



Speaking Up

Survivors' experience of policing as part of a coordinated response to domestic violence

STANDING together

against domestic violence

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Contents

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Acknowledgements

Introduction	1
Executive summary	3
Section 1	Overall context	5
Section 2	Frontline police response	7
Section 3	Community Safety Unit response	13
Section 4	Advance Advocacy Project's response	15
Section 5	Court response	20
Section 6	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committees (MARACs)	22
Section 7	Other key services - solicitors, services for children, and general support for survivors of domestic violence in the borough	23
Section 8	The one thing that someone told you that helped change the way you thought about your situation	25
Appendix	Consultation with Survivors Protocol	26

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Introduction

Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

Standing Together coordinates the ground breaking partnership which responds to the crime of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham. This work developed out of many years of multi-agency work in the borough. Our methods have been inspired and re-inspired by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota, USA. Like the Duluth Project, Standing Together aims to keep the survivor and their safety at the heart of the process. We are therefore committed to learning from the experience of survivors and one of the methods we use is to convene groups of survivors of domestic violence to consult with them on specific areas of our work.

We have been very pleased to welcome Nicole Jacobs back to Standing Together to carry out this piece of work on our behalf. We welcome the care she has taken in facilitating these groups and the clarity with which she has drawn out the recommendations and points to note for the agencies discussed by survivors. We now look forward to taking forward all aspects of this report within the Standing Together partnership, where all partners continue to be enthusiastically committed to improving the safety of survivors, into the seventh year of this pioneering project.

Standing Together has been consulting with survivors of domestic violence since 2001 and has published three very full reports of the process and thinking behind this work and of the results of previous consultation groups. These are available from Standing Together; a publications list and order form is available on the website.

The consultant

Nicole Jacobs has worked on domestic violence initiatives for over 10 years in both the US and UK. She worked for five years at the Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence as their state-wide training coordinator and technical adviser on standards for domestic violence programmes. She came to the UK in 1998 where she worked for three and a half years on the Standing Together Against Domestic Violence initiative; first at ADVANCE and then to establish the Standing Together Health Project. Over the last year she has helped CRARG (Coordinated Response & Advocacy Resource Group) to develop and conduct the first national accredited training for advocates.

For more information about the Standing Together coordinated response to domestic violence please visit www.standingtogether.org.uk

Executive summary

Goals of the consultation and partner agencies

Standing Together places a high priority on collection of data and statistics for many reasons. It is only through collection of such data that one can tell the overall impact of a multi-agency initiative such as Standing Together. However, data does not tell the whole story. It is not until one digs deeper and unveils the detail of how cases are dealt with and the messages sent to the involved parties, that one can begin to understand what lies behind the data trend.

A founding principle of Standing Together is to put the survivor at the centre of the change process. Operationally, this is done by listening to the views and experiences of frontline workers. This consultation, and the ones conducted by Standing Together over the last five years, attempt to expand this process by carrying out consultation with those who have experienced the services of Standing Together partner agencies firsthand.

This 2005 consultation harkens back to the first consultation ever conducted by Standing Together in 2001, *Survivors Speak*, in its focus on the police response to survivors of domestic violence and the role of the ADVANCE advocates. Whilst other feedback arose from this consultation, it was felt by Standing Together that that this focus would help agencies decipher what substantial changes may have been made in the past five years in terms of the initial response given by the police.

Process: how Standing Together consulted local survivors

Standing Together gathered a list of 18 names supplied by ADVANCE advocates. These were names of people who had told the Advocate that they would be interested in providing feedback for a consultation. A member of staff at Standing Together called each person on the list and attempted to gain a commitment to attend a consultation session. There was one consultation session during daytime hours and one conducted in the evening to accommodate various schedules.

Of the 17 people called and, in one case, written to, 10 committed to attend a session and five actually attended the sessions.

An independent facilitator conducted the session. This was someone who had worked with Standing Together in its first years but has not been employed by Standing Together since 2002. This meant the facilitator was knowledgeable about Standing Together and local services but not involved in the current day to day running of the Standing Together initiative.

With the permission of the survivors, the sessions were taped and transcripts were produced so that the quotes and comments reflected in this report are accurate.

For a more detailed description of how Standing Together conducted this and previous consultations, refer to the appendices and previous consultation reports that give more details about the method and structure of survivor consultations.

Those consulted: their background and perspective

Five survivors of domestic violence were consulted for this report. Each contributed to discussions lasting approximately two hours and the focus of the discussions was largely limited to their experience of the criminal justice system within Hammersmith and Fulham.

All had had experience with Hammersmith and Fulham Police and the ADAVANCE advocates in the past year. All but one had experience with local solicitors, West London Magistrates Court and Social Services.

Two of the five survivors of domestic violence were from minority ethnic backgrounds. All but one had children.

Two of the five survivors had long term domestic violence relationships (one of 11 years and one of 16 years) both of which took place entirely in Hammersmith and Fulham and with ongoing police involvement over the years. The former partners of both of these women have been prosecuted for domestic violence crimes in the past year for the first time.

Of the remaining three, two had extensive police involvement over the past two years each resulting in prosecutions. The fifth survivor had suffered domestic violence for a similar amount of time, two years, but her involvement with the police did not result in a criminal charge or prosecution.

How Standing Together will use the consultation recommendations

Standing Together conducts consultations with survivors for the genuine impact their comments can make on local provision of service. In the past, similar consultations have been fed back to partner agencies via training, operational meetings of frontline agencies and the development of new services and initiatives such as our health project and the development of the Specialist Domestic Violence Court at West London Magistrates Court.

This consultation's impact will be similar; key messages will be fed back to the Steering Committee of Standing Together, at which all agencies mentioned in this report are regular attendees. Areas for improvement will be discussed and, wherever possible, timetabled for action/improvement by relevant agencies. Strengths and new ideas provided by this consultation will be similarly considered. Feedback will also be incorporated into the ongoing training and development strategy of Standing Together.

