

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM

**The Cost of Living  
Crisis & its effect  
on Women in the  
North East**  
February 2025

Erin Parker Leonard  
JoJo Kirtley- Workie Ticket Theatre CiC  
Supported by the Women's Budget Group







# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Foreword- Emma Foody MP
- A message to our respondents
- Trigger warning and support services

## The research

- The research team
- Methodology
- Research engagement

## Introduction

- Setting the scene for women in the North East

## Research findings

- Quantitative data
- Wellbeing
- Domestic abuse
- Housing and Home
- Children
- Voices from women workers who work with Women

## Conclusion

- Recommendations
- Limitations references
- Acknowledgements

## Appendix

- In conversation with Jo Jo Kirtley
- The play- 'Nee Place like Hyem'



## FOREWORD

### EMMA FOODY MP for Cramlington and Killingworth



I am honoured to introduce this crucial report on the experiences of women in the North East, highlighting the persistent social and economic disparities that women in our region face – disparities that have only been deepened by recent crises such as the cost of living crisis, austerity measures, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Watching the performance of “Nee Place Like Hyem” was a powerful way of making the findings of the report into a real, lived experience - because as seen in this report women in the North East continue to endure lower wages, higher rates of part-time employment, and increased financial insecurity.

However, beyond simply acknowledging these challenges, we must listen to women and place their lived experiences at the heart of our response. Women are experts in their own lives. Their voices must shape the policies and initiatives designed to address these systemic issues. This is not just about addressing gender inequality – it is about building a stronger, fairer society for everyone.

The insights contained within this report should serve as a call to action for all of us and we must commit to real and lasting change. That means pushing to tackle the root causes of gender inequality, sustainable support services, and ensuring that women’s voices drive decision-making processes. By working together, we can create a future where every woman in the North East – regardless of background or circumstance – can thrive.





I commend this report for amplifying the voices of women in our region and providing the foundation for meaningful progress. Thanks to Erin, Jo Jo, Workie Ticket Theatre and the Women's Budget Group for their work in pulling together this important report.

*Now we must act!*





## A MESSAGE TO OUR RESPONDENTS

A massive thank you to the women who responded to our survey. We don't know who you are, but please know that each of your responses has been read and deeply considered.

Analysing the responses has been an overwhelming task at times. These are real women with feelings, aspirations and hope.

To those who sat with us and spoke about the dark places you have been and the hope you have for your future — thank you. All of you have impacted this report and the theatre that has been produced.

We will be sending this report to the lead person at the focus groups to share with those who participated. Where possible, we also aim to keep them informed of any policy discussions that result from this research.



# TRIGGER WARNING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Some of the content of this report might be upsetting or triggering. Please find some support services listed below.

## FINDAWAY

This project is for you if you're worried someone you know is being controlled, scared or hurt by their partner, ex-partner or family member. Based in the North East

[www.wefindaway.org.uk](http://www.wefindaway.org.uk)

Anonymous Phonenumber: 0300 140 0061

## Rape Crisis

Did something sexual happen to you without your consent? Or you're not sure? No matter when, where or how it happened, you can come to us. We have lots of information and support that can help – and we will always listen to you and believe you.

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

Helpline: 0800 035 2794

## Women's Aid

Women's Aid's directory contains details of local, regional and national services specialising in violence against women and girls. It is regularly updated by the services listed so you'll be able to find the right local support, when you need it most.

[www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/womens-aid-directory/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/womens-aid-directory/)

## Tyneside Mind

We are here, to talk, to listen, to support YOU. Weekdays 2pm-10pm and Weekends 12pm-8pm. Call on 0191 477 4545 or 0330 174 3174

[www.tynesidemind.org.uk](http://www.tynesidemind.org.uk)

**Warning\*** Please note distressing as it covers g domestic abuse and port download the QR





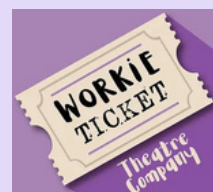
## THE RESEARCH TEAM

### ERIN PARKER LEONARD



Erin is interested in Social research and author of the report. She is also Director of Policy and Advocacy at Represent Women. With experience in local politics as an elected member, she also chaired an award-winning women's branch. Additionally, Erin has contributed as a diversity representative for 50:50 Parliament. Holding a first-class degree in politics, Erin is passionate about advancing women in leadership roles and addressing injustice and breaking down barriers for women in the North East.

### WORKIE TICKET THEATRE CIC



Workie Ticket Theatre CIC, founded by JoJo Kirtley, is an award-winning, female-led, feminist organisation based in North Tyneside. Dedicated to social justice, Workie Ticket uses theatre to amplify the voices of women and girls, particularly survivors of male violence. Through accessible productions, community workshops, and heritage projects, Workie Ticket empowers women and girls by ensuring their stories are heard. Their work fosters meaningful conversations and inspires social change, combining creativity with activism to make a lasting impact.

### SUPPORTED BY WOMEN'S BUDGET GROUP

WOMEN'S  
BUDGET  
GROUP

The UK Women's Budget Group is the UK's leading feminist economics think tank that provides evidence and capacity building on women's economic position and that proposes policy alternatives for a gender equal economy. They act as a link between academia, the women's voluntary sector and progressive economics think tanks.



## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the research project was to explore how the Cost of Living (CoL) crisis has affected women. We examined its impact on wellbeing, domestic abuse, home life, children's wellbeing, and the experiences of women's sector staff in the North East. We also considered how we could best influence change. Given this was a small scale funded project with a broad focus, this report provides an insight and summary of each of these topics. It also aims to highlight the disadvantages faced by women living in the North East compared to the rest of the UK.

### FOCUS GROUPS

---

Erin and JoJo conducted two focus groups in different areas of the North East, offering valuable insights into women's experiences during the CoL crisis. The first, a relaxed and informal session with over 20 women, encouraged group-led conversations and a variety of shared perspectives. The second, a smaller roundtable discussion with 7 women, allowed for deeper, more personal dialogue in a supportive environment. Together, these groups provided a rich balance of diverse and detailed viewpoints.

### SURVEY

---

The online survey was widely shared on social media through our networks and with sector professionals. The only criterion for participation was identifying as a woman. We received 171 responses from a diverse range of women, including members of the general public and women working in the sector. An ethics statement and links to support groups were provided to ensure participants felt informed and supported.

### THEATRE

---

The research findings and women's experiences were included in a rehearsed reading\* written by JoJo Kirtley, performed on October 10th, World Homelessness day, supported by Workie Ticket Theatre. The script was inspired by the voices of the women who responded and their experiences were embodied into the character. Following the performance, we collected feedback and audience input from over 60 attendees. The audience included women who had participated in the research, women's sector staff, academics, data analysts, elected members, and a representative from the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) office.

\*A rehearsed reading is where a performer reads from a script.



## RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

65

attendees at  
the rehearsed  
reading  
performance

171

survey  
respondents

27+

women  
attended  
focus groups





# INTRODUCTION

## SETTING THE SCENE FOR WOMEN AND THE NORTH EAST

The North East of England faces significantly higher levels of deprivation and poverty compared to other UK regions. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022), ‘nearly half (46%) of people in the North are among the bottom 40% of national incomes.’ The Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2021) reports that ‘households in the North East are particularly vulnerable to budget pressures.’ This highlights the necessity to focus on the North East regionally when it comes to research on the CoL crisis as areas that experience deprivation often experience more negative consequences as a result of national and regional crisis.

Money Expert (2023) reports that Newcastle and Darlington are among the top 20 locations in the UK with the smallest annual average salary increases. Meanwhile, Middlesbrough ranks in the top 20 areas experiencing the highest rise in online searches for food banks, indicating a rising economic strain in the region. In addition to the above and shifting the focus back to women, the ‘Women of the North’ report (2024) highlights that women in the North consistently earn less for their work’ compared to women elsewhere.



*THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS IS ANOTHER SMACK IN THE FACE, ANOTHER MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB.*

The report states that women are more negatively affected by ‘persistent barriers to health, access to essential services, working conditions, and mortality rates’. The report further underscores that all 12 Local Authorities in the North East have child poverty rates that exceed the English average.

Council budgets are being impacted by cuts from the central government. According to the Local Government Association report (2023), which examines the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, ‘Councils in England continue to face a funding gap of £4 billion over the next two years.’

Focusing on the North East, Claire Williams, Northern regional secretary at UNISON (2024), states, “Countless essential services and many vital jobs are at risk, with dire consequences for communities throughout the North East.” Many of these at-risk jobs are positions typically held by women.

The Women's Budget Group report (2019) on local government cuts states that ‘These cuts represent a triple whammy for women: local government is responsible for many of the services on which women disproportionately depend.’ The sharp increase in the cost of living during 2021 and 2022 significantly impacted households' ability to afford basic goods and services. Everyday expenses like food, fuel, and energy rose dramatically, while wages and income stagnated. According to the 'Women of the North' report, 'The cost-of-living crisis continues to have an impact, with parents and carers struggling to make ends meet.'



