

# **Survivors Speak**

*A report on the findings of consultations with  
survivors of domestic violence 2001–2002*

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- Bhupinder Virdee — ‘Domestic Violence Intervention Project’: for her assistance in facilitating the consultation.
- Standing Together partner agencies: for guidance in planning the consultation, as well as providing support to the women who participated in the consultation.
- The women survivors of domestic violence who participated in the consultation with such openness and honesty.



# Introduction



When this report was initially planned, Standing Together aimed to primarily make the findings available on a local level to further the aims of the inter-agency work with women experiencing domestic violence in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

Whilst completing the consultation, it became apparent that there has not been very much reported consultation with women survivors to date in the UK that has been used so directly to effect change in key agencies in the criminal and civil legal processes. We therefore decided to expand the purpose of this report, so that it can be utilised for a variety of reasons towards incorporating women survivors' feedback and recommendations into agency policy and practice.

## How to use this report

- You may be reading this report in order to think about one of the services we have consulted women about. In which case you can read the **findings** in *Section 3* directly, which incorporate some of the process by which we worked with the women to hear their views.
- You may want an **overview of the report**, which includes the aims of the consultation, how we put it into effect and the key findings. In this case you will find a comprehensive overview in the *Executive Summary*.
- You may want to set up a similar consultation with survivors of domestic violence, in which case I would recommend you read *Section 2* on the **method of consultation**, including how the process was set up, the way in which we identified the women who participated in the consultation and the roles of the two facilitators.
- You may be most interested in the **concluding comments and recommendations**. *Section 4* will take you through these, including the aspects we think have been most effective in consulting women survivors and some crucial pointers towards achieving the outcomes. You will also find the main recommendations for each of the four services we consulted the women about, in this section.

If you dip into or read the entire report, you will notice that several of the key aspects of the consultation process and findings are repeated. We wanted to reach our audience with some of the crucial aspects of carrying out such a consultation in as flexible a manner as possible. So, if you think, "I've read that piece somewhere else", you will probably be right. I hope you will stay with it and consider these occasional repetitions as an opportunity to truly absorb the main components of this report.

Happy reading!

**Vicky Grosser**  
**Consultant/Facilitator**

March 2002



# Executive Summary



## I. Goals of the consultation and partner agencies

A founding principle of Standing Together is “putting the survivor at the centre of the change process”. Standing Together believes that without the involvement of people with current, first-hand knowledge of the issues there is a serious risk that the safety of women and children will be diminished rather than increased by institutional and procedural change.

The Standing Together Steering Group consists of all the criminal justice system agencies, the Hammersmith and Fulham Council and the health service alongside voluntary sector agencies working directly with survivors. All are equal partners in the management of Standing Together.

Early in the development phase of Standing Together a consultation exercise was carried out with survivors themselves, mainly women then living in refuges, and their views directly informed the design of the pilot project which followed. The current consultation aimed to hear feedback from women who have used the services of the courts, police, solicitors and health when experiencing domestic violence over recent years. It also wanted to hear women’s recommendations for future developments in order to improve the safety of women and children.

This consultation has been made possible by funding from the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme as part of Standing Together’s *Making the Law Work for Women and Health* projects.

## 2. Process: how we consulted the local women survivors

Standing Together employed me as the consultant for this project, and later I was joined by Bhupinder Virdee from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP). My role was to design each stage of the consultation, and engage the women in the process in a manner, which they could fully speak out about their experiences and views. Bhupinder assisted me in the consultation sessions, in particular providing support to the women as they participated.

The key stages of the consultation included:

- a. Writing to the women to invite them to participate in the consultation.
- b. Planning the first session, including providing the women with background information on Standing Together.
- c. Providing two sessions (one day and one evening) for consultation on each of the four services. These included asking women a series of questions, and with their permission taping their responses as a part of a group discussion.
- d. Writing a report on what the women had said, including direct quotations from the transcripts of each session.
- e. Providing the women with a copy of the report, for their information and if necessary corrections.
- f. Using these reports to inform the relevant service about the women survivors’ feedback and recommendations for future developments.

### **3. What the women told us about the four services: strengths and areas for improvement**

The experiences of the women we consulted were sometimes influenced by when the domestic violence had taken place. One had left the violent relationship 25 years ago, whilst another had just left a few months ago, and services have changed during this time. Some felt more positive about their experiences, whilst others were very negative about the impact on themselves and the outcomes of contact with these services.

#### **a. The Courts**

Most of the women who participated in the consultation had used the courts, either through the criminal or civil routes. Those who had benefited from the more recent Standing Together approach of statutory and voluntary sector agencies working together very much appreciated the increased levels of support, guidance and resources available to them. Those who had not received such effective or integrated services think that the present approach is a vast improvement. With an aim of ensuring that women are able to really use the courts as opposed to withdrawing due to fear of reprisals from their violent partner, they summed up their general views on the courts, as well as recommendations for the future as follows:

- Women should be able to visit a court to see what happens and be informed about the court process before attending as a witness.
- Women should be well supported in order to attend court as a witness.
- The male defendant should not be able to see them/make eye contact with them, e.g. they should be able to give evidence behind a screen or by video link.
- The male defendant should not be able to cross-examine them himself.
- Sentences should reflect the seriousness of the crime, as with 'non-domestic' crimes.

#### **b. The Police**

All of the women involved in the consultation had used the police services when experiencing domestic violence. Several had found that being believed, taken seriously and put in touch with local support services had been key in enabling them to remove themselves from the violence. This ensured the protection of themselves and their children.

- Women think all police officers should be trained about domestic violence.
- Women call the police when they are in danger, and they need a fast response.
- Women want to be believed, not judged or comments made by the police such as "what did you do?".
- Women want to be asked what happened away from the man when the police arrive.
- Any questioning of neighbours or their children should be checked with the woman first. Children need to be asked very thoughtfully.
- Having some support in the next couple of days is crucial in helping them make decisions.

- The police need to assist women to find these other resources. The support needed might be with physical changes, or it might be with emotional changes.
- Stay in touch sufficiently for her to take up other agencies support and resources.
- Women support the police taking the decision to prosecute out of her hands, as long as appropriate support to them is also provided.

### **c. Solicitors**

It does appear that some local support agencies are either not clear themselves about how women can access a solicitor and what the present situation is regarding Legal Aid, or they are not checking back what women have heard from the information they have been given. This can lead to a woman being confused and possibly not really understanding the potential benefits for herself in using a solicitor.

- Women themselves think that they should have access to both the civil (for immediate protection) and criminal (for long-term solutions such as men attending prevention programmes) processes.
- The women we consulted strongly support the aim of presenting guidelines for good practice to local solicitors.
- They emphasize that understanding the nature of domestic violence is crucial, which will in turn impact on both the attitudes and the actions of the solicitors themselves.
- Women want to check that their statements are correct before going to court.
- Women want to fully use the service and be in charge of each step as it takes place. Solicitors need to keep them well informed for this purpose.
- Women would appreciate being told about local support services, which should in turn benefit the solicitor in taking forward their case.

### **d. Health Services**

Some health services have identified that a woman is experiencing domestic violence, and then assisted her to get support services and guidance. They need to remember how important their actions can be as these services are in a crucial position to assist women to protect themselves.

- Women very much support the existing protocol established in two Walk-in Centres and one Accident and Emergency, which means that female patients aged 16 and above are asked about domestic violence at triage unless they are unable to speak to the patient alone or the patient is too ill to speak. Nursing staff will ask the screening question through an interpreter (Language Line) if appropriate.
- They also think that a more proactive approach should be made to bring in an advocate if women disclose that they are experiencing domestic violence. This would reach women when they are able to ask for help and hear about support that they could receive, if they chose to.
- Women would like to see all health professionals using the opportunity they have when women use their services to check in regularly about whether they may be experiencing any type of domestic violence.

#### **e. Responding to Black and Ethnic Minority Women**

Whilst the consultation reached a range of women through the general sessions with women about the above services, Standing Together wanted to enable some local services to speak out about how services can improve support to black and ethnic minority women and their children. The following were some key pointers:

- Statutory services need to provide resources for open dialogue with black/ethnic minority community groups and voluntary organisations. Poor decisions can be made without this partnership approach.
- Funding black/ethnic minority/refugee communities to employ women workers assists with bridging the two cultures, and will hugely benefit the mainstream community in providing appropriate services when women are experiencing domestic violence.
- Build working links with community groups — their skills can then be utilised fully, e.g. to support black/ethnic minority women with child contact arrangements.

#### **Conclusions from the women**

The key conclusion women came to is that there needs to be enough support and other resources around in order for women to be able to reach key decisions and disengage emotionally from their abusive partners.

No agency can make change without hearing the real impact of their actions or services on the women who have experienced domestic violence. No consultation will be ‘complete’ in the sense that women will have varying views depending on their backgrounds and experiences. However this consultative process indicates that women are keen to work together, despite their differences, and see enough commonalities to make their recommendations very reliable.

### **4. How Standing Together has and will use the consultation recommendations**

#### **Magistrates Courts**

- a. As a result of feedback from women, Magistrates now understand more fully how ‘strange the world of the courts is’, and how changes are needed to support women who bravely use the courts when experiencing domestic violence.
- b. Magistrates have asked for support from Standing Together to insert guidance about domestic violence into their ‘Bench Book’, and they recognise the value of on-going training on the issue.
- c. In addition Magistrates can see the benefit of the civil and criminal courts talking with one-another, with the woman’s permission.

#### **Police**

All of the front-line police officers in Hammersmith and Fulham received training between September and December 2001. A key component was the feedback from the women in this consultation, and Bhupinder was able to contribute by reading a number of their comments directly to the officers.

Most of the officers appeared to be open to change, hearing both the positive and negative feedback in a thoughtful manner.

### **Solicitors**

Views expressed at the consultation will directly inform work Standing Together is doing to produce “Good Practice Guidelines” for solicitors dealing with domestic violence. Standing Together will present the feedback from survivors to a meeting of the Community Legal Services on March 21, 2002 to accompany a presentation on the Law Society Family Law Protocols.

### **Health**

Standing Together presents the key conclusions of the health consultation to front line health workers in the two Walk-in Centres and the Accident and Emergency during ongoing training sessions and it will be incorporated into training for health professionals and administrators as the project expands and progresses.

### **Standing Together presentation**

On November 22, 2001, Standing Together organised a high-profile presentation which was attended by the Solicitor-General, Harriet Harman MP, and professionals in local and London-wide agencies. One of the women who has been attending these consultation sessions contributed by telling how good local agency practice has enabled her to leave a violent relationship over the past year.

## **5. The value of doing this consultation**

This consultation process was ‘empowering’ for the women. It enabled them to notice that they are not ‘victims’ now; that they have good thinking to contribute towards future changes which will benefit other women and children.

Standing Together staff attended the final session and appreciated the women for their contributions. It was particularly encouraging for both the staff and the women survivors that the feedback and recommendations were used almost immediately in most cases, and so positively responded to by the services themselves.

## **6. The women tell us what they got out of being consulted as survivors**

Out of the fourteen women who originally indicated that they would like to participate in the consultation, eleven were able to take part.