SECTION ONE:

Overall context



Findings

I. Survivors' risk is much higher than the charge reflected by the criminal justice system

Of the five survivors of domestic violence consulted, four cases resulted in a charge that was or would be prosecuted at court (two of the four had pending court dates in the weeks following the consultation). These charges were breach of an injunction (x 2), common assault and harassment. While the survivors were universally pleased by the fact that these charges were successfully proceeding to court or had resulted in a guilty verdict at court, these crimes did not fully reflect the severe levels of risk they had endured. This does not necessarily reflect a failure of the criminal justice system in these cases but it reminds one of the importance of risk assessment to fully understand the context of the survivor's overall situation.

Quotes from participants:

“But then it got to the point where I was saying it's the calm before the storm. Because it was always a cycle where it would be really bad for months and months. There were phone calls every day. 99% of the time it always ended up with him threatening me. It always ended up with him threatening the children. And it got to the point where my kids were frightened to even pick up the phone. Once, before we fled, my son answered the phone and he said that if he told anybody that he was calling us up every day, and that he was causing trouble for us, he was going to come round and kill me in my bed. My son was seven years old at the time, and he got off the phone and he was just white. When I asked him what was wrong he said nothing. He wouldn't tell anyone. He didn't tell anyone for three months.”

“He used to ring my daughter's phone and cuss on my daughter's phone. The texts he used to send to her - it was disgusting.”

“Getting me out of the house was very difficult. Because the harassment was increasing day by day. The phone calls were increasing. It wasn't just a case of phone calls, wherever I went he seemed to be there and it felt like he was almost stalking me at that point.”

“And it got to the point where I wouldn't go out. And I didn't go out. I locked myself in. Apart from taking my kids to school, and even then I got my neighbour to take my kids to school, because I just couldn't go out.”

“He took our youngest and I've got a residency order to say that he lives with me... but he took him on a contact day and refused to give him back. He said, 'I'm not bringing him back. If you want him back you're going to have to go to the police to get him back'. So the next day I did that, I went to Fulham police station.”

“Over the last nine months, me and my kids have moved four times. It is hard. And I think that is what has made it worse for us is the fact that we’ve gone through all this but we’ve had a really unsettled way of life. And we’re due to move again, either next month or the one after, because they have found us a permanent flat. So by the time we actually move into our permanent, it’ll be five times in ten months. So it’s a lot. And my kids and everyone around us have really suffered.”

“It got much worse when he was threatening me and he jumped me from the back as I was coming out of my Mum’s house. He used to attack me from the back. One day I literally run all the way to work just looking over my shoulder. It really got bad.”

“And that’s the only reason why it stopped; he doesn’t have a number to get in contact with me, doesn’t know where we live...”

SECTION TWO: Frontline police response



Findings

I. Those with longer term experiences of domestic violence have become accustomed to the police not pursuing their case aggressively and subsequently conclude that they themselves have responsibility for the criminal case

Two of the five survivors consulted had long histories of domestic abuse and police callouts to their home. Both women could not estimate how many times the police had been called to their homes because of the frequency. In both of these cases, the survivors involved had varying opinions about how the police had treated them during those incidents. However they both acquired the distinct view that pursuing the criminal charge against their partners was solely up to them. In other words, the message that Standing Together has tried to convey to the general public, that the agencies take responsibility to pursue domestic violence charges whenever possible, had not been received by those in long term and high risk domestic violence situations. The first quote below describes a severe incident of domestic violence where there would have been medical evidence and possible statements from friends and neighbours but no charge was pursued. One can understand how the survivor could have concluded over the next 11 years that these kinds of charges must have been solely up to her.

Quotes from participants:

(7 years ago describing her first incident when the police were called)

“We’d gone out and I think it was his birthday and we’d come back and had an argument but it ended up with my whole face unrecognisable. He battered me with a cup and I ran to a friend’s house and I was in shock, I just didn’t know what happening. She called the police. I can remember them being there and then them going back to my house to see if he was there. They didn’t suggest that I go to the hospital or anything, it was kind of weird. I think I made a statement the next day. My partner went on holiday a couple of days later. The police told me this was really bad but then my partner came back from holiday and said he would change so I went back. I was still in shock for about a good month after that, he was doing everything for the children and the washing. He would say, ‘I’m looking after you. I’m here for you’ and I really believed he was there for me, that it had been an accident. I went back to the hospital for a whole week to get bits of cup taken out of my head before they could stitch it up. People used to just pass me in the street and I was that unrecognisable. A plastic surgeon had to put my whole mouth back together again.”

“I think they [the police] have always been brilliant, they’ve always responded to the calls, they used to stop and ask me if I was alright. They put up my mobile number on a post-it in Scotland Yard and said if this number comes up you have to act on it immediately. [When specific charges were made over the years] I went to West London Magistrates and said that I have to drop the charges. I was so frightened I said that I could not go through with it. If I am not there to give evidence there is nothing they can do, is there?”

“There was one incident where he stamped on my face, he punched me and as I was losing consciousness – and that was when I had heard there might be some kind of initiative in Hammersmith and Fulham [referring to a vague memory of publicity about the Standing Together initiative] but the injuries were so bad that they could have taken him to court with me.”

2. Survivors lack knowledge about criminal charges and options for help and generally believe the case cannot go ahead without their statement

Survivors often do not know the options that the police have when they report domestic violence to them. This is particularly true of harassment behaviour as all of the survivors consulted have experienced severe harassment but had not initially classified it as criminal behaviour. Similarly, survivors are rarely told by frontline officers that the decision to arrest and charge their partner or ex-partner is not up to them. Only one survivor consulted had ever been told that directly and that was once the case was forwarded to the CSU. Therefore, they all assumed that the decision to prosecute was on their shoulders.

Quotes from participants:

“I was not aware that the hundreds of calls I was receiving could result in a harassment charge because nobody explained that to me.”

“I couldn’t go through with it. I went to West London Magistrates and told them that I had to drop the charges. I was so frightened I said that I can’t go through with it.”

“No, he got taken to court but if I am not there to give evidence there is nothing they can do is there?”

“There was one incident where I fell down a flight of stairs and he jumped on my face and kind of disfigured my face. The injuries were so bad that they could have taken him to court had I gone along with it, but I wouldn’t because I was frightened about repercussions from his family.”