## *AS MUM, I FEEL THE WEIGHT OF THE BURDEN*

It is also crucial to acknowledge how austerity measures and the pandemic have disproportionately affected women in the North East compared to the rest of the country. The IPPR 10 Years of Austerity report (2020) states, ‘Austerity has had a disproportionately negative impact on the North of England, with serious consequences for the most vulnerable.’ Furthermore, an Ipsos and Fawcett Society report (2022) found that during the pandemic, ‘Six out of ten women (61%) are finding it harder to stay positive day-to-day, compared to 47% of men.’ Many of our respondents echoed this sentiment.

Citizen’s Advice statistics show that from April 2019 to March 2020 most months showed more men were accessing support with food bank referrals. From April 2020 until August 2024 the trend changes and month on month sees more women receiving support to make food bank referrals. With the highest peak in January 2024 when 11345 women and 9102 men sought support. The Young Women’s Trust summarised their 2024 annual report saying, ‘Because they have less savings or emergency money, young women remain more exposed to the cost of living crisis than men. They are more likely to go hungry, fall behind on bills, and get into debt.’

Another crucial factor to consider is the opportunity for women, both nationally and regionally, to be part of the solutions and to have their voices heard. The Covid 19 enquiry (2023) into the pandemic highlighted that women in Westminster were often excluded from discussions about solutions.

Helen McNamara, a former Deputy Cabinet Secretary in the Cabinet Office, said that during the inquiry female experts were frequently overlooked. Stating, 'not only were there numerous examples of women being ignored, excluded and not listened to or talked over it was also clear that the female perspective was being missed in advice and decision making.' It is highly concerning that during a time of National crisis, women experts were not being consulted with and listened to. the consequences of which heavily impact women's day-to-day lives. We need mechanisms to ensure that women from all backgrounds are included in discussions about crisis responses and policy-making.

The Women's Health "Let's Talk About It" survey (2022) revealed that, 'more than four out of five respondents (84%) felt that they, or the woman they had in mind, were 'unheard' by healthcare professionals. This disparity has only intensified women's struggles during the ongoing triple crisis of economic hardship, austerity and the pandemic.



*YOU NEED TO LISTEN TO THE REAL STORIES.  
LISTEN TO US. WE HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN.*

A Kings College London report into women's leadership (2022) states that, 'There is some evidence which suggests having more women in politics leads to a better implementation of welfare and health services and infrastructure.' Women's leadership has an important part to play for women in the North East and this is a factor to consider when looking at regional responses to the CoL crisis.

Devolution in the North East offers valuable opportunities for meaningful participation and consultation among citizens. Ahead of the North East Combined Authority elections, Kim McGuinness stated in her manifesto (2023) 'I want to be the mayor that champions our region and ensures Government hears our voice.' In reverse but of a similar thread, Angela Raynor, in her 2024 conference speech, declared, "Northerners will no longer be dictated to from Whitehall." Devolution removes an additional layer of power and separation, bringing elected officials and decision-makers closer to the communities they serve.



*COME AND SEE! GET OUT OF YOUR LONDON BUBBLE AND EXPERIENCE THE REAL WORLD.*

It has been evidenced that women are often not heard at various levels, from government experts to personal health appointments. Many of our respondents echoed this sentiment, highlighting that women in the North East and those who support them face greater barriers than others elsewhere in the country. When women aren't listened to this further exacerbates the problem experienced when crisis occurs nationally or regionally. Respondents shared their frustrations about being ignored, feeling that policymakers did not fully understand the challenges women, particularly North East women, face. They emphasised the need for decision-makers to listen more to women's lived experiences before implementing solutions.

**WE ASKED: WHAT COMES TO MIND FIRST WHEN YOU HEAR THE TERM 'COST OF LIVING CRISIS'?**

## RESPONDENTS TO OUR SURVEY:

99%

**Said they didn't think  
the CoL crisis was over**

80%

**Said they thought the  
CoL crisis affected  
women more than men**

The combination of the CoL crisis, the pandemic and austerity measures created a triple burden for many women. Our research supports the evidence that more women were affected by these challenges than men. The dismantling disadvantage report (2024) states, 'the growing cost-of-living crisis shaped many of our conversations, contributing towards the ever-escalating level of need'. The effect of the CoL crisis on women and girls is felt by many organisation sin the North East too.



*'EMPATHY AND COMPASSION ARE VITAL  
FOR SURVIVAL.'*

Many respondents expressed concern not only for themselves but also for women in more difficult situations. This empathy was a notable theme in the feedback. Many respondents spoke about the living standards and the negative effects the CoL crisis had on other women with children. There was a lot of empathy in women's responses. Almost all the women believed that the cost of living crisis wasn't over and many feared for the 'younger generation' and its impact on them. The strength and conviction of the women we spoke to and heard from was also a notable characteristic when setting the scene for the women of the North East.



## QUANTITATIVE DATA

### NEGATIVE EFFECTS

---

**90%** had to make changes or that yes there had been a negative effect on **food shopping** (168 respondents)

**90%** had to make changes or that yes there had been a negative effect on their **finance and budget plans** (168 respondents)

**88%** had to make changes or that yes there had been a negative effect on **leisure/social life** (167 respondents)

**74%** had to make changes or that yes there had been a negative effect on **eating healthily** (167 respondents)

Many of the women have had to make multiple changes in how they live their lives due to the CoL crisis. Having multiple aspects of their lives to juggle places immense pressure on their shoulders. Leisure and social life and eating healthily have also been significantly impacted.

**56%** had to make changes or that yes there had been a negative effect on **paying the rent or mortgage** (158 respondents)

---

## WELLBEING

Well-being was a central theme present throughout the responses from the women. The pressure on women's day-to-day lives increased and so did the burden of those working with and supporting other women.

Women said they did not feel like they had the 'head-space' and that every aspect of their lives was impacted. Many women spoke of 'living on the edge'. Repeated themes and experiences in the qualitative responses were the constant fear of the next bill, getting an email from the landlord or something else unexpected. Women reported using self-described 'hacks' or ideas to figure out the cheapest way to heat their home and manage the smart meter.

The Woman of the North report states that 12% of women in the North East provide unpaid care compared to 10.3%, the national average. We know, from reports like these, that women bear the brunt of the mental load of the family workload and carry out the majority of caring duties for dependents. The CoL crisis has created another layer of stress for women, worsening their overall well-being.



*I HAVE HAD MOMENTS WHERE I HAVE FELT TOO EXHAUSTED OR ILL TO WORK BUT HAVE FOUND WAYS TO PUSH THROUGH LIKE WORKING FROM HOME AS TAKING SICK DAYS WOULD CRIPPLE US FURTHER FINANCIALLY.*

Many women expressed feelings of hopelessness, as budgeting became increasingly impossible with the sums simply not adding up. Many shared that they had no choice but to 'muddle through' resorting to strategies like "robbing Peter to pay Paul" or being "more savvy" with their finances. This constant struggle is exhausting, adding both mental and physical stress. One woman commented, 'I've had moments where I felt too exhausted or ill to work but found ways to push through, like working from home, because taking sick days would cripple us further financially.'

As the burden of running a home increases so does the burden on a woman's wellbeing. Rising debt becomes a critical issue facing women. Citizens Advice CoL dashboard reports that, 'Before the pandemic council tax arrears were the most common form of debt, followed by credit, store and charge card debts - but this is now energy debts as energy costs rise.' This is true for 6 out of 12 of the Local authorities in the North East for 2023-24. Of the other 6 LAs Rent arrears (2 LAs) and Council tax arrears (4 LAs) are the most common forms of debt in 2023-24. At one of the focus groups we discussed that women have to be on top of everything, understand systems and always have to think about getting the best deal and the most for your money, whether this was shopping, utilities or running a home.

One respondent said, 'Through the winter I am always stressed when we have the heating on, watching how long it has been on for and having an unhealthy relationship with my smart meter watching the price go up.' The number of women receiving energy affordability help from citizen's advice is higher than men every month since 2014. The gap widens further from September 2020. In January 2024 there were 14074 (66%) women receiving energy affordability help compared to 7250 (34%) men.



*WOMEN WORKING INCREASINGLY LONGER HOURS, TAKING ON MULTIPLE JOBS TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES*

Women had to find different ways of coping. When asked about changes in their use of substances to cope with the CoL crisis 18% said their use had increased. Many of the responses told a story of exasperation and feeling desperate while knowing they had to keep going and finding coping mechanisms was getting increasingly harder.

Many women reported that mental health support was not readily available, and long waiting lists often left them in crisis. One respondent shared, 'I work for a mental health charity that holds a session at a food bank, and the stories I hear from women who need mental health support due to the increased mental load they are carrying are heart-breaking.' The Dismantling Disadvantage report (2024) highlights the stark reality, stating that between 2021-22, 81% (over 145,000) of women in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear who needed mental health support did not receive it.

