:

- Maintain client satisfaction measures above 90%
- Deliver improved range of quality and impact measures
- Ensure consistency of client experience and brand delivery
- Achieve increased public awareness and engagement

3. For every woman at any stage

We recognise that women need different kinds of support at different points in their working lives. Our goal is to provide personalised, inclusive services that evolve with our clients' needs over time.

Whether a woman is just starting out, returning after a break, or navigating a new direction later in life, Smart Works is here. We meet her where she is, providing tailored support for every woman, at every stage of her journey to employment.

Year 1-2:

- Review our delivery model to ensure it's tailored, seamless and inclusive
- Develop a volunteer management framework to support and strengthen our impact
- Invest in technology and time to build relationships, to help address post-appointment support and wardrobe needs for clients
- Expand ongoing support post-appointment via an online community and additional client follow up

Year 3-5:

- Continue to monitor, evaluate and invest in technology and relationships to support the client journey
- Evolve our model in line with changes in the fashion industry and the job market
- Enhanced tracking of client satisfaction and outcomes by demographic group

Success Measures:

- A more diverse volunteer base with improved training and support
- Track client satisfaction and outcomes by demographic group
- Improved use of technology to support efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery



4. Raise our voice

We will use our voice to influence public discourse and policy around women's unemployment and workplace inclusion, while being rooted in the lived experience of our clients.

We will build on the success of the Unemployment Index and use our data and client stories to build consensus around the need for change, working with partners and collaborators to do so.

Year 1-2:

- Amplify client stories, backed by data, to increase awareness within key stakeholder spheres, ultimately to drive change

Year 2-4:

- Develop policy and advocacy campaigns that are rooted in client stories and experience

Year 4-5:

- Influence employment policy and practice to improve women's employment experience, using evidence and lived experience

Success Measures:

- Increased engagement with partners and stakeholders regarding gender inequality issues in the workplace and policy forums
- Increased engagement from employers to implement the recommendations of the Smart Works Unemployment Index

5. Strengthen our foundations

We will build the infrastructure, culture, and funding model needed for sustainable growth, grounded in equitable practices and continuous improvement.

We will create an inclusive and supportive environment for staff and volunteers, fostering a culture of togetherness, continuous learning, and adaptability. As we evolve, we will use data and qualitative feedback from staff, volunteers, and clients to inform our work. We aim to ensure Smart Works is a model employer.

Year 1-3:

- Map and identify current organisational culture and take steps to continue to improve this in a way that aligns with our core values
- Deliver operational investment to increase capacity, sustainability and strengthen the organisation
- Invest in staff by improving pay practices, progression and talent management, and by providing growth, learning and development opportunities

Year 1-5:

- Diversify income and build reserves to ensure a sustainable funding model

Success Measures:

- Maintain sufficient reserve levels to support organisational sustainability
- Track staff sentiment through staff engagement and surveys
- Improved organisational design to set us up for future success



Stakeholder insights and risk awareness

This strategy is grounded in extensive consultation with staff, volunteers, trustees, and external partners. It reflects a shared ambition to expand our reach and deepen our impact while remaining responsive to key risks. These include the risk of inconsistent service quality, lack of visibility, and overextension without sufficient funding. Smart Works will mitigate these through national alignment, clear messaging, inclusive practices, and phased, sustainable growth.

Final thoughts

This five-year strategy provides a clear and focused path forward, informed by staff and volunteer insights, client feedback, and our own research. By grounding our ambitions in strong foundations and lived experience, we will be ready to meet the rising need, raise our voice with credibility, and reach thousands more women with the support they deserve.

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