3. Survivors would have liked for charges against their partners to be pursued without their statement

When asked if they would have liked for charges to be pursued against their partners without their involvement, survivors unanimously agreed that they would have been relieved to be told that the police and CPS were going ahead without their statement. Even when pushed to think back to early instances when they might have been unsure what they wanted from police intervention, they agreed that a strong police stance that took control of the situation would have been welcomed.

Quotes from participants:

(When asked if she would have liked the criminal justice system to take control of the case if possible with other evidence)

“I would have liked that. When I had those really bad injuries if they [the police] had said that if the injuries I sustained were so bad that they could go ahead with me, I would have said fine do it, because the injuries were that disgusting.”

4. The fear and shame of survivors makes it easier for them to accept the lack of aggressive police response

Overall, the survivors in this focus group did not direct their frustrations at the police except for some exceptional circumstances. Their frustrations were towards their partners (now ex-partners), which is understandable because of the betrayal and intimidation involved in those intimate relationships. The lack of aggressive pursuit of their partners by the police often did not frustrate the survivors because, as stated above, some thought they had to make the decision to prosecute. Their shame and their fear of the perpetrator often allowed them to accept the lack of pursuit by the police of their perpetrators.

Quotes from participants:

“I dropped the charges. I don’t really want to say what they [the police] were like because I can’t remember whether they were nice or not. I just thought they were police officers doing their job basically, way back then, I was quite ashamed of it really, I didn’t really want people knowing, so there was a lot of undercover stuff with me. I just wanted to brush the whole lot all the time under the carpet. For years I did that.”

“There was a couple of years without calling [the police]. I think it was whether I would think my children were at risk. I cared what happened to me but I thought I could handle that, and 9 times out of 10 I just wanted to calm the situation down, just for my kids really, and then once it was calm I felt a bit stupid then to call the police. I thought, I can’t call them now because they will think, ‘What is she going on about?’”

“And they [perpetrators] make you believe that you are off your head because he knows the law so much better than me, I’ve never had any dealings with the law all my life so why would I know all this stuff. But he knew how to get out of this, he knew everything.”

“I always dropped, somewhere along the line. There was one guy with the Community Safety Unit, I always remember him being really good and talking to me and really taking time. I listened to him but I just wasn’t strong enough basically. Because the police always said they would be there for me and they would protect me but I used to walk out of there and think that I really didn’t feel protected. Once you walk out of that police station after you’ve given your statement and you’re there on your own... I didn’t feel protected at all.”

5. There were examples of frontline police response that failed to address the safety needs of survivors in dangerous situations

Each survivor told of times when the frontline police response was less than adequate. These examples ranged from not being able to get through to the police station (on their direct line - not 999) to coming to the scene of the crime and not talking to the survivor directly, to colluding with the perpetrator and telling the survivor that the officer believed the perpetrator loved her. Following are quotes from participants that explain some of these situations in their own words.

Quotes from participants:

“We were separated and he came over to the house and he started throwing bottles around, started threatening my other two children, he picked up the television, smashed it on the floor. I dialled 999.... I was panicky. All three of my kids were screaming, they were crying, my little one was

shaking in my arms. I explained to the operator that I needed the police. And they didn't turn up. Well, I say they didn't turn up – I was told by the concierge that the police had turned up, but my ex-partner was waiting downstairs for the police and he told them that he was my brother and that he'd got my ex-partner out of my home and that everything was ok. At the end of the day the police didn't know whether I was lying upstairs dead with 3 kids in my house and I didn't have faith in the police after that, because I'd called and they should at least have gone up to see. It took me another 6 months, to go back to the police, so I lived with harassment."

"I did not report the phone calls because it was a case of I'd lived with it for so long and after calling the police and getting no joy, I didn't want to deal with them. I told the police when I went to the station and explained the situation and I was told that basically it wasn't their problem. So that was twice that I'd had experience with the police where they just didn't seem interested. First was when I dialled 999, the second one was when I actually went into the police. I asked them if they had a list of solicitors, names and addresses, they didn't even give me that."

"The first time I went to Hammersmith police station they said to me my police station is Fulham, so I went over to Fulham and I wasn't sure what to do so at first they did nothing."

(When her partner did not return their son after a scheduled visitation)

"I went to Fulham police station and explained everything. They sent me away and told me that I needed to go and get a solicitor, obviously to get my son back, but... and they didn't seem interested in the phone calls, the harassment... So I walked away..."

"There was another time that he was just trying to get in my house but I couldn't get through [on the Fulham station number] and he went away, but it was okay."

6. Survivors call the police despite inadequate responses in the past for a range of reasons

All five survivors told stories of missed opportunities of when the police could have likely arrested and charged their perpetrators numerous times. This was not always understood clearly by the survivors. However frustrated survivors are with the police response, they often call for various reasons, such as criminal damage, that they have to report for Housing.

Quote from a participant:

(After spending the night with friends)

"That morning, I'd left my friend's house to take my kids to play football. I switched my phone on and my whole message mail box was full. It was pure abuse. One of the phone calls my ex-partner said he was going to smash my windows. When we arrived home he had smashed my windows and called the police. The only reason why I actually called the police to report it was I needed a crime number in order for the council to replace my windows because otherwise I would have had to pay for it myself. The police came and asked me whether I suspected anyone of doing it. They listened to the message. I showed them the injunction, the prohibited steps order and I showed them the contact order, and I showed them my residency order. They said that it was unlikely that anything would be done because obviously there was no proof and no evidence that it was done by my ex-partner. I knew that but I needed to report it anyway. I broke down and they noted everything down and not long after that I got a call from the Fulham CSU."

7. Perpetrators use the police and social services to further their abuse

Several of the survivors consulted reported instances whereby their perpetrators had solicited the help of the police and social services to further their abuse. In one instance, Social Services were called but with the help of the ADVANCE advocates, the situation was handled appropriately. Below are quotes when the police were called and survivors were arrested for criminal damage and common assault, and one instance where police time was taken so that the perpetrator could look for the survivor accompanied by the police. In both instances, there were existing injunctions against the perpetrator and/or there was a lengthy history of abuse recorded by the police.