 *EVENTUALLY IN LATE 2021, I HAD A BREAKDOWN AND BEGGED FOR HELP. THERE WASN'T ANY.*

**WE ASKED: HAS THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS AFFECTED YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?**

**62** %

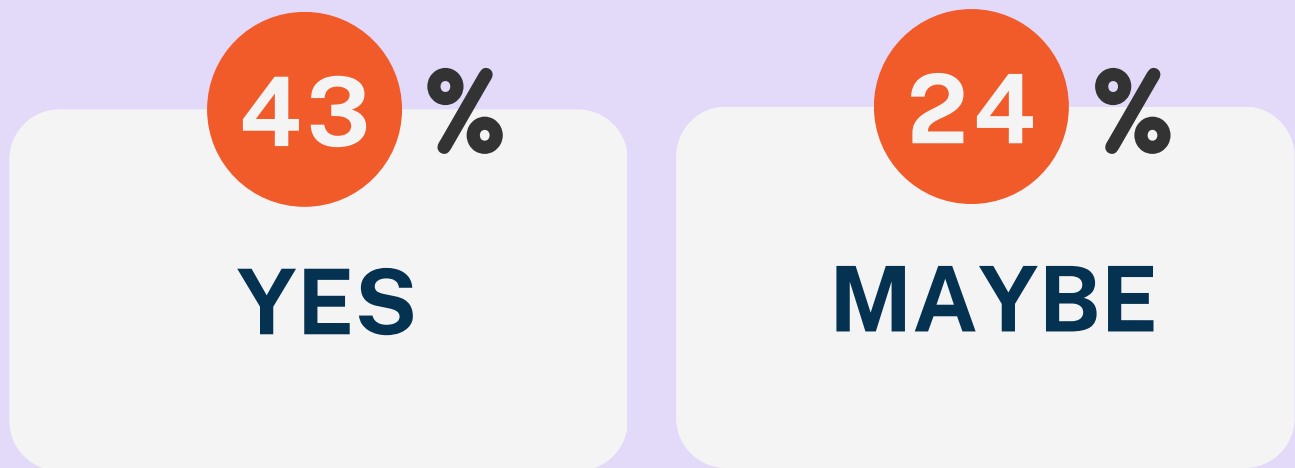
**YES**

**20** %

**MAYBE**

Respondents told us that their physical health had also been affected. Some women couldn't afford healthy food, were skipping meals and choosing not to take part in recreational activities. For many women hobbies have become an unaffordable luxury. This is another aspect of women's lives that has had to change due to the CoL crisis.

## HAS THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS AFFECTED YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH?



## DOMESTIC ABUSE

A common theme among the respondents was a feeling of being ‘trapped’ with financial pressures making it more difficult to leave dangerous relationships. The Woman of the North report indicates that women in the North-East face the highest rates of domestic violence, with ‘19 incidents per 1,000 population, compared to an average of 11 per 1,000 in the rest of England.’

In our discussions, several women shared their struggles with financial difficulties after leaving abusive partners. Many were left with significant debts and without rights to their family home since their names were not on the legal documentation. Numerous women expressed that financial concerns played a substantial role in their inability to leave their abusers.

One woman mentioned that it felt easier to stay with her abusive husband because she didn't believe she could survive on her own. The Victim Support website states that, ‘Economic abuse or control is often a major factor in domestic abuse situations. The abuser may use the rising cost of living to tighten their control over you, or push you into further hardship or debt.’



*IT (COL) FORCED ME TO GO BACK TO A MAN WHO WAS EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE TO ME AND I HAD A MENTAL BREAKDOWN.*

We heard from staff members at charities that provide domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) support, who told us women struggled to afford to attend support sessions due to the costs of public transport. Group attendees mainly consist of those living geographically close to their support centre. They expressed their concern for women who live further away and are struggling to access support. This increases pressure on services with limited capacity and budgets to try and deliver sessions from other locations and reimburse travel costs.



Many women talked about feeling “let down” and “not believed”. Feeling “trapped” by systems that were supposed to be there to support them. Shelter states that, “Domestic abuse was the second most common trigger of homelessness in the North East in 2023/24’ and ‘More than 1,500 households became homeless in the North East in 2023/24 due to domestic abuse’.



*I WAS LEFT WITHOUT ANY SUPPORT OR HELP. I DID END UP DRINKING AND MY EX ACCUSED ME OF BEING A DRUNK IN FAMILY COURT. I HAD NO MONEY OF MY OWN.*

We must also acknowledge that women with children also face extra barriers due to stigma and judgement and fear of child removal. The Woman of the North report states that, ‘Fears around child removal for justice-involved women may be particularly exacerbated in the North of England which has higher proportions of child poverty and children living in lone parent families, which tend to be headed by women.’

Some women respondents said that their partner or their ex-partner would threaten them with the idea that their children would be removed due to them being the bad parent. These pressures further intensify the burden felt by women and are further exacerbated by the CoL crisis.

One woman shared her view that it was common for fathers to ‘not bother’ paying child maintenance. She explained that her neighbour turned to sex work to pay the bills as there was “nothing more left to do”. One woman referred to her ex husband as a job hopper who used a change of jobs to avoid paying child maintenance. When child maintenance is not paid the burden is often passed onto women to make up the shortfall. A House of Commons Committee report (22-23) states that, ‘Child maintenance can play a vital role in lifting children in separated families out of poverty’.

The Surviving Economic Abuse website states that non payment of child maintenance, ‘is a tool for coercive control that can have a significant effect on victim-survivors. It can affect their ability to provide for their children and build economic safety after leaving an abuser.’ This was a common theme during our research.

# HOUSING AND HOME

We wanted to find out more about women's housing situation and home life and the effect the CoL crisis has had on this aspect of their lives. We heard from women whose living experiences varied. Some were homeowners and some were homeless. However the feelings expressed by all of the women were largely, fear, helplessness and anxiety.

The women we heard from who were in temporary accommodation reported feeling unsafe. One woman shared that she had been stuck in temporary accommodation for two years. According to Shelter's 2024 report, there were '250 single women in temporary accommodation in the North East, marking a 47% increase in just one year. '



*I LEFT MY EX AND I COULDN'T FIND ANYWHERE TO LIVE THAT WAS SAFE. I ENDED UP SPENDING A FEW NIGHTS SLEEPING IN MY CAR. I HAVE A PROFESSIONAL JOB. IT WAS MAD TO THINK I HAD NO WHERE TO LIVE.*

## RESPONDENTS TO OUR SURVEY:

8

**Women were homeless**

7

**Women lived in unsafe accommodation**

Several respondents shared that the response from statutory services had worsened, leaving them feeling abandoned, particularly when it came to housing repairs and housing support. Concerns were raised about women experiencing multiple traumas and being forced to engage with various services, with delays exacerbating their situations.

Some respondents who own homes or have a mortgage reported that their properties were "falling apart" due to their inability to afford necessary maintenance. One woman said she had been living with mould for years, while another shared, 'I have damp in my home, but I'm unable to afford to address it.'

One women's sector worker shared, 'I've seen families living in social housing where there is black mould, and the council does nothing. Cuts to councils are evident. Choices like austerity and the pandemic have led to funding cuts, significantly reducing the essential services that can be delivered, further straining public services already overwhelmed by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.'



*STATUTORY SERVICES ARE CRUMBLING AND  
WE'RE PICKING UP THE PIECES.*

Another sector staff member noted, 'The number of street homeless women has become more visible.' According to Shelter's 2023 report, 21 women were sleeping rough on any given night in the North East, more than double the number in 2022. Some respondents felt that charities were now "picking up the pieces" of statutory services that were "crumbling."

The Homeless Link report on women's experiences of homelessness (2024) states, 'As with all forms of homelessness, poverty is a leading cause of women's homelessness.' Additionally, 'women's homelessness is often hidden, with many women employing survival strategies that prevent them from appearing in official statistics.'

The Woman of the North report highlights that ‘women’s homelessness is an ‘invisible problem’ as women are far more likely than men to exhaust all social avenues before resorting to rough sleeping, often alternating between sofa surfing and sporadic nights on the streets.’ This hidden nature of women’s homelessness underscores the importance of gender-informed approaches that recognise and address the unique challenges faced by women in precarious housing situations. Tailored support services must not only meet their immediate needs but also address the underlying issues, such as domestic abuse, to ensure long-term stability and safety.



*SUPPORT SERVICES FOR WOMEN WITH COMPLICATED UNMET NEEDS ARE ALMOST NON-EXISTENT AND WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS IS INCREASINGLY WORSENING, UNSAFE AND UNSEEN.*

The Women’s Rough Sleeping census report (2023) by Change Grow Live states, ‘Women reported transient and intermittent rough sleeping patterns, making them less likely to be identified by outreach workers responsible for verifying and supporting rough sleepers.’ Spending time on night buses or traveling out of cities are some of the strategies women adopt instead of "bedding down."