*“I have liked giving something back to support other women who experience domestic violence.”*

*“This was good, I think we should be able to feed back to other services, like the Housing Department.”*

*“It was good to hear women who left longer ago than me, that they can say that things are better for them now”.*

*“I think it’s important that we say what we think — so that women and children are protected.”*

*“It was good to be here, to contribute to changes being possible”.*

*“I liked meeting the other women.”*

*“It gave me a chance to reflect back and see where I’ve come since I was in a violent relationship.”*

The women are keen to participate in further consultation for agencies in Hammersmith and Fulham. Given that this process is so effective in providing direct feedback and recommendations to agencies, I would hope that Standing Together would be supported in its work by agencies participating in further consultation in the future. The key I think is for the agency to be prepared and willing to use the feedback it receives. This can really have an impact on future services and resources to families impacted by domestic violence.

As this report goes to press we are delighted to hear that The Camelot Foundation will provide a grant for Standing Together to develop this consultation further in 2002–03.

# Section One

## Why Consult Survivors — The Objectives



### 1. The Standing Together aims for the consultation

A founding principle of Standing Together is “putting the survivor at the centre of the change process”. Standing Together believes in empowering women; knowing that where agencies plan change, however well-intentioned, without the involvement of people with current, first-hand knowledge of the issues there is a serious risk that the safety of women and children will be diminished rather than increased.

Voluntary sector agencies working directly with survivors — ADVANCE, a specialist advocacy service, DVIP, the Domestic Violence Intervention Project, the Hammersmith and Fulham Community Law Centre and Women’s Aid — are equal partners in the management of Standing Together, on the Steering Group alongside all the criminal justice system agencies, the Hammersmith and Fulham Council and the health service.

Survivor agencies took a lead in the development of Standing Together, alongside the Council and the police. Early in the development phase a consultation exercise was carried out with survivors themselves, mainly women who have been living in refuges. Respondents supported the idea of the case going forward to court without the victim’s participation if necessary, provided appropriate support and advocacy was in place.

Standing Together will continue to rely on the input of front-line survivor agencies to the management of the project. The work described in this report is Standing Together’s second consultation exercise with survivors directly. It has been made possible by funding from the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme as part of Standing Together’s *Making the Law Work for Women* and *Health* projects.

### 2. The consultation process

Standing Together asked me as the Consultant for this particular consultation with survivors, to take responsibility for the following aspects.

- a. Contacting women nominated by survivor agencies to inform them about the plan for this consultation.

Standing Together sent out letters, which I drafted, on lines agreed with the survivor’s agencies that were involved in planning the work. I then telephoned all women who had responded expressing an interest in attending the consultation sessions to introduce myself more informally and hear any needs or concerns they each had about their participation. At this stage I also informed the women that we would be taping the sessions, for the sole purpose of obtaining a good record of their feedback.

- b. Meetings with the survivors who expressed interest in being involved.

This was to include one “general” meeting for women who had not expressed any needs such as interpretation, plus separate meetings with particular black/ethnic minority communities via established community groups — initially one group, and if time permitted a second one. The purpose of these initial meetings was to inform survivors about Standing Together’s work to date, seek their feedback and hear their ideas for future developments. At these initial meetings, women were invited to participate in a series of three meetings (later extending to a fourth), using consultation material and input from Standing Together, which I then formulated into a plan for each meeting.

- c. To document the process — by producing a report of each meeting.

I wrote a report shortly after each meeting took place. These reports were then checked with the participating women, so that Standing Together could use them immediately to provide feedback and recommendations to key groups of professionals: police officers, magistrates, solicitors, health service staff. So the consultation was able to directly impact on local practice. At the heart of these reports were the voices of the women themselves. Although it was time-consuming to transcribe the session tapes, direct quotations proved extremely effective in reaching the professionals. For example, the police training included the trainer reading out what the women had said in their own words, which clearly moved the officers to greater understanding than providing them with generalised conclusions.

- d. Establish an ongoing “focus group”.

In the process of the consultation, it was hoped to identify a group of women who, having experienced the consultation process, would like to form an ongoing “focus group” which Standing Together would consult on a regular basis. Standing Together aims to get to a position where it is able to consult with an informed group of survivors about detailed plans before they are implemented.

### **3. Time-tabling the consultation process**

The three primary consultative meetings with women took place over a period of five months, July–November 2001. Half of the women could attend daytime sessions, while half preferred evening meetings. We therefore decided to set up both a daytime and evening session for each of the three stages of the general consultation.

We held one further meeting in February 2002, to talk about experiences of using health services, and one meeting in early March with a group of women from the Somali community in Hammersmith and Fulham.

### **4. Venue**

Standing Together and I thought carefully about choosing a venue, which was accessible by public transport and friendly and private for the consultation. It needed to be somewhere women could come to without it being conspicuous or obvious what they were there for. Thanks to a local family support agency we were able to have a place with a warm and welcoming group room, plus a fully equipped crèche (which the agency was able to staff for us), a kitchen for refreshments and cigarette breaks. The women were quickly “at home” there.

# Section Two

## Method of Consultations



### 1. Guiding principles

Standing Together established the following guiding principles for the consultation:

- a. This consultation was to be carried out in line with Standing Together principles of best practice, empowering and respecting women at all times; and in line with the protocol which Standing Together agreed with survivor agencies at the start of this project to govern this work (Appendix A). **The safety of women and children is paramount at all times.**
- b. Standing Together wanted to be as inclusive as possible, and recognised the need to make separate approaches to particular communities to encourage their participation.
- c. Standing Together wanted this consultation to be carried out in a way, which would develop a focus group in order to carry out future consultation with survivors after this first year's work.

### 2. What Standing Together hoped to achieve

Standing Together wanted to consult as wide a range of women as possible — providing a variety of feedback on the services they aimed to assess.

In order to do this they had committed to provide an interpreter if needed, and planned to include not just direct consultation with known survivors, but an additional consultation with black/ethnic minority women in the borough through a partner agency.

Through this consultation the voices of survivors would reach professionals providing services to women experiencing domestic violence, including their recommendations for improved practice.

The reports resulting from this consultation would be used immediately to inform the practice of Standing Together participating agencies in Hammersmith and Fulham, with the intention of improving the responses and therefore safety of women and children.

### 3. The participating women

It took considerable courage and hope from the women to participate in this consultation process. Courage to tell their experiences and revisit them in order to, as one of them said: “do something which could make things better for women in a similar position in the future”. With, unfortunately, painful experiences for many of the women when they had called on agencies to assist them, it took hope on their part to expect that this process could make a difference towards improving them in the future. Meeting as a group supported the women in sharing their experiences and thoughts, and provided an opportunity to input a range of recommendations together.

Fourteen women responded saying they would like to participate in the general Standing Together consultation. Eleven actually attended the sessions.

The women who participated in the general survivors consultation included:

- Two black African–Caribbean women
- One black Asian woman
- One black North African woman
- One white Eastern European woman
- Six white Western European women.

The ages of the women ranged from thirties through to fifties, with their experiences of domestic violence being between 25 years and only several months ago.

Most of the women have children.

The initial black/ethnic minority women’s community group identified to consult with unfortunately closed down several months into our consultation process. After further consideration ‘The Horn of Africa Community Centre’ Co-ordinator, Helena Ismail, expressed an interest in the women’s group at the Centre participating in a general consultation about domestic violence and use of services in Hammersmith and Fulham. This session took place in February 2002.

Ayar Ata, Co-ordinator of Hammersmith and Fulham Refugee Forum was also able to contribute his thinking towards improving services for refugee and asylum seeking women who experience domestic violence in the borough.

#### **4. How the women were invited to participate**

In setting up this consultation, Standing Together wanted to make use of experience gained in other parts of the country. They benefited from discussions with Peta Sissons of *Awareness in Practice*, who is a member of the Steering Group. She shared lessons learned from similar work she has carried out. Standing Together is also grateful for discussions with Gill Hague and Cathy Humphries, who have knowledge and experience of this work.

These useful inputs depended on Standing Together’s pre-existing contacts and knowledge. Despite a thorough search, they could not find any easily accessible written material about the process of consulting survivors, and so this report goes into detail about what we did and why, as well as about the consultation findings. We hope this will be useful to agencies in the future that wish to consult survivors of domestic violence.

Standing Together then drafted a protocol (Appendix A) setting out their thinking on how to carry out the consultation. The purpose was to develop and then commit Standing Together explicitly to ways of working that would be safe and positive for the women who agreed to share their experiences. Once agreed with the survivor agencies, the protocol would govern the consultation process.

Standing Together then met with survivor agencies to inform them about the consultation, discuss the protocol and agree any amendments, as well as seek their agreement to nominate women whom they would approach to invite to participate. The meaning and limits of “accountability to survivors” were also discussed.

Standing Together was delighted that the agencies represented at the meeting agreed the protocol, and proceeded to nominate and contact women for the consultation. It was initially envisaged that these agencies would have a role in the consultation meetings themselves, by being available outside

the sessions to provide emotional support if women become distressed. However following discussions between Standing Together and myself, we decided to include a second facilitator who would focus on providing the emotional support to the participating women, rather than to include a number of agencies.

I think one of the strengths of this consultation was that women were asked to participate by one of the local agencies already involved with Standing Together. Each woman was invited directly by the agency she knew, which immediately created some safety and sense of connection with the project. The women's details were then given (with their permission) to me as consultant, including information about how to contact them (e.g. by phone or in writing) and when they wanted to attend, an evening or a daytime session. See example of letter at Appendix B.

It was crucial, I believe, that Standing Together had obtained sufficient funds for this project so that all costs could be adequately covered. Women were able to claim all travel costs, childcare was provided on the same site as the consultation meetings, and each woman received a voucher for a local store as an appreciation of their participation. During each meeting a variety of refreshments were provided.

Two women were moved to tears by the gift vouchers, perhaps reflecting their recognition that the Project knows it is not an easy decision to 'pour out' your own experiences as a survivor, even though it was also experienced as an empowering process by the women themselves.

## **5. Bringing in the consultants/facilitators**

Standing Together decided to use an external consultant for this work for two reasons:

- a. The need for specialist skills.

Standing Together wanted the consultation to be a positive experience for the women, and recognized that this cannot be taken for granted. Asking questions about such a personal, traumatic and long-lasting experience as domestic violence is very different from many other types of "consumer research". It is not the same as talking about personal experience of most other types of crime. Feelings evoked may surface in the meeting and also afterwards, often to an extent which surprises women themselves. We therefore set up the consultation to be carried out by someone with extensive and specific experience of this work.

- b. The need to create distance from the agencies whose work women were asked about.

Standing Together is a partnership of operational agencies. It was important to maximise opportunities for women to speak freely about their experiences of using these agencies, whether positive or negative. It was thought that an external consultant who could genuinely say she was independent of all Standing Together agencies was important. The decision to ask Bhupinder from DVIP to assist in facilitating was made in order to ensure a link back to local support services.

I was appointed by Standing Together as the consultant, due to my experience of working with women survivors of domestic violence as well as involvement in consulting them about service provision in another London borough. My experience of working with women from diverse backgrounds was considered important, as well as my skills in structuring consultations and 'coming up with the goods' in reporting back recommendations to the services concerned.

Whilst believing that clear 'leadership' (one person taking a lead role) is important when carrying out consultation, I also think this type of project works best with a second facilitator. Standing Together respected this thinking and were able to secure the contributions of Bhupinder Virdee from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) to work along-side me. We agreed that I would lead the process and the structure of the consultation meetings, whilst Bhupinder would watch for emotions raised for women and assist them in handling them in a manner that enabled them to stay with the process and fully contribute. My experience has led me to believe that women are able to express emotions as well as continue to participate in consultation. Crying, for example, does not prevent her from also thinking and sharing her views (unless she chooses to leave the room). Bhupinder's involvement therefore provided an additional level of emotional support to the women as we received their feedback and recommendations. She has a very thorough knowledge of local services and could often encourage women to use the DVIP or other appropriate services for on-going emotional support.

