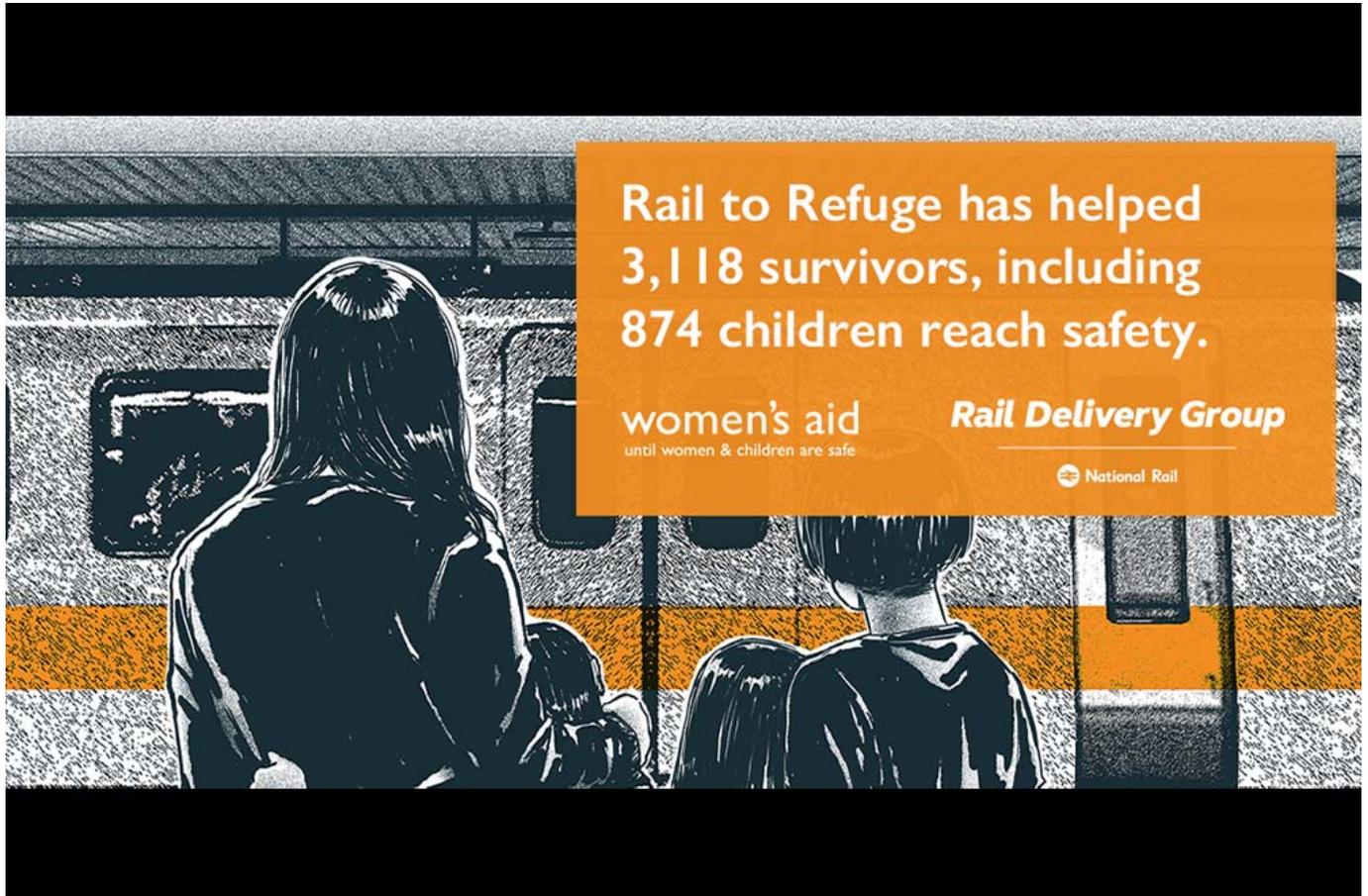


Lifesaving 'Rail to Refuge' initiative renewed

April 11, 2022



The 'Rail to Refuge' initiative will continue to help survivors of domestic abuse escape danger and reach safety after it was officially renewed.

Since the scheme's inception, during the 2020 lockdown, four people on average have made use of the free travel offer every day.

All train operators in Great Britain took up Rail to Refuge, initially for the length of the first lockdown, before subsequent extensions. With the scheme now having reached its second anniversary, operators are pleased to confirm a further continuation of the funding required, securing its future.

Rail to Refuge is a joint initiative between rail companies and Women's Aid in which train operators cover the cost of train tickets for women, men and children as they travel to safety at refuges. Since April 2020, when the scheme was introduced, train operators have provided free tickets to 3,118 people, including 874 children. 65% of people who used Rail to Refuge to date said they would not or could not have travelled if the journey hadn't been paid for, with an average journey for recipients costing £73.

For many people subjected to domestic abuse, reaching a refuge far from their perpetrator can be difficult and dangerous - especially for those whose perpetrators use economic abuse and coercively control their

finances. Those who suffer domestic abuse are often denied access to cash by their abusers, meaning free travel can be a lifeline that enables them to reach a safe place and rebuild their lives, supported by specialist domestic abuse services.

Survivors are supported by Women's Aid Members Services and when they are offered a refuge place, the service can book the ticket(s) they need, with train companies covering the cost. Tickets are also provided for their children, if required. They can be used as e-tickets on a phone or can be picked up from stations with a debit or credit card. The scheme allows survivors to board a train and travel without having to explain their situation to anyone.

Andy Bagnall, Director General of the Rail Delivery Group, said: "Rail to Refuge has seen train operators providing lifesaving travel every day for two years now – something that we're proud to be able to provide and to be able to continue offering to those who sadly need it.

"Rail staff will continue to work hard to assist those in need, just as they support all of our passengers and help to make sure there is no unsafe space on the railway."

Isabelle Younane, head of policy, campaigns and public affairs at Women's Aid said: "We are proud of our partnership with Britain's rail companies, and to announce the most recent passenger figures, which builds upon our December 2021 Import Report. These show just how many women and children's lives have been saved through Rail to Refuge, so we are delighted that this vital scheme is continuing into its third year.

"These figures are, however, sobering- demonstrating the demand among survivors for affordable escape routes. We know that in situations of domestic abuse, survivors are often isolated from their finances, and therefore unable to flee their perpetrator. Rail to Refuge takes away these barriers and allows survivors to escape abuse and be brought to a place of safety and specialist support. It is a lifeline for survivors who would otherwise be trapped in abuse and at an increased risk of harm.

"We are grateful that train companies have worked with us to remove such a significant financial barrier to escaping abuse and hope to continue to work together to ensure survivors' needs are prioritised and the scheme remains accessible, and with a secure future which is essential for the safety of survivors of domestic abuse."

Rail to Refuge has received much acclaim, including from HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, who met representatives of the rail industry and Women's Aid at Victoria Station last year. Her Royal Highness was full of praise for the scheme as she met Southeastern's Darren O'Brien, who first proposed the idea, and she described it as a "brilliant initiative".