## RESPONDENTS TO OUR SURVEY:

17

**Women lived somewhere with mould**

18

**Women lived somewhere in disrepair**

## RESPONDENTS TO OUR SURVEY:

15

**Women moved in with others to reduce costs**

8

**Women got eviction notices**

18

**Women had difficulty finding affordable housing**

17

**Women had rent/mortgage arrears**

27%

**Said their experience of domestic abuse got worse due to CoL crisis**

\*of 88 respondents

## CHILDREN

According to a report on understanding poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) the North East has the second-highest poverty rate in the country. The Woman of the North report highlights that all 12 local authorities in the region have rates of absolute child poverty exceeding the English average.



*THE EFFECTS OF THIS WILL LIVE ON WITH  
MY CHILDREN AND ALL OF THEIR  
GENERATION*

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation also reports that ‘44% of children in lone-parent families were in poverty in 2021/22,’ and according to Gingerbread, ‘89% of single-parent families are headed by single mothers.’ This underscores the critical connection between child poverty and issues disproportionately affecting women. Additionally, Shelter reports that in 2024, there were ‘190 single mothers in temporary accommodation in the North East — a 46% increase in just one year.’

Many respondents spoke about family separation, often exacerbated by systems that failed to provide adequate support. One woman shared that she is now estranged from her son, while others reported that their children no longer had contact with their fathers. One respondent explained that some women felt it was better to leave their husbands, describing them as “a drain on resources” and a “burden.” She referred to a “triple whammy” of struggling to pay bills, bearing the brunt of domestic chores, and caring for children and elderly relatives.



Some women reported that the cost-of-living crisis exacerbated their partners' 'bad tempers and verbal emotional abuse.' One woman shared that she felt her husband blamed her for the financial strain, while another described how her husband "withdrew entirely". refusing to have any direct debits in his name. This left her to shoulder the financial burden alone for the sake of their children.

Some respondents spoke of experiencing stress which they felt was triggered by their husbands and partners which resulted in them feeling they were 'more argumentative' leading to an increase in the 'distress' that the children were experiencing. Many women said they felt trapped as they couldn't leave due to the CoL crisis and this then meant staying in a toxic environment. This, in turn, had a detrimental impact on their children. The affect that domestic violence has had on children has worsened during the CoL crisis and the consequences of this could still be unknown.

One respondent, who works with women, noted that they had 'seen many more families needing to stay in one room for warmth,' which often led to increased friction and heightened instances of emotional and physical abuse between parents and toward children. Long waits for Child Support Agency (CSA) payments further exacerbated financial instability, impacting both women and their children. Again many women spoke of the struggles they faced providing for their children due to their children's fathers avoiding paying child maintenance.

## RESPONDENTS TO OUR SURVEY:

**58 %**

**report a negative effect on  
their dependants eating  
healthily**

**62 %**

**report a negative effect on  
their dependants  
leisure/social life**

Respondents spoke about the heavy burden of caring for dependents, often feeling as though they had failed. They shared how they had to say “no” more frequently to their children, which they felt was negatively affecting them. Women have been forced to make difficult decisions that deeply impact their families, with the ongoing pressure of supporting children taking a toll on their overall well-being.



*IT'S HARD WHEN THEY WANT TO GO SOMEWHERE BUT I HAVE TO SAY NO BECAUSE I CAN'T AFFORD IT. IT BREAKS MY HEART TO BE HONEST!!!*

We know from our survey results that The CoL crisis also meant some women had to make changes in their children’s lives. Over half of the women surveyed reported a negative impact on their dependents’ ability to eat healthily, while almost a third noted a detrimental effect on their dependents’ leisure activities and social lives.



*THE THINGS THAT WE NOW CAN'T AFFORD IMPACT MOST ON THE CHILDREN - HEALTHY FOOD, DAYS OUT, HEATING THE HOUSE PROPERLY, EDUCATIONAL TRIPS AT SCHOOL.*

The research results demonstrate the various ways in which children have been negatively impacted. Many children are exposed to more frequent arguments, homelessness, and adverse changes in their lifestyles. This is an important area to explore further, especially considering the high levels of child poverty in our region. The North East Child Poverty Commission states that, ‘In the North East, 89% of all constituencies have at least one in four children growing up in poverty.’ The link between women and child poverty must be explored further and acted on.

## VOICES FROM THOSE WORKING IN THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

We received 47 qualitative responses to our question about the experiences of women who work with, or support other women and how the CoL crisis has negatively impacted their ability to provide support.

Positive comments were scarce among the responses. Many expressed deep concern about the impact of the cost-of-living on the women they support and how this, in turn, affects their own well-being and that of other staff and volunteers. Funding challenges were a recurring theme, highlighted as a significant barrier to providing adequate support.



*INVESTMENT IN WOMEN'S SERVICES  
IMPACTS THEIR WHOLE FAMILY AND SAVES  
BILLIONS DOWN THE LINE IN NHS, SOCIAL  
SERVICES AND PROBATION SERVICES. IT  
ALSO POSITIVELY CHANGES THE LIVES OF  
FAMILIES AND WHOLE COMMUNITIES*

A UNISON report looking at council cuts (2023) states that, 'Local authorities in the North East could be forced to sell land, buildings and other capital assets, as well as cut back vital community services' Local Authorities are having to make decisions about cutting vital services that women rely on and making redundancies to the workforce. Much of this is being felt in statutory services that women rely on and adding to the rising demand in need for services being delivered by the women's sector.

Voluntary organisations were carrying a heavier burden, and staff members reported feeling overwhelmed. Women working with or supporting others felt helpless at times, with many expressing how distressing it was to hear the harrowing stories of the women they support.



*YOU ARE LOSING PROFESSIONALS ACROSS THE BOARD DUE TO THE IMPACT IT IS HAVING ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH, THIS IS THEN A SPIRAL WE CANNOT ESCAPE BECAUSE THESE PROFESSIONALS ARE NEEDED TO SUPPORT OTHERS DURING CRISIS.*

Some women shared feelings of hopelessness, working longer hours, and lying awake at night worried about how they would keep the lights on in their services. One woman mentioned that two of her colleagues were concerned about the prospect of homelessness. They also noted that they were supporting a police officer at the local foodbank and another individual, a business owner, who was sofa surfing.



## **WOMEN WORKING WITH WOMEN:**

*HOW CAN I LOOK AFTER OTHERS WHEN I CAN'T EVEN LOOK AFTER MYSELF?*

*WE ARE ALL UNDERFUNDED, EXHAUSTED AND ANGRY.*

*LIVING WITH A RAT PROBLEM, UNABLE TO AFFORD TO REPLACE ITEMS, LACK OF SUPPORT FROM COUNCIL WITH BEING IN COUNCIL HOUSING- WHAT DO I ADDRESS FIRST?*

*MY MENTAL HEALTH HAS MADE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO SUPPORT OTHER WOMEN*

*I LIE AWAKE AT NIGHT WORRYING WHAT THESE WOMEN WOULD DO WITHOUT US. FUNDING NEEDS TO BE TARGETED TO GRASS ROOTS ORGANISATIONS.*

*I STILL SIGNPOST, BUT THERE ARE LESS PLACES TO SIGNPOST TO*

*ANY ORGANISATION I WOULD ADVISE PEOPLE TO SEE HAS MASSIVE WAITING LISTS AND ARE OVERWHELMED*

# CONCLUSION

Women in the North East face significant social and economic disparities, such as lower wages, higher part-time employment, and increased poverty. These issues are exacerbated during crises like the CoL, austerity measures, or the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to greater financial instability, uncertainty and a burden on mental health. It also leads to women being in more dangerous situations.

During such events, women are often more severely impacted than men. For instance, the pandemic saw women shouldering more caregiving responsibilities and experiencing higher job losses in female-dominated sectors. This underscores the heightened hardships faced by women in the North East during national or regional crises.

Statutory services are under strain, and advocating for additional resources is essential to ensure they can effectively fulfil their duties. Funding for the voluntary sector is also critical in addressing the challenges faced by women. We know that the organisations that support women are bearing the brunt, demand has risen and funding for them is getting tighter. Listening to women and including their perspectives in developing solutions is vital, especially during crises. Despite the ongoing CoL crisis, it is crucial to focus on the resilience of women and the organisations supporting them. Strengthening these organisations can better support women and girls still affected by the crisis.

We need to learn from women's unique challenges and experiences as they offer valuable insights, by engaging with them directly, we can develop more effective, targeted solutions. Women are experts in their own lives, and their voices should drive any response to both current and emerging crises. It is also crucial to highlight the correlation between child poverty and women in poverty. When crises like the CoL occur, women are disproportionately affected across all aspects of their lives.