In this manner we attended well to achieving the aims of the project by establishing a clear structure for consultation of local survivors of domestic violence. However we did not do this at the expense of the women: their feelings could be acknowledged and supported whilst they participated in the process. We were inviting the women to share their personal experiences of using each of the four services. They frequently recounted and therefore remembered some of the detail of painful experiences, and at times this would raise strong emotions for some of the women. Two of us provided a great deal more support to the women so that they could say what they really wanted to. They also offered very valuable support and empathy to one another.

#### **From Bhupinder:**

As a co-facilitator of women's support groups at the Domestic Violence Intervention Project I have a good understanding of the issues that face women who are experiencing or have in the past experienced violence in their intimate relationships.

During the survivors consultation it was important that women felt safe and supported while disclosing sensitive information about their experiences. The effects of domestic violence can continue long after the abusive relationship has ended.

My role as co-facilitator was to:

- Provide women with emotional support in the immediate sense as well as ongoing support after the consultation
- Support Vicky in the consultation
- Mirror ethnic diversity in the community
- Model a respectful working relationship

It was a privilege to be involved in a project that made it possible for survivors' voices to be heard.

#### **6. The planning process for consultation with women**

Before each consultation session with the women, Standing Together staff met with myself and Bhupinder to identify the questions that would be the focus of the forthcoming session.

Working together in this way proved crucial. Standing Together staff were able to identify what they wanted to achieve from the session. For example, they knew that the first session on the courts could be fed back very soon through a training day planned for local Magistrates. They therefore needed to frame questions, which would combine addressing some areas of concern about the court process and domestic violence, but not lead the women in their responses. By listening to these aims, I could with Bhupinder frame the questions, ensuring that they were open enough to allow for a wide range of responses from women who have had varying experiences of domestic violence and responded differently in order to protect themselves and their children. On each occasion we chose three to four questions to cover a variety of aspects of the service being consulted about and elicit a range of experiences and views from the women. See Appendices 3–6 for session plans.

As the consultation sessions progressed and women became more familiar with the process and one-another, differing views could more easily be voiced and acknowledged. Alongside this growing confidence I would then sometimes encourage women to proactively propose changes and improvements needed when issues arose which lay outside the direct brief of the session. In this manner I think we were able to hold a framework, which could lead to clear reports and recommendations to each of the four services, but build in flexibility, which meant that the women were truly heard, especially when they were voicing aspects, which we had not anticipated. In essence we always kept our eye on the fact that they are the experts.

## **7. Creating relationships for effective consultation**

Consultation can take place that in effect ‘takes’ from participants, rather than enabling them to build relationships and receive something for themselves in contributing to the outcomes.

When the women returned the letter saying they wished to participate, all except one had indicated that they would be happy to be phoned. I therefore spoke with almost all of the women before they attended the first session. I asked about their childcare, access and travel needs. The women often informed me about their fears and expectations of attending, and I was able to listen and then think about how to most appropriately welcome them. I think this contact before we met enabled the women to know a little about me, my and Bhupinder’s roles as facilitators, and that the focus of the group would be on consultation rather than a support group.

The (Stage 1) initial general consultation meeting with women survivors aimed to create relationships *between* the women, in order to make it ‘their’ space, as well as give them a ‘taste’ of what the fuller consultative process in the Autumn would involve.

- This would be more likely to lead to an on-going focus group in its own right for the future.
- Such a group was more likely to feel able to speak up/take initiative and make concrete recommendations to Standing Together which will have positive impacts on their work in the future.

At the first session I spoke with the women about how they would like to develop some ‘Ground Rules’, which would enable each of them to fully participate whilst also thinking about themselves and their needs. We then put together the following guidelines, which were reviewed at the beginning of each session (and giggled when the occasional mobile phone rang!).

- Each woman can choose how much she wants to say about herself, or not.

- Confidentiality: if we meet outside this group, each woman can choose her response. If one woman doesn't want to talk, that's okay. It's not personal. We will acknowledge one another.
- Listening to one another/taking turns.
- Respect one-another's different views and experiences: impacted by age, culture, etc.
- It's okay to disagree with one-another/have a different view.
- Don't interrupt each other.
- No mobile phones on unless needed for emergencies (e.g. children).
- Having some fun together!

It seemed that these ground rules assisted the women to each establish the boundaries which were right for them. It also made space for them to get to know one-another.

At the end of each session we invited the women to tell us how the consultation was going for them. They told us:

*"I have liked giving something back to support other women who experience domestic violence."*

*"This was good, I think we should be able to feed back to other services, like the Housing Department."*

*"It was good to hear women who left longer ago than me, that they can say that things are better for them now".*

*"It was good to be here, to contribute to changes being possible".*

*"I liked meeting the other women."*

*"It gave me a chance to reflect back and see where I've come since I was in a violent relationship."*

*"It has been a great help to talk, and I'm pleased with what Standing Together has been able to achieve."*

*"I've enjoyed the gentle guidance of the facilitators."*

*"You make me feel big."*

*"I've liked giving something back for the help I've been given."*

*"I've heard different views and learnt a lot."*

*"Thank you to all the agencies which have helped. Without them you can't do it."*

*"Coming here has made me feel not forgotten."*

*"It's been good to be involved in making sure the same doesn't happen to other women."*

There is no doubt that such a consultation brings both facilitators and participants closer in the process. We started and ended the consultation with different roles as facilitators, but we had shared much with the women in the process.

We said our final 'goodbyes' with both myself and Bhupinder saying how honoured we had been to be involved in the consultation and how much we appreciated the women's openness.

*Vicky: “I do hope that you are proud of yourselves. What you have contributed will be widely distributed and used to change services in the future, so your input will support other women who experience domestic violence. This is not a small thing.”*

*Bhupinder: “You have had the courage to say enough is enough, and what you have shared with us will make a difference for other women.”*



# Section Three

## Findings



### I. The Courts

#### Survivors' Experiences and Views of the Court Process: July 2001

##### I.1 Introduction

In July 2001 Standing Together against Domestic Violence held two meetings with women survivors of domestic violence, to seek their accounts of their experiences and views of the court process. Standing Together will use the material women gave us at a workshop for magistrates from across London, which West London Magistrates' Court is hosting on behalf of Standing Together on 29th September 2001.

##### I.1.1 The participants

Standing Together liaised with agencies working directly with survivors of domestic violence in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham to set up a process whereby agencies informed women about this consultation process and invited them to participate. Fourteen women indicated that they would like to take part in the consultation process to contribute to the work of Standing Together.

- Seven of the fourteen women actually attended these first consultation sessions.
- Two women were black and five white, of whom one was Croatian and one Portuguese.
- Ages: 30's–50's.
- Time since the violent relationship: 6 months–25 years.

As the Consultant who was facilitating the meetings with survivors, I telephoned or wrote to each woman to make personal contact before the meetings. Women had clearly been well informed about the aim of the consultation for Standing Together through the agency, which had invited them, and the letter sent out to describe the process. They responded enthusiastically to my calls, and were clear about what they were being asked to contribute. Several were able to state concerns or needs in order to participate. These included anxieties that they may be emotional in the meetings, and I assured them that while the focus of the meetings would be on hearing their thinking and recommendations, emotions would be okay. If necessary a second worker would be available to listen to feelings in more depth. It is my experience that if women are permitted to express feelings they are well able to continue thinking and contributing to the process.

##### I.1.2 Practicalities

As the women indicating that they would like to participate in the consultative process were equally split between requesting morning and evening sessions, we decided to hold both in order to engage as many women in the process as possible. Women appreciated this inclusive approach, and the availability of both travel costs and childcare facilities.

## **1.2 Facilitators**

I believe that the women benefited from having both a white and black facilitator, who also spanned different age groups and cultural experiences. It gave an inclusive message and appeared to increase safety for the women to share a range of views and experiences, which should provide Standing Together with more comprehensive feedback and recommendations for future work.

## **1.3 Process at the meeting**

Women attended this first meeting on either July 6<sup>th</sup> or July 10<sup>th</sup> 2001 depending on whether they preferred daytime or evening.

The Standing Together staff team prepared questions to find out what women's experiences had been in using the court process, and to obtain recommendations for how to make it possible for women to be effective witnesses in the future in order to receive positive outcomes to their 'cases'.

The women found these questions very useful, and responded with ease and openness. Whilst we had limited time we were all pleased (both facilitators and the women) with the range and depth of their responses. This is especially the case since it was the first time they had met one-another.

The first half of the session included welcoming the women, reminding them why the consultation is taking place, and creating the space for links to be made between them so that the actual process could be started in the second half of the session. We stressed the importance Standing Together attaches to survivors' input in order to make real and worthwhile changes for women and children experiencing domestic violence in the future.

Most women said they were pleased to come and take part so that women in the future would have better support and services than they themselves had received in the past when experiencing domestic violence. However, as the women attending the sessions had left the violent relationships between 6 months and 25 years ago, some women were already benefiting from the impact of Standing Together in Hammersmith and Fulham, and had positive experiences to feed back.

Early in the meeting, we introduced ourselves and explained the roles of the facilitators:

*Vicky:* worked in refuge, then counselling/support service for women, now co-ordinates a domestic violence prevention project in another London borough. Believes in consulting survivors as part of long-term prevention. My role is getting the consultancy done, thoughtfully, for Standing Together.

*Bhupinder:* worked in a refuge for women whose first language is not English, currently works with a local project offering support to women experiencing domestic violence (one of the survivors' agencies represented on the Standing Together steering group). New to consultancy and looking forward to it. Bhupinder's role is to support the process/support the women.

### **1.3.1 Setting some 'ground rules' for working together**

The women agreed the following for working together:

- Each woman can choose how much she wants to say about herself, or not.
- Confidentiality: if we meet outside this group, each woman can choose her response. If one woman doesn't want to talk, that's okay. It's not personal. We will acknowledge one another.
- Listening to one another/taking turns.

- Respect one another's different views and experiences: impacted by age, culture, etc.
- It's okay to disagree with one-another/have different views.
- Don't interrupt each other.
- No mobile phones on unless needed for emergencies (e.g. children).
- Having some fun together!

### **1.3.2 Background for participants: what is the aim of Standing Together, and how does it work at present?**

Handouts on the structure and work of Standing Together were provided for each woman, and I used flipchart to explain the civil and criminal courts processes.

### **1.3.3 Starting the consultative process**

I emphasized again: This is about your comments and recommendations: about actively advising Standing Together.

We asked four key questions received from Standing Together to start the consultation on courts/Magistrates. Women's responses were put on flipchart so they could see them, check I had interpreted them correctly and make any changes or additional points. The four questions were:

1. If you used the courts — were you informed about what was happening?
2. What made or would make the day in court OK?
3. What should happen to the person who abused you?
4. What could the courts do, or what could be done for abusers, so that you could remain safe?

The following are the points raised, with inserts from the transcripts of the meetings (used with the women's permission) to better illustrate the comments and recommendations. The headings do not reflect the four questions — rather they have been chosen to enable a useful and logical ordering of the views and information collected.

