

Recording the Process of Change.

**A Review of the Data Monitoring Systems at the
Standing Together
Specialist Domestic Violence Court**

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Recording the process of change: our remit

The collection of data to evaluate to what extent projects are meeting their aims is key to the effective development of both policy and practice. Standing Together for many years now have been at the forefront of domestic violence projects in understanding these crucial links. Because of the time consuming nature of data collection and analysis and their importance in leading policy and practice, it is crucial that projects are collecting the right kind of data which link in appropriately with their project aims. In other words, it is not enough simply to collect and analyse data, the data that is collected must be valid and reliable and the analysis must be meaningful and easily understood by project partners.

In Autumn 2004, we were commissioned by Standing Together to assess the recording and monitoring of data and evaluation methods used at the Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC). The remit we were given is described below.

‘Recording the process of change’ remit

1. Assess the sort of data collected against the aims of the Domestic Violence Court and of Standing Together, especially those regarding safety and accountability.
2. Review and recommend changes to the observation forms used by Standing Together.
3. Review the evaluation methods and review processes to date.
4. Identify the most effective methods for carrying out the ongoing evaluation of the work of the SDVC in the future.
5. Map out an evaluation plan for the future

1.2 How we did the assessment

In order to carry out this work we have looked at both the SDVC court data sets and the Standing Together Abuse Tracking System (STATS). We have:

- examined the types of data gathered, explored how these are or could be used, and how the different data sets are linked or could be linked;
- interviewed and spent time with Victoria (Development worker);
- sat in on court cases at the SDVC;
- interviewed and examined STATS with Tanya (Data Development and Tracking Officer);
- interviewed Nicky (Police Data Tracker);
- interviewed Adebola (Development worker)
- had a discussion with Peta (Training Officer) about training and feedback to practitioners;

- examined a variety of Standing Together documentation including reports and data forms; and
- attended the review of the second years operation of the SDVC.

We produced an interim report in February 2004, and held a meeting with the Standing Together team to feed back our interim findings.

Although it was not our intention to conduct a full review of STATS, early in our assessment it became clear that it would be necessary to look at the data before it reached the SDVC stage in order for the SDVC data to be properly understood.

1.3 About this report

The focus of this report is on Hammersmith and Fulham and Standing Together. The SDVC and related activities of course also involve the Kensington and Chelsea areas and the Eaves advocates. We recognise that the data collection, processing and management with regard to domestic violence cases from Kensington and Chelsea are less developed than is the case for Hammersmith and Fulham. However, we did not look at the Kensington and Chelsea data systems nor have we interviewed/talked with staff involved in supporting women from Kensington and Chelsea.

The following Chapters (Two through to Five) address each part of our remit in turn (as described above). Chapter Five also concludes our report.

CHAPTER TWO: HOW THE DATA RELATES TO THE SDVC AIMS

2.1 Using data to evaluate success in meeting aims

This chapter looks at how the data relates to the SDVC aims, in line with part one of our remit.

Part one of our remit

Assess the sort of data collected against the aims of the Domestic Violence Court and of Standing Together, especially those regarding safety and accountability.

Our experience over previous years evaluating and reviewing evaluation programmes has led to the conclusion that it is essential to firstly establish that the processes involved in change are measurable and secondly that the data collected can be used as a measurement of achievement of such changes. In order to do this, it is important that project aims are clear.

The SDVC currently has three main aims. These are shown below.

SDVC aims

1. To increase the effectiveness of the judicial system in:
 - a) providing protection and support to victims and witnesses of domestic violence;
 - b) providing appropriate sanctions to perpetrators; and
 - c) reducing delay through effective case management
2. To further increase co-ordination of agencies, including the Crown Court, involved in supporting victims and witnesses and dealing with perpetrators.
3. To explore the potential for linking civil courts in to the criminal justice process at WLMC.