This report has addressed various topics, highlighting the challenges women encounter regarding children, well-being, domestic abuse and homelessness. The negative impact of national or regional crises further intensifies these issues and we need to understand this. We need to listen to all of these voices and work together to make sustainable and meaningful change for women in the North East.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## POLICY MAKERS

We recognise that the Central Government has numerous options to enhance the lives of women in the North East. Since devolution, the region has witnessed the establishment of combined authorities. Our focus is on recommendations that can be effectively implemented in this area.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEVOLVED AUTHORITIES

- Ensure that devolution effectively supports women and actively implements strong systems to promote their participation.
- Implement creative policies with a gender perspective and make gender-informed decisions at all levels. Equality impact assessments should be established and utilised effectively.
- Ongoing training and development for all staff on how women experience services differently than men, emphasising the impact of events like the CoL crisis on women.
- Adopt a gendered and intersectional approach to ensure that the appropriate services are available for women and girls, providing support in a holistic manner. Women should be actively involved in both the development of new services and the evaluation of existing ones.
- Support and advocate for the creation of an All-Party Parliamentary group on the Women of the North.
- Encourage more women into decision-making roles and consider using quotas. This includes political leaders, officers and other sector leaders.

- Local Authorities to take part in the Women's Rough Sleeping census so we can better understand women's homelessness
- Ensure that any efforts to address child poverty also focus on combating women's poverty.

## CRISIS RESPONSE

It is evident how women are affected disproportionately during crises like the pandemic or the CoL happen. We need policy-makers to understand this and act on it.

- Gendered informed regional crisis responses written into policy. This should include understanding what services are available to women.
- Establish a robust system to ensure women's voices are heard in preparation for and in response to crises and that this is written into policy and procedures.
- Create an emergency fund to support women through events such as the CoL crisis. This could provide support to victim-survivors to escape abuse, help mothers heat their homes, ensure that mental health support is available and provide a specialist response to women.
- Improve and better fund accessible mental health services for women: Given the disproportionate emotional and mental health impact of crises on women, ensuring access to specialised, gender-sensitive mental health services is vital.



## UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF THE WOMEN AND GIRLS SECTOR

We have seen how women and girls sector organisations have worked hard to ensure support is available to women and how the CoL crisis has increased this pressure.

- Better funding for women and girl's organisations and a better understanding of the value that they bring to society and the economy.
- Listen to women and girls organisations and ensure they are part of the plans to halve male violence against women and girls in ten years.
- A regional strategy to improve women's services regarding homelessness & housing, mental health & well-being and domestic abuse that is accessible and co-designed.
- Adopt a women and girls charter for best practice to include commissioning and participation.
- Improve access to affordable childcare: Address childcare affordability and availability to help reduce the burden on women, particularly in times of economic strain.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### WOMEN RESPONDENTS :



*MONEY SPENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES IS CRUCIAL FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY*

*PENSION RISES AND WOMEN ARE IN PHYSICALLY DEMANDING OR MENTALLY DEMANDING ROLES*

*PLEASE START TAKING A LONGER-TERM VIEW*

*I LIE AWAKE AT NIGHT WORRYING WHAT THESE WOMEN WOULD DO WITHOUT US. FUNDING NEEDS TO BE TARGETED TO GRASS ROOTS ORGANISATIONS*

*GIVE US DIGNITY IN YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH US*

*YOU NEED TO LISTEN TO THE REAL STORIES. LISTEN TO US. WE HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN.*

*STOP PRESSURISING SINGLE PARENTS TO WORK FULL TIME WHEN THEY'RE JUGGLING SO MUCH STUFF ALREADY*



CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE TO ENSURE THAT  
CORPORATE COMPANIES AREN'T MAKING  
HUGE PROFITS WHILE CHILDREN STARVE

ALSO GET RID OF THE 2 CHILD CAP KIDS ARE SUFFERING

PENSION RISES AND WOMEN ARE IN PHYSICALLY DEMANDING  
OR MENTALLY DEMANDING ROLES

SORT OUT THESE BIG ENERGY COMPANIES WHO HAVE  
BILLIONS IN PROFIT BUT ARE CRIPPLING FAMILIES WITH  
THEIR INCREASING PRICES

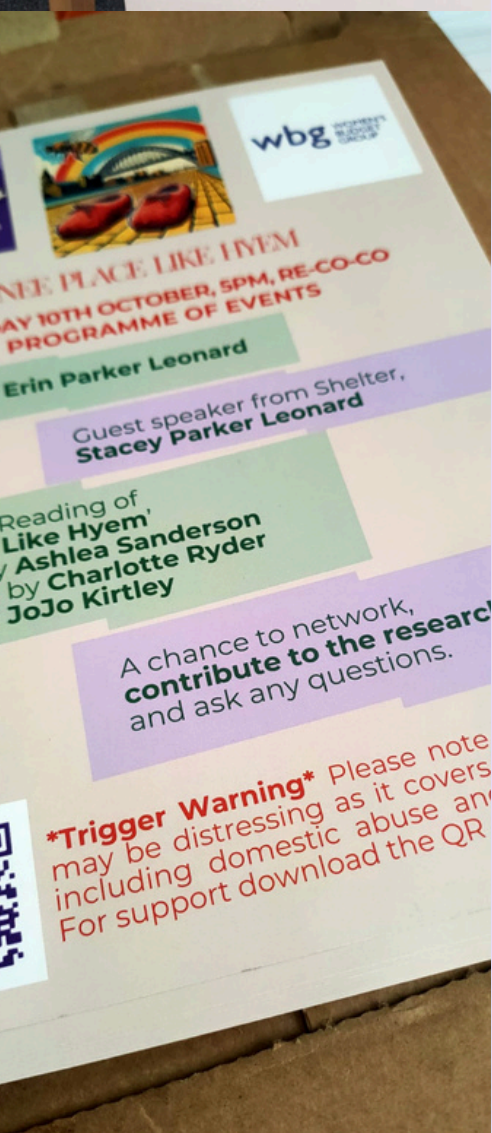
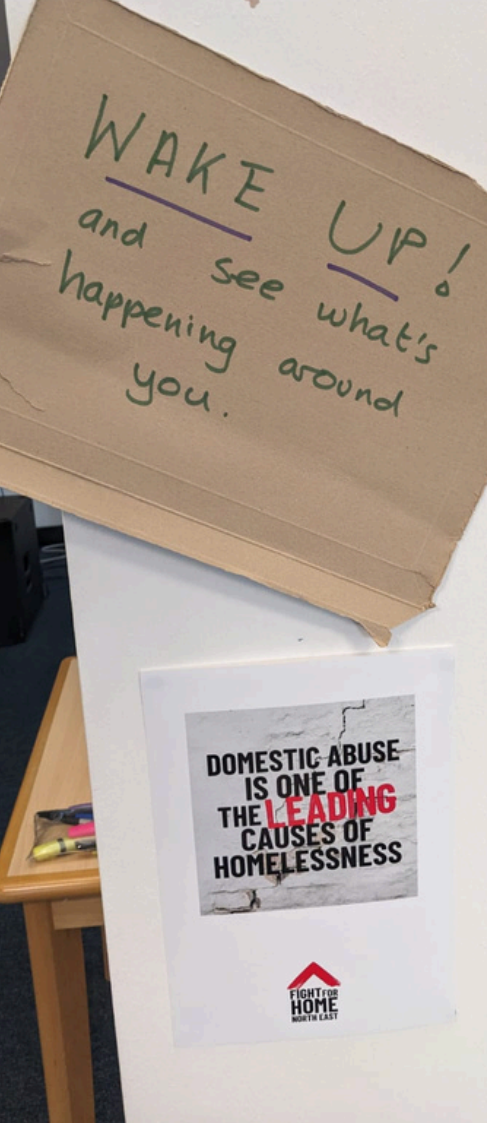
COME AND SEE! GET OUT OF YOUR LONDON BUBBLE  
AND EXPERIENCE THE REAL WORLD

MORE HELP AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT WOULD BE  
REALLY HELPFUL TO REDUCE STRESS AND DEPRESSION

TAX THE RICH MORE. STOP THE HUGE PROFITS. HUNT OUT THE  
TAX HAVENS

WALK IN THE POOREST PERSONS SHOES

POLICYMAKERS HAVE LOST SIGHT OF WHAT IT IS LIKE TO  
LIVE WITH ONLY JUST ENOUGH OR EVEN NOT ENOUGH  
MONEY TO SURVIVE



## LIMITATIONS

This was a small-scale piece of research which also included a performance to create meaningful connection with the audience. We are exploring funding avenues to extend the reach of the 'Nee place like Hyem' performance by creating a film. This would expand the reach and impact more decision makers, organisations and individuals.

We gave respondents the option to skip questions so not all the questions had 171 responses. This was important to ensure women weren't deterred if a question arose that they didn't want to engage with. It did mean that each question had a different number of responses.

Regarding demographics, we had less respondents from the 65 and over age bracket (5.8%) and the 16-24 age bracket (2.3%).

We left space for women to self-identify regarding their ethnicity which made analysis difficult due to the different descriptions used. We can see from the self-identification that the majority were White with only 4.2% answering without the word white included. Most of the respondents were British Nationals (97.1%).

The survey was open to women from the North East. We got more responses from Newcastle and North Tyneside postcodes.