Quotes from participants:

(After going to the perpetrator's sister's house for the evening)

"I was lucky because he had tried calling my house that night and I wasn't there. He went to my other friend's houses with the police. He called the police and he told the police I didn't know where I was and that he feared for our son's safety. He went to two of my friend's houses with the police and the police knocked on their door and asked them whether they could search their home for me and my son."

(After years of police callouts to her home related to domestic violence)

"He had got me arrested as well, once for criminal damage and once for common assault. The police said to me that I could sort all of this out because it was all tit for tat. One of them came to me and said that they thought he really loved me."

8. When police provide a positive first experience, it can be life-changing for the survivor

One of the five survivors had an excellent response from the police the first time she called the police. This particular survivor was experiencing fairly high levels of risk from her boyfriend of two years but until the point she called the police, had not acknowledged the severity of her situation. The following provides an example of how an adequate police response can save the survivor from further distress. This was also the only case which did not result in a criminal case at court.

Quotes from participants:

(After being put in touch with ADVANCE via the domestic abuse helpline)

"It was a bad incident and I ended up with a black eye. I had spoken to ADVANCE and they said I should really do something about it because it had been a pattern, it had been building up. It had reached a point where I just thought it was too much so I phoned a few days later and asked if I could report something just so there would be something on file. They said that I had to come in and do it so I went in to the police station in Fulham to make a report. They were really good because they took it seriously. I thought maybe I was making a big deal and that they must have more important things to worry about. But they took it seriously and they wanted to take a photograph and then had a whole full on form thing [perhaps referring to a Book 124D domestic violence report form]. I had to go and speak to a specialist officer in the Community Safety Unit. They phoned me a couple of weeks later to check that things were okay. I was quite surprised. A couple of weeks after that my boyfriend had come round again and was trying to get in and was throwing stones at the windows and making a big fuss and scene so I phoned the police again and two officers came round, but again I didn't press anything and they offered to go round and visit him."

9. It is important that referral procedures to ADVANCE are followed (so that ADVANCE can proactively contact the survivor)

Survivors would not call ADVANCE on their own (see feedback on ADVANCE) even when they had agreed to be referred to them. It is therefore important that the police follow procedures for referring survivors to ADVANCE and not just leave a leaflet or card or phone number. ADVANCE can then proactively contact survivors who accept referral to them.

Quotes from participants:

“I think the CSU officer gave me the number. She told me to call them but I didn’t contact them. I just couldn’t really be bothered; I just wanted it to go away. Then the following week I had a call from ADVANCE. I felt relief because I had someone to talk to...”

“I think it was the police that gave me the number or the police contacted them and they contacted me, but I wasn’t that interested, I thought it was another victim support thing, but then a friend of a friend works for Women’s Aid and she said I should give ADVANCE a chance and that’s what I did.”

10. Other key aspects of the frontline police response

None of the survivors participating in this consultation had a specific memory of the police using the Book 124D domestic violence report form that includes risk assessment. One person thought that perhaps a 124D was used but could not be sure if she was just confusing it with a thorough interview. None of the survivors in this consultation thought that they had been risk assessed by the police until their case got to the CSU. Most can remember the CSU officer asking extensive questions about the history of violence but not could specifically remember a 124D form being used that would walk the officer through the interview in a comprehensive way. Book 124D was first used by Hammersmith and Fulham Metropolitan Police Division in February 2005.

11. Final recommendations to the police in their own words:

“Answer the phone, Fulham Police Station!”

“Be sensitive about how serious the situation is to the victim.”

“Respond to the calls a bit livelier and be more understanding. Ask us if we are alright first before anything else.”

“Be more sympathetic really, regardless of how many times that woman has rang and dropped.”

“Remember that not every case is the same. Whether you are at someone’s door or at the front desk of the police station, take a couple of steps back and think that each case is different.”

SECTION THREE:

Police Community Safety Unit response



Findings

I. Once a case is referred to the CSU, it makes a dramatic impact on how seriously the survivor believes the case is being handled

All of the five survivors who participated in this consultation had dealings with the CSU and, without exception, all were impressed with the level of concern shown for them and the willingness of the CSU to work hard to build a case against their perpetrator.

Quotes from participants:

“She [the CSU officer] was brilliant. She kept me in touch and I could ring her anytime. She gave me the number because he used to ring my work number and threaten me saying he was going to kill me or throw acid on me... I had about 100 phonecalls and texts a day and she [the CSU officer] used to come over to my home and my workplace as well and take statements if I couldn't go to the station.”

“The police, they started listening [once her case was referred to the CSU]. It was like they understood why I had tried to report things several times. My windows being smashed was the pinnacle of everything really, because that was when CSU took over, that was when ADVANCE came in, and started helping me.”

“They [the CSU] went through everything. They actually asked me to start from the beginning. Not from just where the relationship broke up but they told me to go back right to the beginning, you know, ‘What was your relationship like at the beginning?’, ‘Did you find yourself having problems at the beginning?’ And it was really weird, because at that point in time I didn't see that I was going through domestic violence...”

“It was so funny because I was coming from work on the day he was coming out the police station. And I saw him and I thought, ‘What am I going to do? He's going to bash me!’ But he walked past me. I was so confused and frightened. It was not until I got a call from the CSU saying that they had just given him bail conditions. That explained why he didn't batter me. Otherwise I'd of been dead there and then to be quite honest.”

“It was a relief that I was actually being taken seriously. Relief at the fact that I was being listened to by the police. It felt, at the end of the day, if I needed to call them I could.”

2. There is a need for frontline officers to refer survivors to the CSU and ADVANCE much earlier

Unfortunately, it took numerous dealings with the police for survivors to have contact with the CSU in four of the five cases. All of the participants felt that they were given a good service and treated well by the CSU and thought that referral to the specialist officers as soon as possible is important. Several participants wondered how their lives over the past two years would have been different had they been put in touch with the CSU officers the first time they rang the police. Similarly, it seemed that, with one exception, most of the ADVANCE referrals only came via the CSU. Survivors felt that they would have benefited from a referral to ADVANCE much earlier in their involvement with the police.

Quote from a participant:

“If somebody there had called [name of CSU officer] down, I might have thought, ‘I am going through domestic violence’. But at the time I thought it was only a minor and that I could handle it...”

