

More than 70 domestic abuse survivors used free Northern service to reach safety

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More than 70 survivors of domestic abuse reached safety and shelter by using Northern services last year free of charge.

A total of 54 adults and 19 children used the Rail to Refuge scheme between April and November 2020, using the train operator's network to travel to safe accommodation.

Rail to Refuge is a joint initiative between rail companies and Women's Aid, where operators cover the cost of train tickets for women, men and children who need a safe haven.

People escaping domestic abuse are usually advised to seek refuge services at a considerable distance from their perpetrator, but for many, raising the cash to pay for a train ticket can be very difficult. This is especially true for people experiencing economic abuse, who may have no access to cash.

The Rail to Refuge scheme aims to remove this barrier by offering free train tickets for women or men, and their children, to travel to a recognized refuge and is funded by the Rail Delivery Group.

The scheme was first introduced last year after domestic violence campaigners saw a rise in requests for help as coronavirus lockdown measures came into force, and it has now been extended until the end of March.

Tricia Williams, Chief Operating Officer at Northern, said: “We are proud to be able to support this scheme. Our staff are working hard to support the survivors of domestic abuse in these difficult times while keeping the railway running for the local communities who rely on it.”

Across the UK, between April and November 2020, Rail to Refuge has helped 1020 people, including 273 children find safety during the pandemic.

Joanne Bridger, Procurement Coordinator at Women’s Aid said: “When we started the Rail to Refuge scheme, we did not imagine how our lives would be changed by COVID-19.

“However, in response to the news that domestic abuse worsened – as perpetrators used the pandemic as a tool of abuse – the scheme was extended across the whole of mainland Britain’s rail networks, thanks to the generosity of the RDG, Northern’s support of Women’s Aid, and our partner organisations in England, Scotland and Wales, and has shown that all of us can work together to end domestic abuse.

“Northern should be incredibly proud of the support it has provided to Women’s Aid, the refuges in our Federations, and the hundreds of passengers who have been able to take these life-saving journeys.”

Jacqueline Starr, Chief Operating Officer at the Rail Delivery Group, said: “We’re proud to have provided a vital lifeline for over a thousand people escaping a desperate situation, but there are still too many women, men and children that need help. Our staff are working hard to support the survivors of domestic abuse with free train journeys while keeping the railway running for all the people, communities and local economies that rely on it.”

Traveling to leave an abusive relationship is allowed under COVID-19 restrictions.

The scheme is available to people who have already received an offer of a refuge space. Tickets are only able to be booked through a verified refuge. Support for anyone can be found here:

<https://linktr.ee/railtorefuge>

Survivors of domestic abuse who would like to access the scheme, or need other support, can get in touch with Women’s Aid through its Live Chat service, open Monday – Friday (10am to 4pm), and Saturday and Sunday (10am to noon) via: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk>.

Photo credit: Northern