With a larger scale piece of research we would have been more able to disaggregate the data and take a more intersectional approach in our research engagement and analysis. There were valuable comments about disability, race, sexual orientation and being childless and single.





## REFERENCES

The Fawcett Society and Ipsos MORI (2020) [Women are bearing the emotional brunt of the coronavirus crisis](#) | [The Fawcett Society](#)

Covid enquiry- Witness statement of Helen Mcnamara (2023) [INQ000273841 - Witness statement of Helen MacNamara, dated 09/10/2023 - UK Covid-19 Inquiry](#)

Women's health 'let's talk about it' survey (2022) [Results of the 'Women's Health – Let's talk about it' survey - GOV.UK](#)

Kings College London, the Global institute for women's leadership- Women political leaders: the impact of gender on democracy (2022) [women-political-leaders.pdf](#)

Kim McGuinness- My devolution plan for the North East (2024) [My devolution plan for the North East](#)

Angela Rayner- Conference speech 2024- [Angela Rayner speech at Labour Party Conference 2024 – The Labour Party](#)

Young Women's Trust A world not designed for us: Annual survey (2024) [A world not designed for us: Annual survey 2024](#)

Citizens Advice- Cost of Living dashboard- (Dec 2024) [CA cost-of-living data dashboard](#) | [Flourish-](#)

House of Commons- Children in poverty: Child Maintenance Service- Sixth Report of Session (2022–23) [Children in poverty: Child Maintenance Service - Work and Pensions Committee](#)

Surviving Economic Abuse- Child Maintenance ([Child maintenance - Surviving Economic Abuse](#))



## REFERENCES

Joseph Rowntree Foundation- Low-income households in Scotland, the North and Midlands of England were more likely to be going without essentials and experiencing hardship than average (October 2022) [London, the North of England, and Scotland hit hardest by the crisis of spiralling prices | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

Office for National Statistics- Income, spending and wealth: how do you compare? (2021) [Income, spending and wealth: how do you compare? - Office for National Statistics](#)

Woman of the North-Inequality, health and work (2024) [Vast inequalities faced by women in the North of England exposed in report - Health Equity North](#)

Money Expert- The Cost of Living Crisis: Which UK Towns and Cities have been most affected? (2023) [The Cost of Living Crisis: Which UK Towns and Cities have been most affected?](#)

Claire Williams, UNISON- Funding shortfall of £157m leaves the North East councils on a precipice, says UNISON (2024) <https://northern.unison.org.uk/news/2024/09/funding-shortfall-of-157m-leaves-the-north-east-councils-on-a-precipice-says-unison/>

The Women's Budget Group- Triple Whammy: the impact of local government cuts on women (March 2019) [Triple Whammy: the impact of local government cuts on women – Women's Budget Group](#)

IPPR- 10 years of austerity: Eroding resilience in the North (2020) [10 years of austerity: Eroding resilience in the North | IPPR](#)





## REFERENCES

[Agenda Alliance and Changing Lives \(2024\). DISMANTLING DISADVANTAGE Levelling up public services for women with multiple unmet needs TSWF Final Report](#)

[Independent review of the Child Maintenance Service \(CMS\) response to domestic abuse - GOV.UK](#) - this is the updated Child Mat report republished in 2023.

Shelter Newcastle- statistics on women in the North (2024) [Home - Shelter England](#)

Homeless link- Exploring women's homelessness (2022) [Exploring Womens Homelessness Final VA - Copy 2.pdf](#)

Change Grow Live- Women's rough sleeping census 2023 report (2023)- [Untitled-1](#)

[Domestic abuse and the rising cost of living - Victim Support](#) (2025) Domestic abuse and the rising cost of living

Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024- (2024) [UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

Single Parents- Facts and Figures (2025) [Single parents facts and figures | Gingerbread](#)

UNISON- North East councils face "dire" cash crisis totalling more than £133m- Sept 2023 <https://northern.unison.org.uk/news/article/2023/>.

North East Child Poverty Commission- (2024) <https://www.nechildpoverty.org.uk/facts/>



# THANK YOU

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Smallwood Trust and Sisters Trust for the grant to support this work.

Women's Budget Group's Emma Thackeray for all of the support and guidance.

The women who gave their time and shared their stories, without whom this project would not have been possible. Specific thanks to Free Women's Community and East End Women- part of Building Futures East.

Re-CO-CO for the space and hospitality during our 'Nee Place like Hyem' performance.

To Stacey Parker Leonard from Shelter for their input on a regional level and speaking at the Nee Place like Hyem performance.

Emma Foody MP for Cramlington and Killingworth for speaking at the 'Nee Place like Hyem' performance and writing our Foreword.

The Workie Ticket team- for bringing the women's voices to life and ensuring they aren't just another statistic or piece of data.

Jo Armstrong for proof reading support.

## CONTACTS

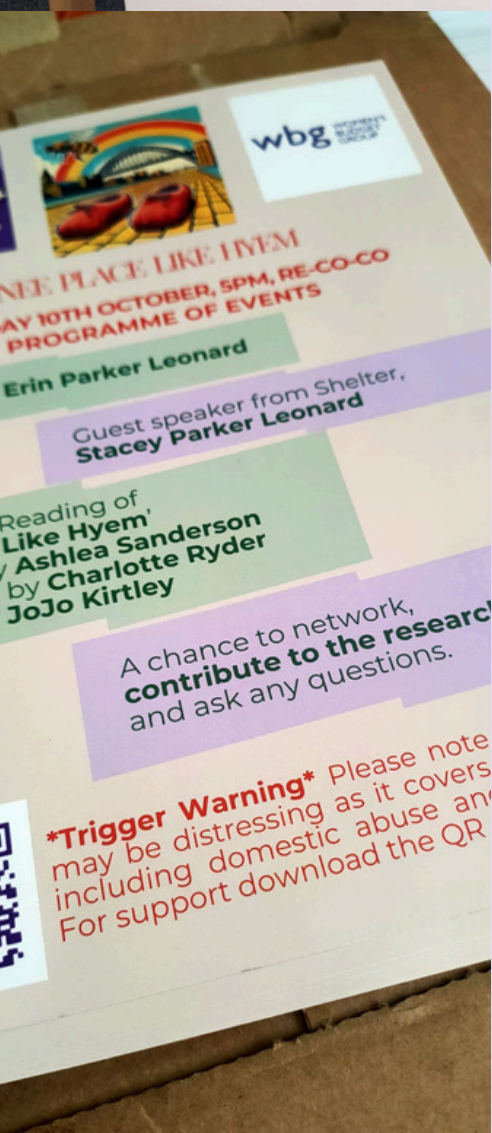
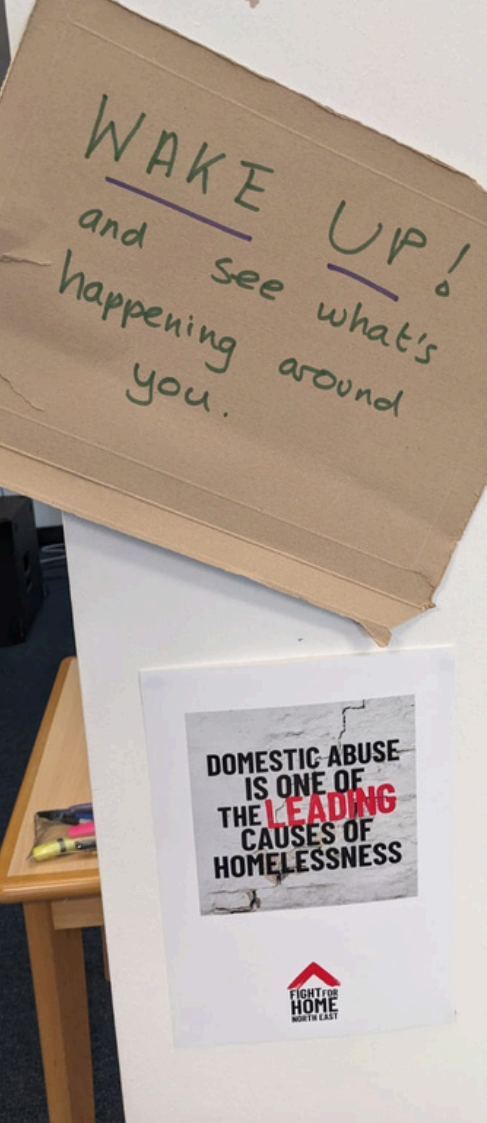
[workietickettheatre@gmail.com](mailto:workietickettheatre@gmail.com)

[erinparkerleonard@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:erinparkerleonard@yahoo.co.uk)

[emma.thackray@wbg.org.uk](mailto:emma.thackray@wbg.org.uk)

[www.workietickettheatre.com](http://www.workietickettheatre.com)





# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE PERFORMANCE



In conversation with JoJo Kirtley

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE PERFORMANCE

In conversation with JoJo Kirtley



## Why use theatre as a medium to share these stories?

---

Theatre is a powerful tool for storytelling because it creates an immediate, shared experience. It allows the audience to connect emotionally and intellectually with the issues being presented. With our play 'Nee Place Like Hyem', we wanted to reflect the lived realities of women in the North East, bringing their voices to the forefront in a way that demands attention and empathy. Theatre doesn't just tell stories — it makes people feel them.