## **1.4 Responses to the consultation questions**

### **1.4.1 General comments about the courts/Magistrates**

One woman gave an extremely positive account of her experience. I include it first as an example and an inspiration for the way things could and should be for all women; and because it illustrates so well how the civil and criminal justice systems can work in tandem to protect women. It is also an example of excellent co-operation between agencies in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

*“He was taken in on the Tuesday night, the next morning my police liaison officer had obviously heard about it and she came in on the Wednesday morning to the Hammersmith Police Station. A appointment was set up for me to go with my Domestic Violence Intervention Project counsellor, Bhu, on Thursday, the next day to make a statement at the solicitors chosen by Lola. Lola was liaising with the police from ADVANCE... they chose a solicitor, the next day on Friday I went to court. You know*

*like one or two in the afternoon. He never came back to where we lived, he never came back. He wasn't allowed to."*

There was a general view that magistrate's attitudes and personal ideas about domestic violence needs to improve. Women see their attitudes as crucial in informing the way that cases are handled in court and the sentencing decisions taken.

*"Because you see I know someone who is a Magistrate in S... (not London) and she wrote me a letter sort of saying more or less, sorry about but you know if you stay that long you must be sort of, you know you sort of must quite enjoy it. You know it was almost like that and it makes me wonder you know what makes people say things like that because these people are Magistrates. I know she was a part time teacher she was also a Magistrate, so what I mean is that they have these personalised ideas and her ideas were very much like — she obviously had no conception of what it was like in domestic violence. You just want the person to change because you love them; you still love them even though you hate them as well. It's like an addiction because you love them and really think that they will change, that you will be able to help them. That's where you stay and they don't understand. This woman quite obviously didn't understand it and it worries me because she is, is a Magistrate."*

Generally, women felt they had not been given enough information or support about the courts in advance.

*"...so I didn't know about them or how to use them. Nobody told me. The police came and arrested him and that's it. I wasn't given any other information."*

- One woman said that only five months ago she was left to go to court on her own.
- Another woman was not informed that her partner was on bail. He turned up with a knife to attack her.

However, there were some more positive experiences:

- In January 2001: one woman appreciated the way the police had kept in touch with her.

*"I had the support of the Advocacy Project: ADVANCE as well. They gave me lots of support and everything, and I was informed of what was happening."*

Many women have fears of facing the perpetrator in court, and that after the case he can always come back to find her. There was a sense that nothing will have changed, except that she will have put herself in more danger by giving evidence against him.

*"I think for women in general, going to court and having to face the person is quite hard... I've been called to go to court soon and that's what worries me... the courts can only do so much, but at the end of the day he can come back to you".*

- One woman told us that she didn't have the information that he would be in court.
- Another had an excellent solicitor, but was intimidated by her husband being given a copy of the Statement. She hadn't realised that this would happen.

*"In the refuge I desperately wanted to have some contact with my family for Christmas and so we approached a solicitor who was very, he was absolutely wonderful, really supportive. He was really nice, but who didn't tell me what was going to happen. I didn't know that my ex-partner was going to get a copy of my statement, which wasn't always entirely accurate. There were things had been woven into my statement that I knew that I'd never said, you know, so I felt very, very intimidated*

*and then going to court was stepping into an entirely different universe. You know seeing people bowing to Judges... and I was seen by a Judge in chambers in order to get this injunction and he was very sympathetic and granted me the injunction but I was told this was a very unusual position and I should be extremely grateful for this, you know literally sort of reverse out on my knees saying thank you, thank you.”*

#### **I.4.2 Survivors’ experiences in court: “What made or would make the day in court OK?”**

People who work in the justice system should never forget how accustomed they have become to a world with its own rituals, costumes, and procedures, which are very far removed from the day-to-day experiences of the majority of the population. For women attending court, who have also to face the ordeal of seeing their abuser, it is an absolutely strange, intimidating and terrifying experience.

*“...and I was shaking... because going through that door is so petrifying. And we’re not always told what to expect and he’s, ex-partner sitting at the back intimidating you”.*

*“It was a highly different universe — I didn’t expect that”.*

#### **I.4.3 Women need to know exactly what is going to happen**

*“It’s very important to know exactly what is going to happen and how it’s going to happen and that you are informed of the way and so what to expect.”*

It is important for women to see the court beforehand, as it is very frightening.

*“Just one thing I will say is totally excellent, Blackfriars, I don’t know about any other court. But Blackfriars Crown Court, Sophie (from ADVANCE) and I went in a day before the trial. There was a lady there and she showed us around what the court would look like, you know and... and the only reason that happened because the police, not the police I’m sorry, someone got the dates confused so Sophie and I arrived and the two policemen who were handling the case, they were coming outside and said we’ve got bad news for you its been delayed and so its tomorrow. So Sophie said lets go in and see and that’s how Sophie and I got to see... so I think it’s very important.”*

#### **I.4.4 Women need to be prepared for cross-examination**

*“His barrister tried to make me feel small. And that’s one of the things if you are not told way ahead, if something is said you can be just standing there in shock basically.”*

*“...why then must you be cross-examined like you are guilty. I mean I dread it because I have already been warned even by ADVANCE that you have got to be prepared that they will tear pieces out of you and they will try and wreck you and you got to, and they will discredit you so that you feel like shit. How awful, I’m dreading it.”*

#### **I.4.5 “Why should women be cross-examined?” — does the victim have to go to court?**

Women talked about using other witnesses and evidence, and were very keen that this should happen more often. They know that the power and control that the abuser exerts puts survivors of domestic violence at a terrible disadvantage in court.

*“My husband even said that if he was ever taken to court he would actually defend himself. (i.e. would not employ a lawyer.) Well imagine, he would be able to ask me question... it’s face-to-face, it’s everything, the way they look at you and control you — it’s all to do with looks isn’t it.”*

*“There were so many statements from other people around that I felt I shouldn’t even need to go to court because evidence was there... I shouldn’t need to go to court to prove everything because he had already condemned himself.”*

#### **1.4.6 Support in court — what can be done?**

Women are terrified, yet some women still go to court to give evidence.

*“It’s the thought of going to court and having him there, of facing him.”*

*“There should be some sort of reassurance that he can’t just leap at you from the other side of the room”.*

Everyone involved in the court process needs to be alert to attempts to intimidate the victim. Whether or not visible and overt intimidation takes place, the effect of being in the presence of the perpetrator is so powerful that it can prevent the woman giving effective evidence.

*“Well, as you walk in the court, the first person you don’t want to see is him. I mean, that’s intimidation straight away. Cause they always intimidate with looks... you know what each look means, like: I’ll speak to you when we get home, that’s what the looks used to mean”.*

*“I don’t think I should have had to see him at all... I felt intimidated when he was there, just waiting and the court case had to be adjourned until after lunch because I was shaking so much. I had to take a tranquillizer and I went in and then I was, and then I was blank.”*

#### **1.4.7 Survivors proposed some specific ways in which they can be protected**

- Not having to see the perpetrator. They can intimidate the woman. We should be able to use video evidence.

*“I remember going into the court and I think the usher said to me, I’m going to stand in front of him so when you walk past him you don’t have to look at him. And when I walked into the witness box he was still on the left visible there for me and it was really hard.”*

*“It would have been best not to see him at all.”*

- Good support is needed when women are in court.

*“When I walked into the Witness Box he was still on the left, visible there for me and it was really hard. If it wasn’t for the eye contact from the women from ADVANCE I don’t think I would have been able to get through the day”.*

#### **1.4.8 It would be good if the court process could all happen more quickly**

The time it takes to get cases into court is an enormous barrier for women.

*“That’s what puts women off and also I mean, my case is from last year June and it went to court in September and his barrister adjourned it. It was adjourned three times and they wanted to adjourn it again this year”.*

In Canberra, Australia, where magistrates have adopted a case management system for domestic violence cases, results have been encouraging: from a situation where 76% of family violence cases went to a full hearing, they now find that 70% are guilty pleas at the first opportunity, with enormous savings in court time as well as reduced stress for the victim. (more information about the Australian experience can be found at [www.padv.dpmc.gov.au](http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au))

#### **1.4.9 Sentencing: What should happen to the abusers?**

This question evoked strong responses.

*“I want him to be scared, like I have been for years.”*

*“I feel I’m on trial. I feel like the guilty person... I want him to be afraid like I felt afraid for years... I want him to be scared shitless. That’s what I want... but I’m the one who’s scared shitless... do you know what I mean?”*

*“Domestic violence, it should be a shame that the perpetrator does it. You know, as far as I’m concerned it’s like rape... they do rape you because your mind, they damage you.”*

*“I feel like the guilty person — he’s on a good salary, I’m on income support, and he’s had no punishment at all.”*

A range of views were expressed, which could be summarized by the comments:

- For the man to go away, stay away from women.
- Give proper, stiffer sentences and re-education to the men.

*“I just think society’s up-side down, if you rob the Post Office or a Bank you get 25 years, but if you kill your wife you get out in three years. We need to educate men that it’s not okay to be violent to women, and I guess we need to impose stiffer sentences.”*

*“Punishment should be given like if a stranger had done similar things to me. Prison would embarrass him and lose him his job.”*

Many of the responses are an endorsement of the Probation Service specialist Domestic Violence Prevention Programme, which tackles offending behaviour in a very specific way, requiring domestic violence perpetrators to take responsibility for their crime. It is the sentencing option, which most effectively addresses the comments that follow.

*“I don’t think just punishing people, that’s not the answer... rehabilitation, education is just so important”.*

*“There was not such a thing as re-education when this thing first happened to me... I think it’s an excellent thing. I think it’s so important.”*

Several of the woman thought the man should say ‘sorry’ and mean it — it could be built into the court plan.

*“...and really meant it and know that he really meant it; I would not carry the scars. That was all I wanted. And for me I always think the day he may say sorry and he will be on his deathbed and it may be too late”.*

Women have mixed views about restraining orders.

*“Those restraining orders, I think they are fantastic and I think I was lucky. Lucky is not the word you know, I mean a five-year restraining order if you break even if he touches me and he’s back in and got to do five years. So I mean I think it’s very important if you’ve got children, you’ve got to think about the children. And also if he goes near the children at school, its very important, it should be the same, that restraining order to affect the school and the teachers should know. Because you don’t want to be worrying he is just going to turn up at the school.”*

*“All I would like from him is a sorry... I mean he’s got two years, two years to keep away from me, after two years what happens? The situation stands, this man lives ten minutes away from me and the housing, they haven’t done anything in the fact to move the children or me away. He was ordered he had to pay compensation which he still hasn’t done, so for me personally even though the courts are trying to come down heavy on him. He hasn’t had a punishment as far as I’m concerned cause he is still walking around. If he had gone to prison for what he had done I would have felt a bit better but to still be walking around, he hasn’t received any punishment. You’re the victim I feel, you still remain as the victim because you’ve gone to court for everything but as far as I’m concerned nothing really has been done to him apart from an order to keep him away. After two years I might even go back through this whole thing again, who’s to know, I mean if he was put into prison maybe he would have said okay well they’ve really taken a harsh turn on me I shouldn’t go out there and do this again but he’s walking around free to do it again.”*

*“I would like to say something especially about the courts, about the injunctions. Well personally I think injunctions mean nothing, they mean nothing. Honestly the police in my own experience (and I feel that many women would vouch for me in the same position) think that injunctions won’t stop them. I mean if they are determined to come and get you.”*

*“Very violent men wouldn’t take any notice of it... they think it’s a joke.”*

It is important to be aware of the power abusers continue to exert over their victims, whatever the type of sentence.

*“You should make it clear in prison that you should never intimidate by writing letters. Because from my own experience I was getting letters sent out to me... he was contacting me with terrible things”.*

After the whole ordeal of going to court is over, whatever the sentence, women are left to carry on and make sense of all that has happened. One woman proposed:

*“Giving women counselling after the end of the relationship — when there are lots of feelings and new things to deal with. “*

#### **1.4.10 Points raised in addition to questions posed by Standing Together**

During the session, there was discussed about the immigration status of women and how it can impact on them when experiencing domestic violence. I thought it important to feed back in addition to our four questions from Standing Together.