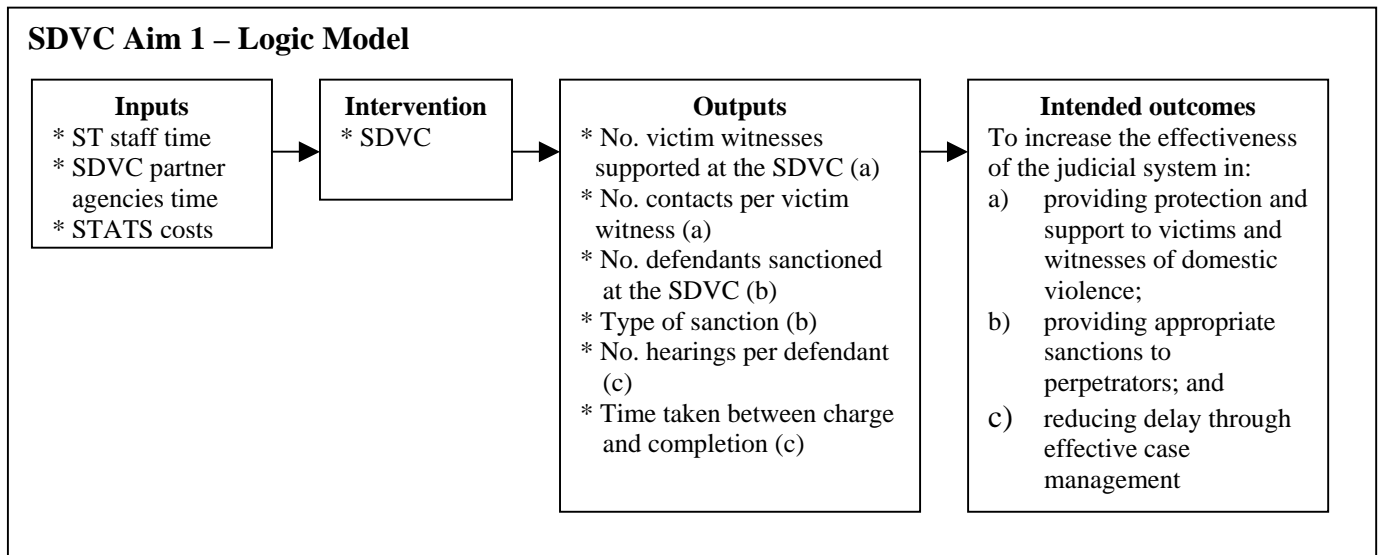
2.2 Tracking inputs, interventions, outputs and intended outcomes

We have found that using 'logic models' have proved useful for the development of new projects and also in 'firming up' and providing clarification for existing projects. This means tracking the logical progression of:

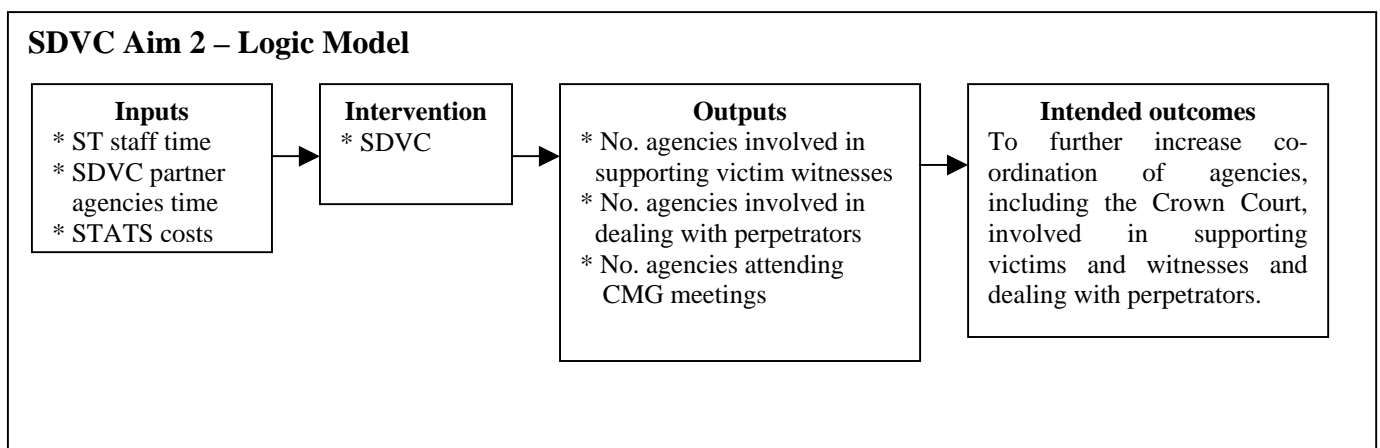
- inputs (what goes into achieving the intended outcome);
- interventions (what is being done to meet the intended outcome);

