

Becky Rogerson
Doctor of Science
Durham Cathedral, 9th July 2025

If I were a football commentator, I'd say that Becky's working life – which started in Ossett West Yorkshire - is a story of two halves – The first, the result of her family breaking down when she was 11; when being with horses gave her much needed comfort. She left school at 16 with no qualifications but for 15 years she travelled Europe training and preparing horses for events, before settling in York where she ran a successful competition yard – including piloting Desert Orchid a legend in National Hunt racing during the 1980s.

Her expertise and reputation for training both children and young people in pony clubs; and difficult horses provided the groundwork for her leadership approach - a reflective practice thinking about how best to get through to people and horses and equip them to achieve their best. Following serious injury in her mid-30s Becky changed direction, went to night school and then Teesside University in 1995 to study Psychology and Criminology. When she saw and successfully applied for a post as a domestic abuse refuge worker the second half of Becky's working life started. This job introduced her to one of the most pernicious social problems of our time – domestic abuse, which, across the world, results in the death of a woman every 10 minutes. At Teesside, Becky had come across feminist ideas and in her work from then on Becky applied what she calls pragmatic feminism: translating feminist ideas and principles into practice in the real world of domestic abuse services.

It was also at Teesside that Becky met her partner Margaret – who became a clinical psychologist; so living parallel working lives which led to mutual learning, support and success.

Becky was then part of a group who successfully applied to the Home Office for a innovative one-stop domestic abuse service. My Sisters Place opened in 2001 and very soon Becky became the Chief Exec. During her 17 years there My Sister's Place became an extremely successful local service with a national reputation for its innovative and pioneering work, providing therapeutic services for victim/survivors and working with perpetrators; and securing a BACP award for best practice. Becky won a

Winston Churchill Fellowship supporting international travel to visit domestic abuse projects. She came back inspired to think and implement unthinkable things. Becky always credits Michelle O'Rourke the 'brown owl' of My Sisters Place for being a supreme second in command and who, amongst other things, was able to slow down Becky's, occasionally over ambitious, unthinkable, ideas.

One such unthinkable idea was Becky's nomination of the project for the National Lottery Charity of the year in 2013. The winner is based on a public vote and MSP – annual footfall of 1000 - was up against charities such as The Giants Causeway – annual footfall of millions. But they won. Becky says 'the real prize was realising that anything is possible. It gave us all a sense of self belief that's so important to pass on to our clients in the work we do.'

Becky was also a magistrate for 10 years, became a member of the Board for Women's Aid nationally and is an accomplished speaker always arguing from the evidence for change or about what works.

In 2018 Becky was seconded to WWiN a domestic abuse service in Sunderland that was struggling. She became the Chief Exec until her retirement last year. In six years, the staff team increased from 12 to 55 and WWiN's reputation has been restored.

Other women leaders in the region have said that Becky has been a role model for feminist leadership; bringing her humanity to bear in her working relationships with everybody, including a sense of humour – something she says is crucial in this work. Her determination to spread the word about what works means that Becky has been involved with the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse at Durham since its launch as a regular attendee and contributor. In 2020 she was recognised with an MBE for services to domestic abuse.

Though she retired last year, Becky is still working to bring people together to continue the work to end gender-based violence. That and winning the battle with her garden.

I'm so pleased that we are giving this mark of achievement to Becky today and hope that, in some small way, this lets Becky know how much her contribution to the region and nationally is valued.

Chancellor, I present Becky Rogerson to receive the degree Doctor of Science, honoris causa.