3. CSU officers should be aware that survivors do not always understand what they are investigating or even that they are specialist officers

Although the survivors in this consultation gave high praises to the CSU, this did not mean that at times they did not misunderstand their way of working. It is important to remember that survivors often think the charges are still “up to them” (see Section Two) and can misinterpret why CSU officers want to know further details or request the survivor make further statements.

Quotes from participants:

“I don’t understand. We are going to court and the police officer wants me to go back to the year 98? I think he thought that I would drop the charges if he wanted me to go back all that way. I am sure he wanted me to say that. I cancelled the appointment where he wanted me to make the statement about the past. I thought, I can’t remember an hour ago and do I really want to remember all of that?”

SECTION FOUR: ADVANCE Advocacy Project's response



Findings

I. The impact that support from ADVANCE has, in terms of change in survivors' lives, cannot be overestimated

All survivors participating in this consultation believed that their experience with ADVANCE had changed their lives and provided immeasurable support. For longer term survivors, they remarked how different their experience with the criminal justice system had been with the involvement of ADVANCE. Many felt they would not have been able to endure the criminal justice process without the help and support of ADVANCE.

Quotes from participants:

“Way back when, there wasn't anybody, there wasn't ADVANCE. I don't know if I would be here today if it wasn't for ADVANCE.”

“As I said before I don't know about the law even now, but ADVANCE explained things to me and they would tell me what the words meant and they explained the system to me. They helped me think through what to do. Without them, I would be thinking, ‘Oh my god he's getting the better of me again’. I would have just crumbled really, just gone back and just done the same thing.”

“ADVANCE equipped me. They went with me to the court. They kept me in touch. Really kept me up to date with what's going on. They used to ring me up to see how I was coping, which was really good.”

“When I had to flee, I was being told that I was being moved out of borough. I had to leave everybody behind, and I actually put my foot down to the council and I said I'm not running away any more, I don't want to. It's my life, it's my kids' life – why should we leave our family? ADVANCE wrote a letter to the council and explained my situation. They also wrote a letter to emergency housing to say that it would be better for my family if they could find us temporary accommodation quickly. At that time we had gone from our home to a bed and breakfast to a hostel. We finally got temporary housing through ADVANCE's help.”

“When he [the perpetrator] went to court for his pre-trial hearing, I didn't even know that he was due to go in court. And it wasn't until ADVANCE called me and said that he'd been in court and pleaded not guilty that I knew what was happening.”

“Social Services got involved with my case because when he assaulted me I was holding our child in my arms. ADVANCE helped me with that as well because I was really unsure of what Social Services were going to do.”

“ADVANCE know I’m under a lot of pressure because of the court case was adjourned. I’ve got to move next month. I spoke to ADVANCE a lot this week because of this move, trying to furnish a flat completely. I had to leave everything behind. We literally walked out with our clothes and we are literally starting from scratch.”

“They do phone calls for you. They do practical things. I wouldn’t have done any of that myself because I did not feel strong enough. They made all the solicitors appointments for me. All I had to do was ring up and say, ‘Look, I can’t deal with this’ and they would help me.”

2. Survivors do not always acknowledge what they are going through as domestic violence until they talk to the advocates

Of the survivors consulted, only the ones with long term histories of abuse (10+ years) reported that they would have defined themselves as experiencing domestic violence. Those in shorter term relationships defined themselves as experiencing harassment because of the severe nature of the stalking behaviour they experienced, although all of the survivors had been repeatedly physically assaulted. Advocates should continue to be sensitive to the fact that when they initially talk to a survivor, they may not acknowledge the term domestic violence. Advocates should also be aware that part of their service that changes lives is helping survivors to define and put into context the abuse they have experienced.

Quotes from participants:

“The advocates gave me the leaflet on the domestic violence and when I read it I started to cry and I just threw it on the floor. I said no, no that isn’t me. But it was.”

“I’d seen domestic violence as someone being battered all round the place..”

“It’s not until you actually see domestic violence described in writing that you realise there are all types of domestic violence... but when you’re in that type of situation you don’t think of that.”

“They [the advocates] kept saying to me ‘domestic violence, domestic violence’ and I kept saying to them ‘harassment, harassment’ because to me that’s all it was it was. Because my definition of domestic violence was a woman that was being beaten up. There was no emotional side involved; it was all the physical side.”

“The police, they started listening, it was like they understood why I had tried to report things several times. My windows being smashed was the pinnacle of everything really, because that was when CSU took over, that was when ADVANCE came in, and started helping me. But still even then, I wasn’t going through domestic violence, I was just being harassed.”

“When I actually realised we were actually going through domestic violence it became worse for me because I started to feel very guilty that I had allowed this man to come into my older two kids’ lives and take control of their lives as well as my own life..”

“I think the reason ADVANCE really helped me is because they took my situation seriously and didn’t make out that I was being stupid and paranoid. A lot of what I experienced had been more verbal and control. He would check my mobile all the time, go through all my emails, and ask who phoned. He wouldn’t let me see my friends. He criticised my relationship with my mother saying I

was too close to her. He questioned my finances. Stupid little things all the time. He also pushed me and kicked me. So the one thing that ADVANCE made me realise was that it just wasn't right and it wasn't normal to get a black eye and it wasn't normal to get bruises round your neck you know, it's just not normal."

3. It is important for ADVANCE to proactively contact the survivor

Most of the survivors consulted said that they would not have called ADVANCE on their own. Several were given the number and did not call and only began contact when ADVANCE proactively called them. For several survivors, this was because they did not acknowledge what they were experiencing as domestic violence (see 2 above). They commented that if someone had given them the number to ADVANCE and said it was for help with domestic violence, they would not have called. However, if the ADVANCE service was introduced as a service that would help them with, for example, harassment, they might have been more inclined to call.

Quotes from participants:

"I think the CSU officer gave me the number. She told me to call them but I didn't contact them. I just couldn't really be bothered; I just wanted it to go away. Then the following week I had a call from ADVANCE. I felt relief because I had someone to talk to..."

"I think it was the police that gave me the number or the police contacted them and they contacted me, but I wasn't that interested, I thought it was another victim support thing, but then a friend of a friend works for Women's Aid and she said I should give ADVANCE a chance, and that's what I did."