- outputs (the type of data collected); and
- intended outcomes (aims/change to be achieved)

The logic models below show how the inputs, interventions and outputs currently map onto the SDVC's aims (intended outcomes):

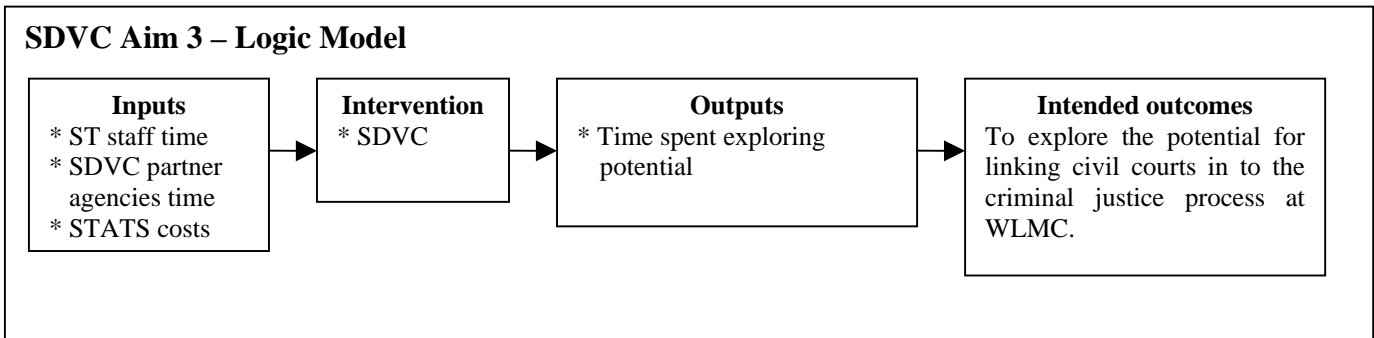


It is our understanding that all of the outputs related to Aim 1 are currently being collected, but they are not reported in a way that easily maps onto the intended outcomes. There are some validity and reliability issues that need to be addressed, primarily related to Aim 1b. These include clarifying what is meant by sanctioned (convicted?) and what the CMG mean by an ‘appropriate’ sanction (IDAP? CRO? Custody? Will what is ‘appropriate’ vary according to case details or the charge in question?).



Regarding Aim 2, we suggest that this data is actually available but is not reported. Because it is something that can be ‘seen’ and ‘experienced’, we believe it is not seen as linked to data outputs. If this is still something that the SDVP is aiming to do then