#### **1.4.11 Immigration status and the impact on women experiencing domestic violence**

*“For me as a woman who come to England with their husband who had a work permit, if I left I couldn’t work without the ‘leave to remain’ — If I’d gone to court, it would have affected my*

*application. I had no rights, I was nothing. I also couldn't leave England as my passport was with the solicitor. I was effectively trapped."*

All the women agreed that information needs to be given actively to women who have uncertain immigration status so that they know their rights.

#### **1.4.12 In conclusion**

There was no disagreement between the women when individual responses were given. They recognized that experiences were sometimes influenced by when the incident and court contact had taken place (some 25 years ago and some women awaiting their court appearance now). Some felt more positive about their experiences whilst others were very negative about the impact on themselves and the outcomes of the process.

They did however support one-another's proposals and actively encouraged each other to participate and share their different experiences and perspectives. Several key areas they had in common been:

- women should be well supported in order to attend court as a witness
- women should be able to visit a court to see what happens and be informed about the court process before attending as a witness
- the male defendant should not be able to see them/make eye contact with them: e.g. they should be able to give evidence behind a screen or by video link
- the male defendant should not be able to cross-examine them himself.
- sentences should reflect the seriousness of the crime, as with 'non-domestic' crimes.

#### **1.5 Closing the sessions**

At the end of each session we invited each woman to say what she had got out of attending. Comments included:

- *"I have liked giving something back to support other women who experience domestic violence."*
- *"This was good, I think we should be able to feed back to other services, like the Housing Department."*
- *"It was good to hear women who left longer ago than me, that they can say that things are better for them now".*
- *"It was good to be here, to contribute to changes being possible".*
- *"I liked meeting the other women."*
- *"It gave me a chance to reflect back and see where I've come since I was in a violent relationship."*

Despite the fact that women left looking pleased with themselves and having appreciated the opportunity to contribute to changes which will effect other women who are experiencing domestic violence, I thought it important to check that they felt okay a week or so later. With their agreement, I telephoned them all to check in. They were pleased with this contact. Several said that they had enjoyed the session and enquired about the next steps. A few told me of feelings which had

come up, including noticing, “that my life is improving”. One woman had additional contributions to make to the consultancy already.

The general tone was of looking forward to further consultation and more contact with one another.

In addition I phoned the women who couldn't get to these initial sessions but wanted to be included in the Autumn focus groups. They were also looking forward to joining the consultation.

In all I think this process is ‘empowering’ for the women. It enables them to notice that they are not just ‘victims’, that they have good thinking to contribute towards future changes which will benefit other women and children. This in itself is deeply respectful. As one woman said:

*“I mean if there were women out there who knew that they could actually stay in their homes having had the abuser removed ...and get people to come along with them. Or just have someone there to talk to who would just help them through the process...”*

No agency can make change without hearing the real impact of their actions or services on the women who have experienced domestic violence. No consultation will be ‘complete’ in the sense that women will have varying views depending on their backgrounds and experiences. However this consultative process indicates that women are keen to work together, despite their differences, and see enough commonalities to make their recommendations very reliable.

## **2. The Police**

### **Policing Domestic Violence: September 2001**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Standing Together has worked with Hammersmith and Fulham Police to produce detailed procedures for how they are to act at the scene of a domestic violence incident. Recently Chief Superintendent Anthony Wills has issued a strengthened arrest policy.

This consultation with women has been used in police training, which commenced in late September 2001. This input will assist in giving officers as much information as we can about the survivor's perspective and what women would like from police.

The women in the consultation received feedback at the November meeting about their contribution to the police training.

##### **2.1.1 Participants**

I wrote to all the women who had attended the first stage consultation in July. In addition I contacted women who had not been able to attend then, but indicated that they would like to join the process at this stage. The women attended one of two sessions: evening or morning.

- Nine women attended this session.
- Two were black (African-Caribbean), one Asian and six white, of whom one was Croatian and one Portuguese.
- Ages: 30's–50's.
- Time since the violent relationship: 8 months–25 years.

The women were welcomed, introduced themselves and decided that the 'ground rules' agreed at the first session would remain the same.

#### **2.2 Facilitator reminded women of the importance of their different perspectives**

Everyone will have different experiences and different points of view and it's good to hear all of those different things. Consultation is not about everyone agreeing with each other; it's very much about creating a place where all the different perspectives can be put out and fed back.

##### **2.2.1 Facilitators' roles**

Because of timings of these sessions, there was little time for the two facilitators to meet before the first of the Stage 2 sessions. In retrospect this was not beneficial. Although the session was successful, it seemed to take longer for women to link up and respond to the questions.

In discussing this together, Bhupinder and I agreed that it was very important for us to be well connected both before and during the sessions. We achieved this for the second Stage 2 consultation sessions, and it did seem to enable the women to participate more fully and speak out in detail about policing of domestic violence. A good lesson learnt!

## 2.3 Policing and Domestic Violence

I reminded the women that two initial questions had been covered about policing in the July sessions (responses received then have been included in this section of the report). I recapped so that the new women could understand the background to this second stage.

On this occasion we used the following questions to elicit women's experiences and views on policing of domestic violence:

1. What makes a woman experiencing domestic violence call the police?
2. What would make you want to call the police more?
3. How should the police respond when called out to women's home when they are experiencing domestic violence?
4. Should the police themselves prosecute — taking the responsibility out of women's hands?
5. What do you think women generally need if the police takes the whole case out of her hands and proceeds to court whether she really wants it or not?

Women were pleased that their comments and recommendations would be used in police training the following week. I informed them only at the end of the sessions that in fact Bhupinder would be providing this part of the training, as I did not want to influence their views nor affect their relationship with Bhupinder in the consultation process.

All of the women had called the police or had them called on their behalf (e.g. by neighbours or family) at some time during their violent relationship.

## 2.4 Responses to the Consultation Questions

### 2.4.1 What makes a woman experiencing domestic violence call the police?

She's had enough:

- Life threatened (life threatening situation)  
*"What made me call the police was because he threatened me with a knife... he held the knife against my throat, so that's what made me grab the phone. When he was threatening me with the knife I dialled 999, when he was still in the room and he threw the phone on the floor, and the operator was hearing it all."*
- In 1993 one woman was afraid to call the police in case the man later came back.
- In 1994 another didn't call the police because her partner was black.  
*"I was afraid to call the police because he was black... to me black men were always being beaten up by police, especially in the area I lived at the time which was Brixton. They were known for that".*
- Emotions come into it. Feelings of love can remain for the woman. She may want him away, but not necessarily removed by the police.  
*"I was scared because I was getting beaten up but you do love that person and there is that, a lot of your emotions are mixed up".*
- When the violence gets worse and worse, then women call the police.

*“There is threats and everything, cause you do eventually take the threats seriously cause it gets worse and worse each time.”*

- One woman was abused by her father as a child. The police took evidence but she was scared to take it further in case of more abuse. This same fear arose when she was abused by her partner as an adult.
- On the other hand, in 2000/01 another woman got good immediate support. The police liaison officer was very good and informed her at each stage. The police officer had a real understanding about non-physical abuse.

*“I’ve never called the police; the police have always been called on my behalf by other people. I was always afraid to, because of what he would say or if he was taken away and spent the night in the cells, the next morning what would he do when he came back”.*

- Women usually call the police for immediate protection.
- Several said that they expected the police would act as protectors and take them to a place of safety.

*“I think initially because you feel the police are going to respond a lot sooner than waiting until the morning to go and see a solicitor. That’s not always practical. So you have expectations that the police will act as protectors if you like. That they will intervene; they have the powers to intervene and that they will protect you. Take you to a place of safety. That’s what I would expect as a women experiencing domestic violence.”*

- Women responded to the media and politicians portrayal of that the police as there to protect us.
- Women expected immediate protection from the violence, as well as support and information about other agencies so they could choose what to do.

*“I think we want the police as well to offer some support about other agencies and whatever. So immediate protection from the violence but as well trying to sort options about what you can do next.”*

- You can’t report if you don’t know there are options.

*“It’s a big thing to call the police, it’s not just something you do...Maybe you will want to report because if you know you can go to the refuge, if you know you can talk to someone, if you know that there are other ways.”*

- Women didn’t want to report if it led to less safety, and embarrassment when the police arrived, i.e. if people in the street could see what was happening.

#### **2.4.2 What would make you want to call the police more?**

- If police helped — instead of making matters worse (e.g. believing the man, or telling women to go home.)
- If the police gathered evidence, which needs to be appropriate if young children are involved.
- If the police gave support, e.g. referred to other agencies. Clear telephone numbers of other agencies.
- It’s not okay to just advise women to leave the home.

- Training for the police on domestic violence, so they understand it properly.  
*“If police officers were trained to deal specifically with domestic violence so they know what is involved and that it affects the children.”*
- When women go to the police, they want someone to offer practical support to leave or to stay with protection and safety planning.
- It would be good if the police state that it is not the aim to remove children.  
*“Almost like a blanket assurance that if you go to the police for assistance that there would be someone there that would be able to offer you practical help to remove you from the situation. Because very often it’s the last thing you do. You know, I put up with really violent battering for years and it wasn’t until he started on the baby, he wasn’t a year old. He started sort of slapping him, because he was crying too much. I just picked the baby up the very next day and just fled in the clothes I stood up in and that’s when I really, really desperately needed the help. I put up with that for a year cause I actually thought that the baby doesn’t really know about it. It all happened after he went to bed sort of thing. I think women in that situation, I’m sure it hasn’t changed that very much, that I think there is also a reluctance, not to want to inform the officials just in case. I mean there used to be this real kind of fear about contacting agencies and fear around your children being taken away... There is often a fear that your kids are going to be taken away cause you are a bad example and it ties in with all that shame people feel as well I think”.*
- Police should have more information to give woman.
- More police (trained) women.  
*“I felt intimidated when the policemen came. I felt terrible... I would want a policewoman in most cases, definitely”.*

### **2.4.3 How should the police respond when called out to women’s home when they are experiencing domestic violence?**

What should they say, how should they say it — to the victim, to the man, to the children, to neighbours, etc.?

Women were asked to think back to that moment when police arrived at the home. How did the police respond? How could practice in the future be improved?

*“You are calling them for help. It shouldn’t take them half an hour to get there, especially if you are telling them that he has got knives and threatened to kill the children or threatened to kill you. It shouldn’t be a case of well this could just be another one, they should be out straight away, that’s what they are there for — to protect you.”*

- Do and say things that help women to say what actually went on, and then believe what they say when they are asking for help because of danger.  
*“It had got to the stage where I was threatened with a knife or some weapon of some sort — that’s why I called and I got scared for the children. But it is difficult when they come because the person is still there and you just want them to take that person away but they didn’t do that. He was still in the room. So I couldn’t put across things I really wanted to say to them because he was giving me that look. They needed to take him away. At that time I just wanted him away, I didn’t care what they did with him.”*

- Ask women how they are, or what's happening? Do this separately from the man.