4. Advocates have to clarify their role in relation to the police in their first contact with survivors

None of the survivors in this consultation felt that ADVANCE's close working relationship with the police was a problem. However, they did not understand exactly the nature of the relationship between ADVANCE and police. Even when asked in the consultation after much contact with ADVANCE, none of the participants were exactly sure if ADVANCE was part of the police or a separate organisation.

5. ADVANCE's working relationship with the police does not adversely affect the view the survivor has about them

While survivors were unsure of the relationship between ADVANCE and the police, they were well aware of how closely they work together. This was universally perceived to be beneficial to the survivor.

Quotes from participants:

"I just thought they were working alongside each other. I didn't have a fear that they would tell the police anything I did not want them to know."

"If anything I thought that ADVANCE was fantastic because a lot of the time I didn't have to call up the police station myself to find out what was going on because ADVANCE did that for me."

“There were some things that I told ADVANCE that I may have forgotten to tell the police. It worked well because obviously anything that I did say, I didn’t fear that they were going to tell the police but there were things they encouraged me to tell the police. It got to the point where I didn’t know what I’d said to who because everything was going on all at the same time. Because I was moving, I was trying to get the kids settled, I was trying to get myself settled, and the harassment was still going on. It was useful that ADVANCE kept track of these things.”

6. It is difficult for long term survivors to remember the details of abuse over a long period of time

Four of the five survivors participating in this consultation commented on how difficult it was to remember details of their abuse because of the sheer level of harassment and abuse over long periods of time. This impacted their willingness to talk to the police because they worried about not being able to provide the level of detail needed to give adequate statement and to testify in court. These survivors were relieved to hear from each other that they all experience blocks in memory. Advocates should reassure survivors that this response is normal and expected in long time periods of stress and will not necessarily impact the case against their perpetrator.

Quotes from participants:

“That was about 5 or 6 years ago that he was jailed for breaking the injunction but I can’t remember what I had the injunction out for I have had so many, honestly I can’t remember what that one was for. I think he took a bit of my memory as well because I can’t seem to remember.”

“If you were to ask me how many black eyes I have had I would tell you I must have had about 50 but I can’t remember them all happening and what injuries I have had and how many times have I been strangled. There are some things I can remember and some things I can’t.”

7. With high regard come high expectations

ADVANCE seeks permission to leave messages on phones and mobile phones and do not leave messages if they do not know whether it is safe to do so, but this may change for women over time.

There was one instance mentioned in the consultation whereby ADVANCE had experience a flood and had to move from their office that resulted in an instance where one of the survivors did not receive a call back from the advocate about an important court date and to help with her housing. Although it was agreed by participants (and the survivor who experienced this incident) that this was a one off, and she is back in regular contact with the advocates, it is important to realise the responsibility the advocates have to survivors. Often survivors feel more trust in the advocates than anyone else in the criminal justice system, or perhaps anyone full stop. This is an enormous responsibility and underscores the necessity for advocacy services to be managed well and to consistently provide their promised level of service.

Quotes from participants:

“I rang her and left a message on their answering machine. They didn’t call me back and I was devastated because I had to go to court and I wanted one of them to come with me. I was having housing problems and really needed somebody that knew what to do. ADVANCE phoned when I

was standing in the queue at housing. I said, 'You're a bit late aren't you?' So I don't rely on them any more, no, I rely on myself; I've lost all faith in them to be honest with you."

"If they leave a message – I don't think they should leave messages on the phones, not that my ex-partner is going to be answering my mobile, but I have noticed that they have done that a few times and that is really silly because if he did get hold of my mobile he would be saying, 'Who's this ADVANCE, who's this and who's that'."

8. ADVANCE provides more than just practical support

Survivors obviously appreciate the practical support they receive from the advocates. However, it is clear from all survivors in this consultation that they hold in high regard the counselling service provided through ADVANCE, the social opportunities provided by their holiday and summer parties and the general respect and kindness they are shown by individual advocates. ADVANCE provides a sense of community that is not overpowering but supportive and survivors generally feel they can call ADVANCE at any time.

Quotes from participants:

"And it's nice for them to just give me a call and say, 'How are you doing? Is everything ok?' And, I feel secure. It's really weird. And I haven't felt secure for so long because of everything that happened."

"I went to an ADVANCE holiday party a couple years ago. My ex-partner thought that I was going to a huge party or something and punched me straight in the eye but I was determined to go. It was the Christmas time and women who have survived domestic violence were invited. It was really good. My solicitor and lots of police officers were there too!"

"Sometimes you just don't want to bother them [the advocates]. You think they've got all this work to do and all of a sudden you receive a call from a withheld number and then when you hear their nice voice its like, 'Oh, I am so happy.'"

"The counselling [provided through ADVANCE] alone can make you stronger."

SECTION FIVE:

Court response



Findings

1. The need for the Specialist Domestic Violence Court at West London Magistrates Court was underscored

Four of the five cases involved in this consultation led to prosecution at court. Two cases were still pending at the time of the consultation. However minor the charge was compared to the abuse suffered by the survivor, all of the survivors were pleased that the cases had proceeded to court and felt very proud they had cooperated with the police, CPS and the court in the case. However, all spoke of their court date or upcoming court date with an extensive amount of fear and trepidation.

Quotes from participants:

“I had to go in there and give evidence, but I was so frightened - more so of seeing him and being in the same room as him than I was of the judge or prosecution or being cross examined.”

(Regarding an upcoming court date) “I’m scared that I am not going to tell everything because he is there looking at me.”

“That would have been brilliant if you could go to court and give evidence without having to face him. That’s the only thing that frightened me, the only thing that stopped me going to court before, not being cross-examined; it was just having to sit there in the same room as him. He was not looking at me but he would make noises. I knew that he was there to intimidate me. He was talking about a death in my family really loud and I was amazed he was allowed to do this. I got really upset and was going to walk out because I was so frightened. But then I just made myself tell the truth. If you tell the truth you’ve got nothing to worry about.”

2. Survivors are at their most apprehensive before they are due to give evidence in court; positive treatment by court personnel at that time is crucial.