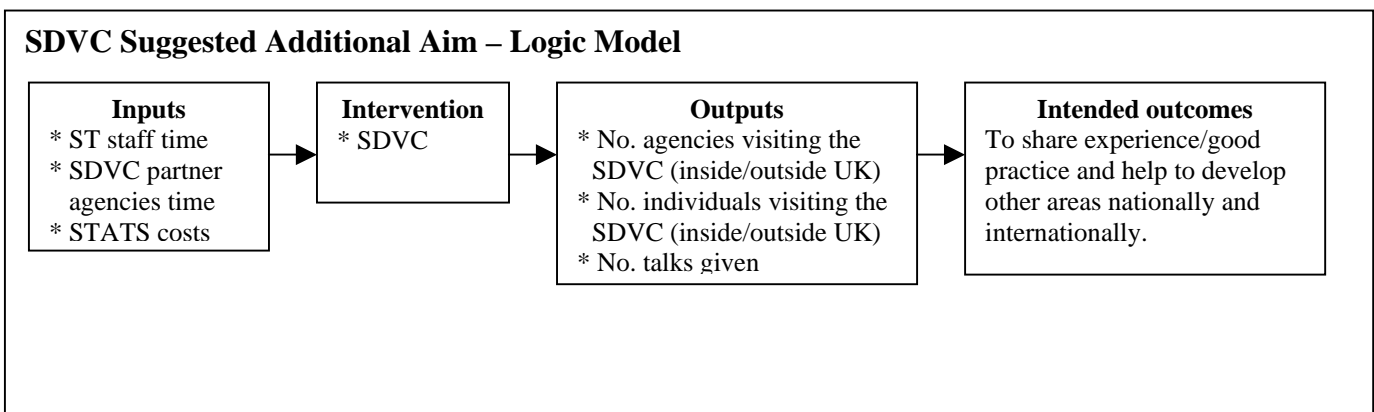
this data should be reported in line with the Aim. Alternatively, it may be that this Aim has now been met and should be removed. It is important to remember that aims need to be updated regularly because projects working well will often meet their aims sooner than they expect. It may also be useful to link aims to time scales.



While data can be collected to measure the work towards meeting this Aim (e.g. time spent), this data and Aim do not seem to be reported. Again, it may be that this Aim is no longer relevant if the relevant work has already been completed, and it appears that some civil data is now being collected.

At the moment, much of the data being collected does not properly map onto the aims of the SDVC. While this usually indicates a problem with the output stage (the type of data collected), in the case of the SDVC we believe it is also because the intended outcomes (aims) do not fully reflect the work being done. This does not represent a major problem for the SDVC because in most cases the data is already being collected and analysed, it just does not ‘link’ up with the aims.

There is a large amount of work being done by the SDVC that is not linked into any aims. Examples of this are the court visits and talks about the SDVC, which seem to be an important part of the SDVC’s work yet are not properly integrated into the aims (see e.g. logic model below).



We suggest that the SDVC aims are revisited to see if they accurately reflect where SDVC is heading, and the collation/ collection of data thus then be changed/ enhanced

in relation to all of the aims. Particular attention should be given to data that does not seem to ‘go anywhere’, i.e. data that is reported but does not map onto an aim.

2.3 Reporting the data

At present the Data Development and Tracking Officer (DDTO) provides detailed reports to the Court Management Group (CMG) that contain a large amount of data analysis. Much of this analysis is superfluous to the *current* aims of the SDVC, however is clearly important to its work. We suggest that the data analysis produced by the DDTO in her reports to the CMG are mapped more closely to the aims of the SDVC. This will allow the CMG to see more quickly and easily how they are progressing towards their aims. Having aims that relate to all the data will also help the DDTO to analyse data appropriately. Having appropriate aims will also help the DDTO discuss the data presented more meaningfully. For example, if the data shows an increase in custodial sentences is this a positive or negative effect? Which direction is it hoped the data will go in? If data is purely meant as description, then the aim could be ‘to describe ...’.

At the moment the data from the weekly court observation summaries are compiled into a quarterly observation summary which is presented separately from the DDTO report. Although both reports do raise some different issues, we suggest that a single report would make the data analysed in each of the separate reports much more meaningful. This would not prevent the separate issues raised being reported, but would mean that where possible the findings could be better explained better using both sets of data. Again, this should be focused on the SDVC aims.

CHAPTER THREE: COURT OBSERVATION FORMS

4.1 Court observation forms

This chapter focuses in particular on the court observation forms in line with part two of our remit.

Part two of our remit

Review and recommend changes to the observation forms used by Standing Together.

The forms focus on perpetrators and are filed to provide a comprehensive and easily accessible record of appearance in court over time. Repeat offending is in this context defined as the offender having been at court at some time for another domestic violence related offence¹. The court forms have mainly been used to provide the basis for weekly and monthly summaries for feedback to court staff, and repeat offending. They have not been used to collate information systematically and could be exploited more fully.