*“You can’t speak if the man’s in the room, because you get the looks and you know that if you’ll say these things in front of this man, he is going to remember what you said and if there is another time that you are together it’s going to come back down on you again.”*

#### **2.4.3.1 Don’t make judgments about the women**

*“I wanted to say exactly what had been happening. There was one time the officer said oh, the first few incidents — oh it’s only love, he must really love you — and all that... those things he kept coming up with. I felt that they weren’t interested. In other words they are not going to help. And I remember there was another occasion when the police officer said: what did you do? Like what did I do for him to be violent. When you are faced with something like that you automatically think — well what’s the point — why did I bother calling?”*

- If, over time, the police have come out again and again, their attitude can make a really big difference in ending the violence.

*“I called because I thought mine and my children’s life was really, really in danger. The kids kept ringing for the police and then he would cut off the phone. I found that it took them a long time to get to my house, and the attitude I got when they got there was — well we’ve been here before, this is just another domestic violence, you’ll be lovey-dovey tomorrow — and it wasn’t dealt with how I thought it should have been. You’ve got kids screaming down the phone saying please help us and there is no one coming, the police can’t turn around and say well we have been here before. I think that they have an attitude, they really do have an attitude, it’s like when you get in the car, they automatically think that once you get in the car and get to the station that you are going to stop and you are not going to press forward, so they are not really concerned with you unless they know that you are going to press charges otherwise I don’t think they bother with you.”*

*“When I called the police the attitude was — I think the best thing for you to do is to take the kids and just leave. I wanted them to take him aside where I could actually tell them what was going on, but they were least interested in what was going on and all they kept saying was, take the kids, have you got a friend you can go to stay with, just you know, leave. They weren’t willing to hear what I had to say, or what was going on or what was happening.”*

*“The police should not say like happened to me maybe in a few days time you will feel different, and for that, actually coming from a woman police officer was even worse, because I thought, am I making a fuss about nothing? Am I over reacting? I think in some ways I even resumed the relationship because I thought perhaps I have made a fuss, perhaps its not as bad, it still goes round in my head.”*

#### **2.4.3.2 Asking the neighbours**

Did women think it was good for the police to talk with a woman’s neighbours?

- Ask the woman what she thinks about talking with the neighbours.

*“I don’t think straight away. The police had been called on numerous occasions, and an officer was nearly killed by him and the neighbours were actually blaming me, so you’ve got to be very, very careful. If they weren’t judgmental then they could be witnesses.”*

*“After the situation my neighbours did come up to the courts and witness against him.”*

### 2.4.3.3 Asking/responding to the children

*“I think that they need very good training because when you said — ask the children — it is very tricky... it depends on the age of the children, maybe they don’t want to know, maybe they just need reassurance that everything will be calm now, maybe they don’t want to talk so it is tricky and I don’t think it’s a question of just yes.”*

*“It affects the children... .so it is not just as simple as that to answer the question. The other thing is usually the understanding about domestic violence that it is not just the physical violence. police need to have a deep understanding of violence, it is not only physical, it can be sexual, financial and mental... the knowledge that they all have an impact needs be understood. The other point is about the beliefs in society with many different cultures — so understanding our different views, cultures and backgrounds — especially with Asian woman — so it about having a proper training and understanding.”*

*“The children could be under pressure from the abuser not to say anything as well — or threats, you have to be careful they might not want to say anything.”*

*“And it is a hard thing for a child to say — yes, my dad hit my mum — the child loves the both parents no matter what even if they have been abused themselves. It is very tricky to ask because they may feel that they are betraying one parent and supporting one and not the other so it is very difficult.”*

The women agreed that it is good to ask questions of children, but only if the police have the training. They really need to understand why they are asking, and about the different kinds of violence and impact and about different cultural issues and different values. So the asking can only really work well if there is that background in awareness first.

*“Everyone can ask a question but you have to know how to ask a question.”*

### 2.4.3.4 When the men have weapons — the need for the police to protect women

- The police need to know how not to abandon the woman if it’s a dangerous situation, they should check the abuser to see if he has got any weapons.

*“When the police came to my house I said to them that my husband had been to Trinidad and he had bought a machete... they said they were not going in. They left me alone. That was two men, who were afraid of a machete, what about me inside the house.”*

*“They should really, if the woman says look, (in my case if was knives — bread knives and everything) they are hidden, and I believe truly to this day — the police should have checked him over because he fooled the police, he fooled them.”*

- If there are weapons and the police run away, that’s not protection. So that’s an issue the police do have to handle — how are they going to deal with weapons because they do exist, violent men do sometimes have weapons.

### 2.4.3.5 Using women police officers

Some women felt that a woman police officer can take a role that’s about being along side the woman. There may be a way in which women police officers can be trained and be made aware that they can play a role that is actually crucial in crime prevention.

*“I still believe that if there was a woman police officer she would have said — can you take him out while I speak to the woman.”*

Others took a different view:

*“I think the police woman I asked for help from in the police station had the same attitude as the men, you know — oh this is another domestic violence. They all stood there with their hands folded and it was like — oh we’ll get rid of this one and another one will come in later on.”*

Given the relatively small number of female police officers, Standing Together recognises that, notwithstanding the views expressed by the survivors, it is probably not realistic to hope that a woman officer can be available routinely to go to domestic violence incidents. The key point that Standing Together can take forward is perhaps rather that officers need to be trained and supported in offering a consistently supportive response, regardless of gender — and this had been the experience of one woman in the borough:

*“I had a different attitude, I found the police to be absolutely brilliant. I have always been afraid almost of the police because they can treat you quite badly on demonstrations, but I was so shocked, the first time the police were involved from last October. I had been hurt quite badly, my daughter went to the police station the next morning and the police came right away to see me. It was a woman police officer on the Community Safety Unit at Hammersmith and she was wonderful.*

*The night my husband was removed by them, this year, two officers came. They took him into one room and took me down to the kitchen, but they were both absolutely supportive and they absolutely said — they don’t change, we are taking him away for you to have a rest. See your solicitor, get a court order and keep him out they said.”*

#### **2.4.3.6 It is important for the police to hold a supportive attitude towards the women**

These two women were both calling on the police at quite similar times in the recent year and having quite different experiences.

*“I had first gone to the police station in 1998, gone to the police station but I hadn’t done anything more about it, I was kind of afraid that he’d go mad.*

*At times they were called out, after, for example when I was on their books and they knew I wouldn’t press charges and they asked me to, and I wouldn’t for a serious incident, so they hadn’t given up. But all that time even though I wasn’t going to press charges my police liaison officer rang me or came to visit me every single week. She’s been in contact with me since October. I mean absolute support, even when I wouldn’t press charges she didn’t give up... she didn’t say if you don’t press charges then it’s your fault, not at all, and I was finally the one who said — this time I’m going to do it and she said — are you sure? And I said yes.”*

*“When we got to the station that night, it was really late and my son was really tired after all this palaver I went down to the station, they took a statement, but there was hardly anything in it, just little bits and pieces, it wasn’t in detail... they didn’t seem that concerned at the time. It was only I think when they realised that there was a young child involved that the next day things started to move, and then it was — at the door at nine o’clock and you know, you have to do something. I mean they were quite good at the beginning you know you have to push forward and you have to take this man to court and you can’t let him get away with it. They did give me the confidence to go forward, but then they left me high and dry... every now and again they would ring me up and say — S. we are coming up to court again are you okay and then that was it.”*

- The police need to say what they are there to do and what they can't do.

*“They should say we are here, I hope you are safe now, so that the woman can relax... show that they have arrived and they want to help you.”*

#### **2.4.3.7 Besides asking you what's happening the police should check the woman's needs**

*“I am scared that if you need a doctor that they fail to understand that. They need to be really for your safety. How can you feel safe if they just leave?”*

#### **2.4.3.8 Making sure the woman is safe when the police leave**

I explained that Hammersmith and Fulham police now have a positive arrest policy for allegations of domestic violence. Below are women's experiences and views over the past 20 years.

*“When they tell the man to go from the home, the man goes about ten minutes down the road and then the police leave and then the man's back at your door, and in my view there is plenty of innocent women out there suffering as we are talking, and they should be actually checking around your place more than once a night. Don't say they are going to do it, they should check, and maybe even knock at your door in the end they did it with me but that was only after the knife went in me. They should have it on computer, so whoever is on night duty can look on the computer and they should be looking round the area.”*

#### **2.4.3.9 Responding appropriately to different cultures/backgrounds**

- The police should be aware of cultural differences.

*“I was deeply concerned about the different cultures as well, I mean for example I got an English policeman who said to me — oh your partner was born and bred in Fulham and you come from Scotland. Don't you have all the roughnecks up there? I mean that was very intimidating to me. I feel strongly about that, if it's a black lady or something they might say — oh look at your country.”*

- It is intimidating or harassment if the woman is met by the police with assumptions about her country or culture.

#### **2.4.3.10 Responding to the man**

- The women agreed that the police need to respond to the man in a way that doesn't make things worse, like escalate the violence. They should take him immediately away, and ask him questions away from the woman. This ensures the safety of the women and children.

#### **2.4.3.11 Giving women information and assisting women to find other appropriate agencies**

Women are stating they need good support to move forwards. What is the police role, and when should they be linking women up with other appropriate supporting agencies?

Women are encouraging the police to think about how they are working with other organisations and to be clear about what their role is as police and what it is not.

*“When I went to the police... and asked if there was somewhere I can go and stay, even a hotel or something that I have to pay for, they didn't know anywhere. That's very important, so that woman can make choices for their safety.”*

Below are some examples of good policing practice.

*“It would be the second time around, when I went to Fulham police station I made a statement, and when I got home there was a message on the answer machine for me to return a call which I did. The policewoman I was dealing with was absolutely brilliant. She located the advocacy for me that I had, then right the way through from the beginning of the case right the way through to the end, even up till now, they will still ring me if there is anything they can do for me, so I have had the ongoing support from the beginning right the way through and you need it, because otherwise you just can’t get through it.”* (This woman has just been through the court process.)

*“It was the police who put me in touch right away, they set up for me to get my court order, they put me in touch with ADVANCE, told me all about the DVIP, it was the police who told me all about that.”*

#### **2.4.4 Should the police prosecute the men — taking the responsibility out of women’s hands?**

Experience from the USA (Duluth, Minnesota; San Diego, California) and here is that relying on the victim to give evidence means that most cases will not go forward, even when the police at the scene acted well and made an arrest. Standing Together wants to see the burden taken off the victim, e.g. the case to go forward whether or not she wants it to, whether or not she willingly makes a statement, even if she then withdraws her statement.

I gave women the background to this approach, then asked them what they think.

- There was agreement that more women will come forward if they know they don’t have to be responsible for prosecutions.
- They also think such an approach would reduce the number of violent men.