Survivors who had experienced court spoke of their treatment by court personnel and how it made a difference in how comfortable they felt on the day. In one instance (see quote below), a survivor felt intimidated by someone who had called about arranging a screen for her to use when she testified. This one interaction made her question whether or not she could go through with her testimony. Comments, both positive and negative, can have a major impact leading up to this stressful time for the survivor.

Quote from a participant:

“I’ve been round the court and everything and they asked me if I wanted screens then I had that police officer ring me. Apparently you have to write a statement to get the screens and he was saying that he did not know if we could get it done in time. He made me feel like I was overreacting and I don’t even want to return his call now. So I will go there and do without the screen.”

3. Positive court results and protective measures issued at court impact on the safety of the survivor

No matter how severe the abuse in the past has been, survivors who experience the court process where their perpetrator is found guilty feel a huge sense of relief. They feel a pride in themselves and a trust in the criminal justice system not previously felt before.

Quotes from participants:

“There is justice. I know it’s not for long but it is worth it because I had never done it before [testified in court] because deep down I must have hoped that it would work out. It took for a judge and police officers to say to me that they were worried about me. So I had to let him know. I had to do it for my kids. When I came out of the court I was ecstatic, I was jumping up and down, kissing the barrister, kissed everyone!”

“My case went to court, that’s when it all stopped. A few weeks ago I did have a phone call from him, but all he can do is contact me at my Mum’s, which is nice because he used to ring right round the clock – constantly. He got 2 years’ probation and he can’t contact me for a year, but I’m thinking when that year’s up... it might start up again.”

4. There is a need to support after conviction

Once the court process has finished, the survivor often feels a sense of pride and relief. However, soon they worry about the repercussions of their testimony in court and will require further assistance and support.

Quotes from participants:

“At the moment a) he doesn’t know where we are and b) he’s still under bail conditions. We are due to go to court. I keep wondering what will happen if he doesn’t get a custodial sentence, he won’t be under bail conditions any more. Does that mean he will try and find out where I am?”

“At the end of the day even if they find him guilty he either goes inside or he doesn’t but I just don’t want him to pick up from where he left off. That is my only fear about him not going inside, that he will pick up where he left off because we have been lucky, it’s been silent since... for the last few months. But he’s been under bail conditions.”

SECTION SIX: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committees (MARACs)



Findings

I. Survivors would support the idea of a MARAC in Hammersmith and Fulham if agencies represented were trained and sensitive to the dynamics of domestic violence

All five survivors consulted felt that the idea of a multi-agency risk assessment committee would be beneficial to those in their positions and would have welcomed such a committee to have been in place over the past years when they were experiencing abuse in Hammersmith and Fulham. There was some trepidation about the training needed for those sitting on the panels and the fact that their case would be discussed without the survivor present. This stemmed the most from two survivors who had experienced negative experiences with Social Services and had participated in case conferences. These survivors were sceptical that a MARAC could be truly run in the way described by the facilitator. They simply did not have enough trust in statutory agencies in general. However, conceptually, all survivors felt the idea would provide enhanced levels of safety for survivors of domestic violence.

Quotes from participants:

“I think the more people that know, the more people that discuss it, the more help you get offered.”

“You’re going to have to share information with those agencies if you went to them independently so there’s nothing that’s going to be discussed that you wouldn’t be telling the social worker, the CSU, or the police.”

“As a concept it makes sense to have everyone sit there and say – housing is an issue and the children are an issue – how can we help?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that it is not a good thing, I would just feel strange that people were talking about me.”

“It’s like things out of your hands, like somebody else is overtaking my life and thoughts, even if I am making the wrong decisions.”

“I personally wouldn’t like it, no. I think that if someone is going to have a discussion about me it should be in front of me and I don’t think that anyone should talk about me behind my back, but that’s me. I think that I should be allowed to have a copy of the minutes of the meeting or something - if you’re talking a conference meeting, that’s a big meeting, I’ve been in a conference meeting before.”

SECTION SEVEN:

Other key services - solicitors, services for children, and general support for survivors of domestic violence in the borough



Findings

1. Survivors require immediate services from local solicitors

Particularly if the response of frontline police officers was inadequate, survivors heavily relied on local solicitors in emergency situations. They appreciated the use of those solicitors who work closely with ADVANCE and who have been trained in domestic violence.

Quotes from participants:

“I can’t fault my solicitor. She’s still my solicitor now, and she’s done everything in her power to help me and my children. It wasn’t until I’d been to court and I got the court injunction that things started to improve.”

“I needed an appointment straight away to get my son back, and when I went to see my solicitor, we went to court on the Friday, I did get my son back that night and I also got an injunction granted to me...”

2. There is a lack of focus on children living with domestic violence and lack of general support for survivors of domestic violence in the borough before the referral to ADVANCE

Survivors in this consultation felt that there was a lack of services provided to children in the borough and could not think of an example of how their own children’s needs were addressed by the agencies involved in Standing Together, except for interactions with Social Services. They felt this was a gap in local service provision. Two of the five survivors had tried to access local outreach services provided by Women’s Aid and were told that they could not access their services because of the dangerous nature of their situations. All of the survivors expressed a need for there to be some kind of umbrella service to women in the borough who needed to talk through their situation, regardless of whether they were involved with the police, or to process what they had experienced after the court case had finished and the relationship had ended.

Quotes from participants:

“The police never spoke to my children. ADVANCE never spoke to my children.”

“That’s what Women’s Aid job was, more so for the kids, to try and get them counselling and try and get them help. I mean, we were told that while we were still in danger we couldn’t have any help and we couldn’t have any counselling. They told us while we were still living there... when obviously, in my old place, where he knew where we was, we wasn’t entitled to any help. We were still living in the situation - they were saying that basically we can’t get help while we’re still in this situation. But I thought that’s more reason to give us help because of the fact we are in this situation.”

“There should be meetings for that shouldn’t there, where women can get together and discuss things, you know like an AA meeting. Or even if somebody has come out of domestic violence and knows what it is or even a list of phone numbers, a list of agencies or whatever to help people who may just want to talk.”