In our interim report we identified a number of areas where the forms could be clearer, for instance:

- There was some duplication across ‘what evidence was heard’ and the following questions.
- The section on ‘case outcome/disposal’ should be amended so that outcomes can be linked to separate charges.
- The issue of child contact (which might be brought up as mitigating or possibly aggravating factor) is not recorded anywhere.
- The word ‘contact’ is exclusively used in the summaries to mean ‘contact with the IP’, although this might not be clear to all readers.
- Systematic data on civil remedies prior to attendance in court should also be included

These and other changes were made to the forms and the new forms are (at the time of writing) in the process of being piloted.

The feedback and review processes are impressive, with the court summary data being used to identify more immediate as well as ongoing problems. Court staff appear generally responsive to this process.

We also considered the impact of being supported by ADVANCE/Witness Support/Eaves Housing, in particular related data issues. Data is being collected but could be analysed/used more fully in relation to the aim of ‘providing protection and

¹ This is a different approach to that of STATS where focus is on individual incidents, and where repeats (following the police definition) only refer to a specified 12 month period.

support to victims and witnesses of domestic violence'. It might also be useful to incorporate 'child contact' as an item in the ADVANCE data, so that this can be linked through to the court and STATS data.

CHAPTER FOUR: EVALUATION METHODS USED TO DATE

4.1 Review of data collected

This chapter looks at the evaluation methods used to date, in line with part three of our remit.

Part three of our remit

Review the evaluation methods and review processes to date.

Most of the issues we have identified in relation to the data collected are related to clarity, as highlighted already within our interim report:

- *Incident data recorded by the police* - It is unclear how the Fulham CSU police 'tracker' deals with co-accusations.
- *Charge data* - As we understand it, STATS does not have the ability to track different charges because there is only one field where the charge may be entered. Individual charges appear to be recorded as separate 'incidents' even if they are from the same incident. We recommend that the structure of STATS be amended so that individual charges, convictions and sentences can be logged. This will also allow an analysis of charge changes that take place, particularly in reference to the downgrading of charges.
- *PoA* – Crimes and no-crimes are recorded on STATS. Why not also record whether there is a power of arrest? Given the changes in relation to s. 39 (common assault) from being a non-arrestable to becoming an arrestable offence, this will make it difficult to make comparisons over time with regard to police performance.
- *Tracking between West London Magistrates and Blackfriers Crown Court* - If a case is heard at Blackfriers Crown Court, Standing Together are informed of the court date, outcome and sentence (if applicable). However, if the defendant is convicted, it is unclear which charge(s) they have been convicted for and therefore what the sentence relates to. We recommend that charge specific data be requested from Blackfriers Court.
- *Appeals* - Details and outcomes regarding appeals against conviction or sentence seem to be collected randomly through word of mouth. We understand that it can be difficult finding out about such cases because of the way court listings work. If closer links were made between Standing Together and Blackfriers Crown Court then it may be possible for a Court Clerk to give a weekly update regarding the nature of cases listed for that week. This would also help Standing Together keep track of the more serious charges where defendants are 'leapfrogged' straight from West London Magistrates to the Blackfriers Crown Court. It would be helpful if a representative from Blackfriers Crown Court were able to attend Standing Together meetings.

- *Link with court data* - STATS only records the most recent situation, and does not include a record of changes over time (unlike the court data different). Is that what is wanted?

We have already suggested that the data analysis moves towards an incident base, which the DDTO has already implemented.

4.2 Review of the data analysis programme used (STATS)

The design of the Standing Together Abuse Tracking System (STATS) is the most impressive way of linking police, project and court data that we have seen in a non-academic project. However, there are two fundamental problems with the STATS programme.