*“No one wants to stand in front and have him staring and it’s bad enough you get the stares at home, but to actually go in front of all these strangers and him and you facing one another and you’re telling strangers what’s been happening throughout the relationship and he’s standing there looking at you and you’re trying not to make eye contact but you can feel, you don’t have to look at him, you can feel the look, you know.”*

*“Most women, the only reason they stop is the fear. Because you have stopped, they [the men] automatically think it gives them a right to have another go, I think that’s very good and I think more woman will come forward [if they know the police will act in this way].”*

*“I think it would actually make them stop and think you are actually going forward this time, that you are not going to take more of his abuse... and it’s not like you are being vindictive, because in his mind he would feel, it’s so serious they’re going ahead with it’s out of your hands. He can’t blame you, authorities higher than you have said that this is it, and it is in the public interest to do that even if you didn’t want to, simply because they will go on and do it with other partners and it is in the public interest.”*

*“I think the police should take over so the man can’t say anything, the woman can say that this is nothing to do with me, this is the law, talk to the solicitor, and get yourself some help.”*

There were also some mixed responses initially from the women on this approach, and the following dialogue shows how their thinking together developed:

*“In my experience it happened to me about two years ago he was in prison — he actually persuaded me to go back with him, after he had been in prison. I actually dropped the charges and I couldn’t believe I was so easily led. The police didn’t even see through him. Then again the police were called and it happened again and again and again. I got a few comments from policemen — ‘oh you should have went through with it...’ I was terrified I was very scared”*

*“I agree that the charges going straight without the statement takes a great burden away from the woman. But I think as well that it takes her right to decide about her relationship away from her as well. We are saying that the man persuades, but we do things, we change things when we are ready. If we are not ready then we can be persuaded to stay in a relationship. If the law is that the charges be pressed, then yes, it is right if he is violent, I am not trying to find excuses for violence because there is none. However, if you want to stay with that man just not in that kind of relationship, will it make it worse or change the relationship for the better. It could be that this is the father of my children and I want to stay with him for whatever reason, but in a different relationship... I mean a better, not violent one.”*

*“I was persuaded back to a relationship by promises of better behaviour. I got him to try and go to the domestic violence project for men but he wouldn’t go. Why do you feel that dropping charges is going to stop, is going to change that relationship?”*

*“I am not saying that it will change, I am not saying it will not, but maybe it is taking it away from the woman if it goes in court anyway, but I think that the right to decide is taken away from her as well.”*

*Facilitator: “Do you think that if he were removed and you were given really good listening and support at that time — that would be useful?”*

*All the women: “Yes.”*

*Facilitator: “So while this is going on, if you got good input it would really help you be able to use the situation to decide what you want?”*

*All the women: “Yes.”*

*Facilitator: “So that’s an important piece isn’t it, if you are going to take the man away, out of the woman’s hands, you can’t just leave the woman on her own, you have to have some other services in there.”*

*Woman: “Its just to have a clean cut like that if you have been in that relationship for a long period of time it is just straight cut... it is very hard to break for whatever reason.”*

#### **2.4.5 What do you think women generally need if the police takes the whole case out of her hands and proceeds to court whether she really wants it or not?**

- Women need a lot of support... sometimes they just want someone to talk to.
- Some may want practical support, i.e. to move house.

*“I gave up my job, my kids gave up their school, and I lost my family. I didn’t know anybody in Hammersmith and Fulham. As far as the refuge was concerned, this was a safe area because it was completely out of the area. So I didn’t know anybody I didn’t know what I was coming to. I didn’t*

*know anybody here, so for us it's a whole new life. He is still in his area, he's still got his friends, he's still got his family, my family were up the road from me so my parents were looking after my kids while I went to work, they used to go from school to my mum and dad's and they'd pick them up, so everything for us changed drastically, nothing changed for him, his life didn't change.*

*I just felt I have gone through every stage of it in my life now, now I'm going to close it and I just dealt with like I was shutting a book."*

- Family and friends might try and sway a woman's decisions and what this approach would do is take the decision out of women's hands and so really that whole extra pressure wouldn't be around. Instead women could focus on next steps for themselves and their children.

#### **2.4.5.1 Women need to make some important decisions about their own lives**

There seems to be something important about women being able to make an important decision — including the moving away from the relationship — that empowers women to heal in order to move on.

*"So many decisions through the years haven't been ours have they. We've done them to keep the peace and so in a way this is a time when you almost get scared and you don't know what to do, and you might need someone to tell you, tell me, tell me, but you really have to do it and that's part of the healing process and growing up because you are like a frightened child with this person."*

Women do have an emotional link with the man. They need help 'to be strong'. One woman likened this separation to "it's like it's your last time and you've got to go forward."

*"I had gone to stay with my friend and fortunately she stood by me but he had threatened her, he threatened to knock her door down and do things, a friend doesn't want that, I mean she was a good friend she has stood by me, but she may have children that she will want to protect, I think that you need counselling, but not necessarily from a friend."*

#### **2.4.5.2 Gathering Evidence**

*Facilitator: "Some of the ways that police go about this is that they come into the home and they take photographic evidence and they pick up information and reports, they can use medical reports from doctors which could be about emotional stress not just physical things, they can collect evidence from different places."*

*"I did experience that actually when the policeman came back with me to the house once they saw a note that he'd left me. He said: this man looks like he isn't going to take no for an answer... I did feel that slight support but also that intrusion of privacy, I can understand that."*

In general the women welcomed the prospect of evidence being gathered from their homes, family and neighbours, as well as from other agencies they had called on for support. However they added that it should be done thoughtfully, and that they should be informed about developments.

*"To collect other evidence, like you said with the photographs, that would be good... And if they have any other evidence it only backs what you are saying... that's why in our case if there is enough evidence you shouldn't be made to go to court, because in my case he actually came to my door when my parents were on holiday here, so they gave a statement which supported me."*

*"Some violence, it's mental... it's the fear, if they're not sentenced or whatever they can actually try and come after women again and this time it's going to be ten times worse."*

*“If the police take the man to court, they could get him to go to a men’s programme. And if you have good support and counselling as well, you get the help. Maybe the woman can have the counselling and good friends can help and volunteering, and outreach projects, there are so many ways to help the woman with her confidence and she can know that someone still cares for her.”*

This is a challenge to the police and the courts to think widely about the kinds of punishment that is given; to leave an opportunity for change and possible repair of the relationship if the woman chooses it.

*“They all say they’ll go to counselling but don’t do it. Wouldn’t it be better to put them in prison and make sure that they do have counselling, I don’t think it sounds harsh.”*

The reality is that each woman will have had very different kinds of situations. On the whole, men won’t say ‘Yes thanks, I’ll go to counselling’. He will need pushing in that direction. Women need a range of responses and taking it out of women’s hands is helpful but in their view there has to be space made for men to change, if they are willing to.

### **2.4.5.3 Children**

*“When the police realised that I had a child. Then they kind of took it more seriously, but they have to. I think that if children are involved then they should take it more seriously.”*

*“In my case my kids were protecting me. And two of my children got hurt. What happened is that they came out screaming, but my neighbours didn’t realise that they screaming as in fright, they thought they were playing, so it took a while for them register — there’s something going on, and that’s when the police were called. But it took a while and they actually came and apologised to me, saying they didn’t realise, they thought they were playing it didn’t occur to them that there was something serious going on until they realised the screams were more intense.”*

How the police take statements and provide evidence for the courts is important. They need to emphasise how domestic violence impacts on children, to show how serious it is.

*“Though the police liaison officer saw it as serious, when we got to court... it wasn’t about them anymore it was about me and it does take a serious effect on the kids. I mean one of my children now has just been diagnosed as psychotic and I really feel that it has something to do with all this, it’s too much pressure for a little head and the children really do suffer.”*

*“For me because I went to the refuge they had child workers so they worked with the children which was good because then there was a lot of things they were able to say and a lot of things that I was told. I was horrified because I didn’t know that when I had to go to work he used to do these things to them and used to make them do this, so it really cut me up and really did make me think that I did do the right thing, even when I had kept thinking did I do the right thing.”*

*“We don’t want our boys growing up thinking this is what you do to a woman and the girls saying — this is what you take from a man, my mum had this, it’s wrong for them and it makes you feel guilty.”*

Children need support for moving on as well, including a space to talk about what it was like for them.

#### **2.4.5.4 Supporting the women to change their behaviour too**

*“I think that many women who are in violent relationships need support, not just the support of the kind that you are talking about, but sometimes the kind of support that will change their ways as well, about bringing up children as well, because I saw so many times in the refuge women bringing children to the refuge because they had been in a violent relationship and then being violent to the children and so when you talk about support it is not just maybe how we understood support and to get on with our life and the counselling and all that, but changing maybe their way of how they see themselves.”*

#### **2.5 Women’s response to coming to this session**

*“This is my second time and I really like it and I feel quite at home!”*

*“I think it’s important that we say what we think — so that women and children are protected.”*

*“This is better than counselling, it helps me to move on.”*

*“It’s good hearing other women’s different experiences, and I learn a lot.”*

*“I like this, saying how things should improve. Doing it together in a group is good, as we remind each other about things.”*

#### **2.6 Conclusion**

Women appreciated the thinking done in preparing for the consultation process. They liked the structure, with space to break and chat with one-another half way through the sessions.

The women welcomed new members to these second stage consultation sessions. Again they had some diverse views, but participated well in listening to one-another and developing a picture of how police practice needs to improve as well as be better linked to other services.

The key conclusion women came to is that there needs to be enough support and other resources around in order for women to be able to reach key decisions and disengaging emotionally from the men.

Therefore, the police need to assist women to find these other resources. The support needed might be with physical changes, or it might be with emotional changes.

In order for this inter-agency approach to work well it will also be vital that the police listen to the women in a space away from her male partner. They need to then believe her, and hear her and her children’s needs. Follow-up contact may well be needed, so stay in touch sufficiently for her to take up other agencies support and resources.

Women support the police taking the decision to prosecute out of her hands, as long as this appropriate support is provided.

## 3. Solicitors

### Solicitors and Domestic Violence: November 2001

#### 3.1 Introduction

Standing Together has noted for some time that solicitors vary in their responses to women who are seeking action in the civil courts in response to domestic violence. This includes both their attitudes and the manner in which they take action.

This consultation with women will be used to develop guidelines for solicitors providing services to women experiencing domestic violence in the Hammersmith and Fulham locality. It will effectively provide solicitors with information about how they can practice in a manner, which respects and responds to the wishes of the survivor.

Unlike the last two pieces of consultation — Magistrates and Policing of domestic violence — the women will not be able to receive immediate feedback about their contribution. Standing Together is still finalising the most effective way to reach local solicitors with these guidelines, in light of other initiatives (the Community Legal Service partnership; and the Law Society's planned Family Law Protocol).

##### 3.1.1 Participants

I wrote to all the women who had attended the first and second stage consultations in July and September. In addition I contacted women who had not been able to attend then, but indicated that they would like to join the process at this stage. The women attended one of two sessions for this Stage 3 consultation — evening or morning.

- Eight women attended this session.
- One was black (African-Caribbean), one Asian, one North African (Algerian Muslim), and five white, of whom one was Croatian and one Portuguese.
- Ages: 30's–50's
- Time since the violent relationship: 8 months–25 years.

The women were welcomed, introduced themselves and confirmed that the 'ground rules' agreed at the first session remain the same.

*Again I reminded women of the importance of their different perspectives:*

Everyone will have different experiences and different points of view and it's good to hear all of those different things. Consultation is not about everyone agreeing with each other it's very much about creating a place where all the different perspectives can be put out and fed back.

##### 3.1.2 Facilitator's roles

The Facilitators had spoken on the phone and met before these sessions. This enabled us to prepare for this new dimension to the consultation: exploring solicitor's role in the civil process. We were aware that not all of the women would have used a solicitor when experiencing domestic violence. We aimed to obtain the views of those who had, but involve all of the women in contributing their thinking towards developing future guidelines for solicitor's good practice.

We maintained the same balance of my taking a lead on the process of the meetings, and Bhupinder supporting the women to contain their feelings as they participated. We noted that one of the women who attended these sessions had recently stopped using the services of a local support agency, at a critical time in her current relationship. Bhupinder was able to assist her to arrange to use the service again. This proved a bonus to the consultation process itself.

### **3.2 Solicitors and Domestic Violence**

I recapped on the civil and criminal processes, and stressed that in this session we would focus on the civil — the role of the solicitor.