*WE WANTED TO REFLECT THE LIVED REALITIES OF WOMEN IN THE NORTH EAST, BRINGING THEIR VOICES TO THE FOREFRONT IN A WAY THAT DEMANDS ATTENTION AND EMPATHY*

**'Nee Place Like Hyem', reflects these women's realities. How did you develop the script from their voices?**

---

The script started with listening. We conducted workshops, focus groups, and surveys, collecting the voices and stories of women across the North East. From there, we worked to distil their experiences into a narrative. Every word in the script is rooted in their voices, whether verbatim or inspired by themes that emerged. It was vital to stay authentic while also crafting a piece that would resonate theatrically. We spent hours refining, ensuring the tone honoured their truth while creating space for a broader audience to engage with it meaningfully.

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE PERFORMANCE



What stood out to you most during the research process?

---

What struck me was the resilience of all of the women we spoke to — their ability to find strength amidst systemic challenges and personal hardship. There was also a profound sense of frustration and a hunger for change, particularly around housing and safety issues. Hearing these shared struggles reinforced the importance of creating this platform. The research wasn't just about gathering facts — it was about amplifying voices that are often silenced.



*ULTIMATELY, THE PREPARATION PROCESS WASN'T JUST ABOUT REHEARSALS OR LOGISTICS—IT WAS ABOUT HONOURING THE STORIES WE WERE ENTRUSTED WITH*

Preparing for the performance must have been intense. Can you tell us more about that?

---

We didn't have lots of time to rehearse and we planned in some time to really look through the script. As it was a rehearsed reading, we knew that Charlotte would be able to have the script but still wanted to make an impact. It was a labour of love and incredibly demanding to get through it. Charlotte - our performer was incredible and Ashlea - our director was brilliant. They both worked so hard — balancing precision with the emotional weight of the material. Beyond the logistics, the emotional toll was significant. Ultimately, the preparation process wasn't just about rehearsals or logistics — it was about honouring the stories we were entrusted with and ensuring that the performance would leave a lasting impact on our audience.

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE PERFORMANCE



What about the performance itself — can you set the scene for us?

---

Picture a room filled with a mix of academics, politicians, decision-makers, service providers, and some of the women whose stories we were sharing. It was electric-charged with anticipation and emotion. Before the performance, we took time to ground ourselves emotionally, fully aware of the responsibility we carried. The stage was surrounded by quotes on cardboard, each one a poignant reminder of the voices we were amplifying, while a slideshow projected powerful images and statements, adding another layer of depth to the narrative.

One of the most striking elements was the twist with our actor, Charlotte. She was embedded in the audience, a deliberate choice that created an unexpected poignancy when her voice emerged. It blurred the lines between performer and observer, drawing the audience into the story in an intimate and deeply moving way.

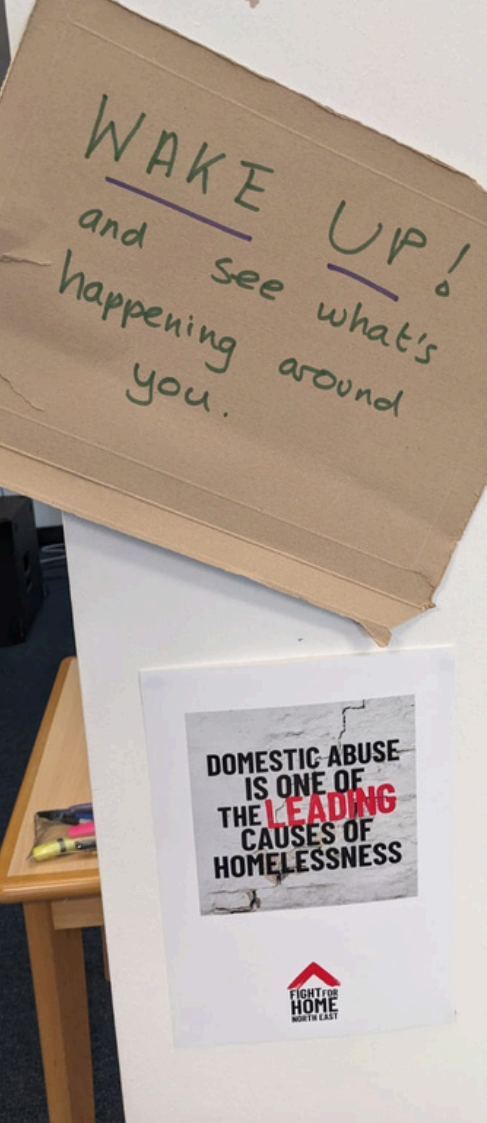


*THE PERFORMANCE WASN'T JUST A SHOW —IT WAS A MOMENT OF CONNECTION, A CALL TO ACTION, AND A TESTAMENT TO THE POWER OF COMMUNITY STORYTELLING.*



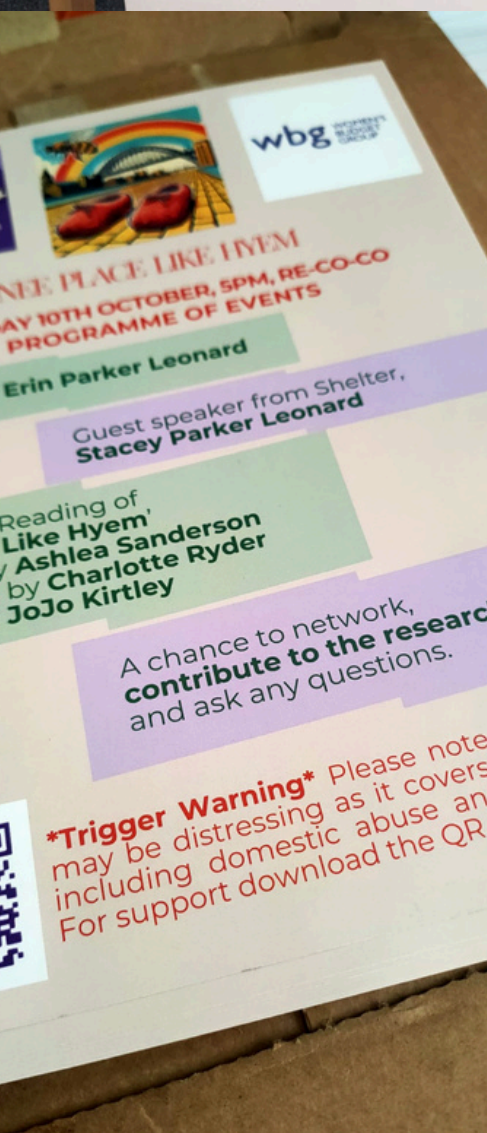
JoJo Kirtley is a freelance writer, producer, and facilitator, and the Founder and Artistic Director of Workie Ticket Theatre CIC. A passionate advocate for feminism and women's rights, JoJo is also a mother of three. In 2024, she was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to explore how theatre is used globally as a powerful tool in combating gender-based violence.





# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT

Written by JoJo Kirtley



# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



## NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM

Written by JoJo Kirtley

Performed at Re-Co-Co, on World Homeless Day, 10th October 2024

Directed by Ashlea Sanderson, Performed by Charlotte Ryder

*Inspired by North East Women we spoke to during the research.*

*Dani, 23, dressed in mismatched clothes. She has no shoes on but blue socks. She's smart, impulsive and honest. Dani is a resilient, streetwise young woman from Newcastle but has lived across the country, hardened by a life of struggle and survival. She's sharp-witted, with a gritty sense of humour that she uses to cope with the harsh realities of poverty and homelessness.*

*Despite her tough exterior, Dani is deeply empathetic and carries the weight of her experiences, often masking her vulnerability with bravado. She's an old soul.*

*Her speech is raw, unfiltered and passionate, reflecting both her anger at the systemic injustices she faces and her deep love for her home. Dani's determination to be heard and her refusal to be reduced to a statistic are central to her character. She's a fighter, driven by the belief that she—and others like her—deserve better.*

*The room is covered with cardboard signs - quotes from the survey/groups/WBG. There are a few signs propped up against the wall or on the floor, strategically placed. Dani enters the room, dragging a red suitcase behind her, whilst the audience enters. She heads for the drinks, perhaps chatting briefly with a few people. Whilst everyone is seated, Dani joins them, listening to the speeches.*

*Dani raises her hand as someone is speaking about the event/report.*

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



Dani Can I say something now?

*Dani walks to the front, dragging her suitcase. She takes a sip of tea and looks out of the window over Newcastle.*

Dani That's a view, like. Newcastle's some City.

*She turns to the audience, noticing their stares.*

Hi. (awkwardly waves) I'm Dani. I'm twenty-three...