Firstly, STATS is not able to work in the way it was designed to. In fact, it has never completely been able to handle what it was meant to do because of a slow internet connection and a delay in police data being entered. This meant that it was never possible to access STATS in 'real time'. A further problem occurred when the police upgraded their internet connection to broadband and CRIS was moved from 'restricted' to 'confidential' as a data set. Because STATS was stored on a web server the 'confidential' status of CRIS data meant that STATS could no longer be internet based and hence could not be accessed by more than one agency. The current situation is that STATS is being used off-line. This means that the STATS programme is trying to do something it was not designed to do.

It was clear in interview with the DDTO and by observing the data entry process from start (police) to finish (court outcome) that STATS is now significantly holding back the work of the DDTO and therefore also the SDVC and Standing Together as a whole. Some of the problems we have identified are:

- The DDTO needs to be able to change the data fields and options immediately without going through a long and costly process. Currently she is not permitted to do this for contractual reasons. However, in order to develop data properly it is to be expected that a database will need to be changed to meet data and analysis needs.
- The DDTO needs to be able to manipulate the data for analysis far more easily than STATS allows. The data analysis abilities of STATS are incredibly restrictive. At present the DDTO has to do the majority of SDVC related analysis by hand.
- There are a large number of fields that are unused. This makes the database clumsy to use and adds to the length of time required for data inputting.
- There are a large number of variables that are undefined. Any ambiguous variables need to be clearly defined to ensure consistency.
- There is a lack of 'free-text boxes' where data inputters are able to enter details that do not fit elsewhere.
- The court data can not be inputted into STATS. This makes tracking attrition from start (police) to finish (court outcome) a difficult and time consuming process.

The role that STATS was meant to play is an impressive one. Unfortunately, it has never been able to fulfil this role. We suggest that the Standing Together and the CMG make a decision regarding the future of STATS. There are at least three options:

- 1) Continue using STATS off line in its current format, paying for a large number of amendments to be made. These amendments are likely to be an ongoing process.
- 2) Re-open negotiations with partner agencies, particularly the police, to try and develop STATS to do what it was intended to do. This is likely to involve the development of unique reference numbers (URN's) so that individuals names are not used².
- 3) Re-design STATS and move STATS to a database that can be manipulated more easily by the DTTO. The most obvious choice would be to move it to Microsoft Access and have the DTTO trained to build databases and analyse data using it.

Our opinion is that option 3 is the most viable and will allow Standing Together and the CMG the most control over their data both now and in the future.

² One way of creating a URN is to use e.g. the first, third and fifth letter of the surname plus the day and month of birth.

CHAPTER FIVE: FUTURE EVALUATIONS - CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Future evaluations

This chapter considers future evaluations in line with parts four and five of our remit and concludes the report.

Parts four and five of our remit

Identify the most effective methods for carrying out the ongoing evaluation of the work of the SDVC in the future (4), and map out an evaluation plan for the future (5).

Standing Together's evaluation plan should focus on clarifying and expanding the data currently collected in relation to aims of the SDVC, as well as fully exploiting the (extensive and comprehensive) systems already in place. This will mean reviewing not only the data collected but also the aims of the SDVC. However, this can not be achieved without also revisiting the aims of the SDVC

Standing Together and the SDVC already have an annual court review and consultation with survivors. These represent good practice and such feedback mechanisms should continue.

However, it would appear that there have been some difficulties for volunteers in taking part in the survivors' consultation. We propose that consultation with survivors becomes a 'built-in' process that is ongoing and linked into the STATS database. Currently this is done via a short questionnaire posted to survivors after the court case or, if the survivor is being supported by ADVANCE/Witness Support/Eaves Housing worker, at a subsequent meeting.

5.2 Conclusions

We have made a number of recommendations throughout this report. The following two themes have featured throughout the report as being the main issues for consideration:

- We suggest that the SDVC aims are revisited to see if they accurately reflect where SDVC is heading, and the collation/ collection of data thus then be changed/ enhanced in relation to all of the aims. Particular attention should be given to data that does not seem to 'go anywhere', i.e. data that is reported but does not map onto an aim.
- We suggest that the Standing Together and the CMG make a decision regarding the future of STATS.



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