“I found myself just walking the streets thinking, ‘Well, where can I go?’”

SECTION EIGHT:

The one thing that someone told you that helped change the way you thought about your situation



Survivors can always think of the one thing that someone told them that enabled them to turn the corner and think differently about their situation.

Quotes from participants when asked about someone that stood out in their mind:

“My housing officer, because it was my housing officer who said to me, “Get out.”

“The CSU. She said to me, ‘We’re going to take him to court whether you like it or not. He has to go to court’”

“My two eldest children gave me their support. I didn’t have that before. And ADVANCE. Before that, I was just on my own.”

“For me I think it was going into the police station and having an initial statement and then them actually taking it another stage and making it clear that it was actually criminal what my boyfriend was doing and that there were steps that I could take. That made a big difference for me.”

“There was a woman who used to work at the CSU. She said to me, ‘Please get away from that man, I can feel it in my waters, he is going to end up killing you’”.

Appendix

Standing Together Against Domestic Violence Consultation with Survivors Protocol

1. Purpose of the consultations with survivors of domestic violence

- To hold survivors' voices at the centre of the change process
- To take a step towards "accountability to survivors", a cornerstone of the work of Standing Together Against Domestic Violence
- To improve women's safety by hearing directly the experiences of individuals and using them (anonymously) to improve agency practice
- To give Standing Together information and opinions from survivors about initiatives we are planning – before changes are made.

2. Purpose of this protocol

To ensure that the consultation at minimum does not harm women / make them less safe; and that Standing Together does all it can to make it a safe and positive experience for women.

3. Contacting women

Initial contact

Survivors will be contacted through their support agency, in the first instance.

Standing Together will give clear guidelines on information needed and information to be given. These will include:

- outlining the purpose of the consultation
- ascertaining a safe time to talk, or be contacted and how
- finding out about child or carer responsibilities and which time of day is best for her to attend a consultation group.

Initial contact is to be made by the agencies by telephone or by letter, using a standard letter drafted by Standing Together. This letter will be sent out on each agency's own letterhead paper. Standing Together will cover costs of postage.

Women will be informed that their details have not been given to anyone else and will not be passed on to any agency or individual, except to Standing Together for the purposes of contacting them should they agree to taking part in this consultation. If contacted by post they will be asked to get in touch directly with Standing Together and to say how they can be contacted if they are willing to be involved. Each individual contacted will be given Standing Together's phone number, email address and a stamped, self-addressed envelope so that they can contact Standing Together in the way easiest for them.

Standing Together will then hold individual details (name, address, phone, email) in their office, in a locked filing cabinet or/and on the computer with password protection. Standing Together will not share individual details with any other agency and will only use them for this consultation.

Standing Together will only contact women in the way they themselves have described as safe for them. They will not leave messages, unless permission to do so has been given, and will hide the Standing Together telephone number when calling in the interest of safety (e.g. by using BT 141).

Standing Together will follow up the contact with the women by their support agency in order to organise a date/s and time for the consultation/s, and to reiterate the purpose of the consultation and answer any questions the women may have about it

Dates of meetings and details of any outside speakers (e.g. it may be that police would like to send a speaker to describe current practice and hear feedback) will be phoned or sent in advance to the participants. Venues will not be included on this notice. Standing Together will contact participants individually with details of the venue.

Post consultation contact

Participants will be asked whether they wish to see the report in draft, prior to printing, to assure themselves that they could not be identified, or whether they just wish to receive the printed report. Standing Together will find out from participants where the report should be safely sent.

Follow up contact

Standing Together will endeavour to re-contact members of the consultation group to let them know when agencies have acted on the recommendations made in their consultation.

4. Format of consultation

Standing Together will generally hold meetings with survivors but may also offer women who are keen to be involved but unable to attend a meeting a choice of written or telephone consultation. Standing Together may hold meetings at which they present information about Standing Together and recent progress and current plans, and then invite survivors to comment.

Standing Together envisages mainly “conversational” consultation, i.e. no requirement for reading or writing, in the consultation meeting/s.

Standing Together will provide facilitators at each meeting, and see that someone with appropriate skills is available to offer individual support if needed, either during or after the meeting. Standing Together will have details of local support agencies and will refer women as appropriate.

The consultation meetings are not intended to be a support group (although the event will include refreshments and “social time” and women may make their own networks as a result of it).

Standing Together will make it clear to any outside speakers that they are not to use the meeting for any purpose except the one agreed in advance with Standing Together, i.e. to consult survivors on a specific aspect of agency practice. Standing Together will be careful to brief them accordingly and to ensure that they follow this brief at the meeting.

5. Access to consultation

Standing Together want to respond to the specific needs of women who are willing to be consulted, and will identify these in the initial contact with survivors agreeing to be contacted (see number 3 above). Standing Together will book an accessible venue. Standing Together can pay travel expenses, childcare, and for interpreters. Standing Together intends to provide a free crèche at the day time meeting venue for children.

Support agencies/Standing Together will ask women in the initial phonecall or letter to say what times suit them best. Standing Together may alternate meeting times between day and evening.

Standing Together intends to give each survivor a gift token to a local shop in recognition of their time and commitment in sharing their experience and recommendations for publication.

6. Recording of consultation

Standing Together has found recording the session less intrusive than having additional people in the room as note-takers. Additionally, it captures a fuller sense of what the participants are saying and assists with writing a thorough and representative report.

Standing Together needs to record the content of the consultations but not the names of the survivors. Standing Together will use initials if notes are taken but these will not be used in any draft of the report. For passing on the record of the consultation Standing Together will not use any initials or names at all. The typed transcript will use "Voice 1" and "Voice 2" etc.

Standing Together will ensure that the facilitator explains this clearly at the start of the consultation and that they secure permission to tape or record the session. All tapes will be stored securely and destroyed when the final report has been printed.

Use we will make of consultation material

We will produce reports from the consultation. Nothing in the reports will identify individual women. The reports will try to be an accurate and complete record of views expressed, and will be provided in draft for participants to read and comment on if they wish. The report will not be shared with anyone apart from the consultant/s and Standing Together staff until participants' comments have been sought and acted on, if they have requested to do so. Each participant will receive a copy of the final report.