*She places her red suitcase in front of her, she rummages around it. Inside are props, the infamous red shoes. This can be utilised throughout the play alongside the cardboard signs.*

There's nee place like hyem, is there? (*points out to Newcastle, Starts to tear up, Ashlea tries to hand her a tissue*) I'm alreet, pet. Tough as the Tyne bridge, like me. (*composes herself*)

Now, I want you all to listen....with emotion as well as logic to what I have to say. (beat) I've been fighting my whole life to exist but I deserve more. (beat) I deserve a chance to live a life with dignity, not just scrape by. We all do. (beat) We all deserve to be more than a number, a statistic or a problem to be ignored, right? We're not invisible. So, I'm not staying silent any longer. We're not. Right?

(I, Dani, am a person—nothing more, nothing less. (*bursts out laughing*). I sound like that Ken Loach film, you knaa the one when the fella kicks off at the job centre...only this time the protagonist's a woman. (*points at her eyes and to the audience, as if to say that's a good one*) And no-one's selling their bodies to make ends meet...yet. (*laughs*)

Right...let's get real.. what comes to mind when you hear the term "cost of living crisis"? Cause that's why we're all here, to talk about that. (*refers to cardboard signs with the following quotes on*) Yet another buzzword? Doom and gloom. Struggling to feed the bairns. Fuel Poverty. Food banks. Price rises for EVERYTHING. Surviving. Trying to keep warm.

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



Can't afford school uniform. The absurdity of there being a 'cost' to live. Worry. Stress. A modern day tragedy. (beat) And somehow, folks are still charging two hundred—no, six thousand quid for concert tickets. You've got to wonder who's buying them, like. Cause they sure as hell aren't struggling with the cost of living...and here we are just trying to keep the lights on. (beat) I've been listening to you talk about how tough things are for women in the North East. I hear you. Unless you play for the Toon, or you're the Gallagher brothers, you're pretty screwed.

(laughs) So, if you're going to write a report on reality, you have to speak to the invisible... the silenced. You need to amplify wor voices. (beat) Survivors of abuse, asylum seekers, the disabled, single mothers and... the homeless. (beat) You all talk about the cost of living, but do you know what it's really like to dodge fellas who think they can take whatever they want from a girl who's got nowhere else to go? Nee hyem. Some of you might even think women can't be homeless... but some of you know what it's like.

Maybe you've sofa surfed, like me or slept on people's floors, lived in moldy social housing or been evicted because you can't afford your rent. No? Well, WAKE UP and see what's happening around you. (beat) We're drowning here in the North East. Child poverty, male suicide, domestic violence—some of the highest rates in the UK. Behind the nice views, it's grim. (beat) But, I'm not here to start a revolution. (sings) from my bed...(laughs) I'm just here for a brew and thought I'd pipe up with a few home truths. (Opens her suitcase. Starts to get changed. Takes a layer off.)

Me and Scottish Sal—we're surviving together—we have a little thing we do where we search for free local events to grab a cuppa, and if there's cake, even better. (Scottish accent) *Saves on the bills, hin.* We spent the whole winter gannin to warm places to save money and cag a custard cream. Some places have hot showers, you knaa. Sal can't afford her leccy bill, so her motto is: (Scottish accent) *One minute of tepid water—clean your armpits and foof, then jump oot, hin.* (Laughs)

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



I met Sal when I was sleeping wherever I could. She took me in, no questions asked. Her house is in bits —major rat problem, no bathroom floor, council doesn't care. Sal got made redundant from her charity job, they lost all their funding. She struggles with her mental health but she'd deed clever. (Scottish accent) *We're all underfunded, exhausted and angry. Fighting for survival and scraps of money, hin.* So Sal—who was pretty well off pre-2020 ...nearly lost her hyem. But as skint as she is, she helped me.. She'd read this article about a homeless woman in Cardiff—some sicko brutally raped her while he was out on the piss, he even filmed it.

(Back to Sal) *Women aren't safe anywhere. It's a terrifying time for us, hin.* And the thing is, she's right. Women have been shouldering most of the crap that's come our way these last few years—the pandemic, cost of living, political instability, conflict —and what do we get for it? More violence. You think it'll stop, especially after women are being murdered by the very people who are supposed to protect us. But here we are, three years after Sarah Everard and it's still happening.

You're not even safe in your own hyem. Eeee I sound like my pal, Feminist Fiza. She went full-on Gloria Steinem after she left her abusive ex during Covid. (Beat) Met Fiza when I was working at B&M's—she was on the tills, I stocked the shelves. (Fiza accent) It's not just an Economic issue, Dani. It's a safety one -She's geet posh is Fiza, privately educated and aaall - Economic stress just makes domestic violence worse, and it's women who bear the brunt. (beat)



# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



Fiza's ex tried to kill her and the bairns. Reminded me of my own dad, he's from Manchester—Liam Gallagher hair with a Noel Gallagher attitude. (*does 'Manc' impression.*) He was a prolific protestor, me Dad - thought he was fighting the good fight against the government, shouting about austerity, but owed Mam thousands in child support. He'd give her a black eye now and again too. (beat) We hid in refuges, but he always found us. He's dead now. Fell off a ladder rescuing a Magpie at some Anti-Establishment protest. (laughs) Karma with wings, Mam said. (beat)

Mam was always lost in her addictions back then, didn't always notice the abuse. (Takes out red sparkly shoes) These were hers. (puts them on) Loved Wizard of Oz, nearly called me Dorothy. She said the shoes were magic, that one day they'd take us somewhere better. (Clicks heels) Nah, still here. (laughs)

Mam's sober now joined a women's Recovery group in 2022 ...It was set up by this amazing woman who beat addiction herself and wanted to help others. She's happy there. Drinks protein shakes now instead of vodka and has this new fella. There was nee room in her tiny bedsit for all of us. That's how I ended up on Fiza's floor, then we were evicted because the landlord put up the rent. Fiza's got bairns though so they were housing priority. And well, I wasn't. (beat) You all think the cost of living crisis is just about money? It's not. It's about survival.

(beat) People like me have been on the edge for years with no safety net, always fighting to exist. Now even those who thought they were safe—like Sal and Fiza—are feeling it. (beat) First time I walked into Sal's place, there was this sign above the fireplace: "There's No Place Like Home." I laughed, 'cause Mam used to say it in Geordie—"Nee place like hyem." (Clicks heels) It hit me like a punch to the gut.



# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



I've never had a real home, a Hyem. Just places I've crashed in, places I had to leave, places that were never mine. When you get older, you think things are going to get better...easier...but it's been harder these last couple of years, relentless...and young people...well, we've been shafted and no-one gives a shit...well apart from Sal. I've stayed with her for a while, but it's time to move on.

I'm not some lost cause or a statistic you can put in a fancy report. I'm not a burden, a drain, or a charity case. I'm not a sob story to make you feel better about your own lives. I'm just... trying to get by. (Clicks heels) I'm on my way to the train station -hence the suitcase. I've spent too long at Sal's. Put too much stress on her. One mouth is easier to feed than two, right? (beat) eeee I can't imagine how rough it's been for parents the last couple of years, trying to feed your own bairns, give them a healthy meal when you can't afford shit.

Well, I'm not Sal's bairn so...it's not fair...I've left her a note ... .with a £20 quid attached to it. It read...I'm off to Manchester. Don't look back in anger, Sal. x (laughs) That used to be our joke... I figured. Bigger city, more sofas to crash on. .Maybes I'll find my dad's family there, reconnect. Become an honorary Manc for a while.

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT

---



But I'm going to miss this place...(slight pause) If I get lost...I can always just click my heels together and come straight back to the Toon... because there's nee place like hyem, is there? So...This is my feedback, if you want to pass this on to a politician or anyone that wants to make real changes...(Turns her sign around) "We deserve better". Cause, we all deserve better. (Sings) So Sally can wait, she knows it's too late as we're walking on by...her soul (begins to exit) slides away...but don't look back in anger (looks back at audience) I heard you say.

*Dani exits.*

THE END

# NEE PLACE LIKE HYEM- THE SCRIPT



---

## Themes

1. **Social Inequality and Poverty:** The play highlights the harsh realities of living in poverty, focusing on the struggles of those affected by the cost of living crisis, particularly in the North East of England.
2. **Resilience and Survival:** The theme of resilience is central, as characters like Dani fight against the odds to survive and maintain their dignity despite the systemic challenges they face.
3. **Homelessness and Displacement** - Dani's experiences of homelessness and the instability of not having a permanent home underscore the broader issue of displacement and the lack of support for vulnerable individuals.
4. **Gender and Violence** - The play addresses the intersection of gender and violence, exploring how economic stress and societal pressures exacerbate domestic violence and the unique challenges faced by women.
5. **Community and Solidarity-** Despite the bleak circumstances, the play emphasizes the importance of community and mutual support, as seen in the relationships between characters like Dani and Sal, who look out for each other in tough times.