We used the following questions devised with Standing Together staff:

1. How did you hear about solicitors?
2. When you used a solicitor, what was good/helpful about their response and work for you?
3. What was not helpful, and why?
4. Solicitors need to be 'instructed':
  - Did they give you clear options to choose from?
  - Did they give you information about tactics, e.g. about 'child contact'?
5. Did the solicitor keep you informed about developments/how should they best do this?

In the first of the two sessions only one woman had gone to a solicitor when experiencing domestic violence. The other women had however had experience of solicitors when applying for divorce. The second session included women who had all used a solicitor at some time when actually experiencing the domestic violence.

It is important to note that several of the women in this consultation did not always make a distinction between seeing a solicitor for the domestic violence directly, and calling on their services for closely associated issues such as divorce, immigration status and child contact. These issues are very often linked to the domestic violence itself.

### **3.3 Responses to Consultation Questions**

#### **3.3.1 How did you hear about solicitors?**

- Told by non-matrimonial solicitor.

*"I went to see my solicitor I'd had for many years. She said she didn't do matrimonial work so she put me onto one of her colleagues. He was good, he got a letter out straight away."*
- A friend told one woman about legal options and solicitors.
- Another wasn't advised she could get a solicitor. When she asked a local support agency she was told it would probably cost a lot (Dec 2000).

*"I wasn't really advised that I could get a solicitor. As far as I was concerned it was just the police and they done it and it wasn't until afterwards that I did realise that I could have got a solicitor. And when I did say something about this, I was told that it would cost me a lot of money and it wouldn't be worth it, just do it through the CPS. ADVANCE told me that it would probably cost me money and, if I had known, if I'd have had an option at the beginning, I'd have gone civil."*

*“The police never ever mentioned it to me. They never said you could take this on your own and do it civil, never.” (December 2000)*

Women getting real information about options, as well as agencies checking that they have got a clear understanding about options available to them such as solicitors is important.

### **3.3.2 When you used a solicitor, what was good/helpful about their response and work for you?**

- Quick at doing non-molestation order, with power of arrest (female solicitor).
- Gave good information including comparisons between civil and criminal process.

*“She was very quick at doing my injunction, very, very quick. And the non-molestation order. She gave me good information, including about the comparisons between the civil and the criminal process.”*

- One experienced a male solicitor with a good attitude and he said she could contact him anytime.

*“He wrote out straight away... but by that afternoon the police had contacted me back, saying that they were going to press charges straight away. I didn’t need to go back through the solicitor but he was willing to follow it through. He was very sympathetic. He listened and said ‘If there are any more problems throughout the day, just contact me straight away.’ He was very good.”*

- It was important that this solicitor acknowledged what had happened and asked questions. He heard the emotional abuse and the devastation.

*“What was helpful about the older man (solicitor), was when, even just the name calling, you know its not necessarily the physical things, but he acknowledged when I said that he had (my partner) called me a “fucking stupid cunt”. He said ‘oh that’s terrible’, he said that. Such a lovely young woman. What an awful thing to say’. It was really warm to hear that. I remember feeling really appreciated. He acknowledged the devastation — what happened and what had been said really, I suppose. He drew that out of me somehow. ‘What did he say to you?’ he said. It was like an encouragement to tell and an acknowledgement that it wasn’t just that he had given me bruises and kicked me. It was also the words he’s used were...emotionally abusive.”*

It is important to women that they are heard, and it appears that actually giving them some positive feedback, as women can be helpful. This woman experienced this as being seen as human, which was respectful.

- Being able to reach the solicitor is important, and getting a quick response.

*“I could reach her straight away... she will see me anytime.” (Present court case.)*

- Quick action and court appearance.

*“He was removed on the Tuesday night and the Friday afternoon I was in court.”*

- Good clear written updates.

### **3.3.3 What was not helpful, and why?**

- Being told you “you must have asked for it”. Women might take this comment on board.

*“I got this one who said that I had more or less asked for it. Well, I changed the solicitor. I felt angry really, bitter, disappointed. I had particularly gone back to the same group of solicitors where I got a positive response before. I probably would have taken on board that I’d asked for it and I felt a bit hopeless and helpless... I think that it was at that point that I was speaking to some other woman who told me about these other solicitors she had used.”*

This was really a credit to this woman’s persistence. Without persisting she might not have been told and heard other ways of going to a good solicitor.

- One woman said she was not taken seriously and her instructions not acted upon. Up-dating the women was agreed to be important.

*“But they never tell you what is going on. Only about that they are going to apply for more money and all the time if you phone up and say look please can I speak to her about such and such and they go ‘oh she’s busy’ and you say, can she ring me back. Do they ring back? No. Do they ring back the next day? No. You spend a fortune phoning and phoning and all you want is, because you are stressed out anyway, because it is domestic violence the reason why you are divorcing him, like I’m divorcing my husband for unreasonable behaviour. If they spent five minutes speaking to you on the phone and they could put your mind at rest where you know your whole life, you are worried about everything.”*

- One woman found that information that she gave the solicitor was not used because it was not in English.

*“When I did give her my marriage papers... I was married in Algeria, not here... she didn’t bother to do the translation. I was upset because of what I had been through. It makes you feel like you are just a number.”*

- Women don’t want to be put off about using Legal Aid. Women need good information.

*“I wonder if they can have a scale of charges. They say someone is expensive, but how expensive? How much would that cost you?”*

How can solicitors work with the restrictions of Legal Aid given the need to protect women? How are they going to do that in a way that is helpful to the women asking for their services?

- Mistakes in statements: as a result had to make a lot of last minute corrections in court.

*“I found her report very bad... when I’d turned up at court on the Friday, she presented me with this report, the barrister hadn’t read it. She said ‘quick, quick, quick go up and swear on the affidavit upstairs in court... I said I haven’t read it. She said ‘I don’t care just do that’. But then I was looking through it and there were so many things she’d added that he hadn’t done on top of all the things, which I couldn’t bear because I always told the truth. I mean I just hate anything like that and so I made her and the barrister, we had three copies, sit down on the stairs before we went in to the judge in chambers... I made her sit down and went through everything and everything we changed, I had to initial... I mean it was a twenty page statement but she put things like, you know, say where he punched the side of the cab and ripped my clothes, she’d put things like he punched the taxi driver in the face and then ripped all my clothes off me completely and things like that.”*

- Too many things happening for solicitors, they are so rushed.

*“Their problem always seems to be that they’re really overloaded... you really need people to take time and go over things because it is very stressful but they sort of, they are very sort of slap happy, as though you are kind of getting a court order on something ordinary not to do with stopping*

someone coming back to your life, which is a very important thing and quite upsetting you know. And where it is about protection of you as well as ensuring your safety.”

- The only letter one woman got from her solicitor was about Legal Aid/finances. She wanted to know where the case was up to.

“She did take ages and when she sent me a letter, it was about the money.”

“With Legal Aid you have to wait. Because once, some years ago, you got your legal aid for the whole thing at the beginning but now you get it in little sections of like £200, £100 and each time... but every time now that you want, that you need something done, you have to wait until they apply to Legal Aid.”

- Information was wrong, e.g. giving the wrong name for notifying the Home Office that divorce from my husband was taking place.

“I did use my solicitor to send his details to the Home Office because he was a dependent on me. She did send a letter... but it was wrong. The name was wrong.”

- It's domestic violence, not straightforward divorce.

“Even if you are divorcing someone after, I think they (solicitors) should be trained to treat those women differently because you do get stressed out about simple things. It is not like a straightforward divorce, so when then solicitor goes ‘well why are you getting upset just ‘cos he said these things about you in a letter’ you’ve already been through the criminal case, and of course, you are going to get upset. So they should be trained that they are dealing with a divorce but this is also a domestic violence case — whether you have been through the criminal case or not.”

### 3.3.4 Solicitors need to be ‘instructed’

- a. Did they give you clear options to choose from?
  - b. Did they give you information about tactics, e.g. about ‘child contact’?
- Solicitor was very positive about the ‘non-molestation order’ and how it could be used to protect one woman.

“She said ‘We’ll get this injunction and we’ll get this sorted out, he can’t see you. You are safe, nothing can happen to you [name] just pick up the phone, ring the police and they will arrest him again’. So I didn’t feel, even though he was riding by on his bike, she still made me feel quite safe, ‘cos I knew that I had the power there this time. So she was very positive on certain bits and pieces.”

- One woman found that her solicitor explained procedures and steps at each stage. And when he stopped acting for her as the police took up the case, he was still available.

“He was very positive. He explained each different feature. Because the police are going to pursue it, he backed out of it and he told me how the police would be dealing with it from stage to stage and what would be happening and if I was confused about anything to contact him and he would go over it with me.”

- Need for assurance that this approach would work — to feel protected.

*I suppose what I would look for in a solicitor then is, I don’t know, to give me some assurance of the protectiveness I suppose.*

- The solicitor did not act how this woman wanted. In the end she had to sort it out herself.

*“After I had my baby I did go to solicitor for a divorce. It was one year (I waited) and she didn’t do anything. She didn’t until my (ex) husband decided to divorce me... I got custody of my daughter because he didn’t live here. There wasn’t an argument about my daughter. So we, how you say it, we did sort it out. He can come anytime he want to see her. There’s no problem. It is between us... my brother he is the one who...he must be near.”*

### **3.3.5 Did the solicitor keep you informed about developments/how should they best do this?**

- Good clear written updates.
- Be available to contact/speak with women.

### **3.4 Recommendations: ‘good practice guidelines’ for solicitors**

Women strongly think the following ‘do’s and ‘don’t’ should be incorporated into guidelines for solicitors good practice when advising/working for a woman who is or has experienced domestic violence.

#### **Do:**

- Listen to what the client wants.
- Provide confidence in how the legal process works.
- Be aware of the feelings a woman goes through: get training to focus on this work.

*“Maybe they should just have solicitors who deal with domestic violence ‘cos it has grown so quickly and the way I see it, how can they sit there one minute and the next minute it could be some pick pocket or burglary. It is two different things. And I think that solicitors need to be aware of the feelings that you have to go through ‘cos it is just another job to them isn’t it? They don’t understand it ‘til you have been there. I think they need some solicitors who are trained in domestic violence.”*

*“I think they should be trained with domestic violence cases. The whole thing with domestic violence is that you feel really shitty about yourself, ‘cos you feel really small and horrible. It is very important now that people do treat you nicely ‘cos you kinda feel disloyal doing it even though you’ve gotta save yourself and so it is very important that the solicitor treats you like you are an intelligent sensible person.”*

- Explain what you’ll be going through (and perhaps the criminal options as well).

*“That’s why if you have a solicitor that deals with it (domestic violence), they can go through everything when you want...they will tell you what is best and what is going to happen to you and what is going to be said and whether they think it is going to go right or wrong. Give you as much information as possible.”*

- Need to take time and go over things.
- Be realistic about the probable results.
- Tell about the court.
- Give information about agencies/support locally.

*“I think that solicitors should have a list of different projects of who can support women through this time.”*

- Attitude is important: be respectful, believe and don't minimise it.

*“Not to minimise it. Not to make out that it is not as bad. I mean ‘cos they may see things that have happened to people a lot worse than you and think ‘well this is not so bad in comparison to some other case’ particularly. That could be a danger if you had someone who specialised in domestic violence, that they could see someone who was really badly beaten up and yours may be more emotional or sexual and to not minimise your experience.”*

- Important to be possible to contact them, and ask how and when things are happening on your case.
- If marriage in another country, and give details in another language, needs to be translated, understood and taken seriously.
- To be taken seriously, not seen as just a number.
- Attitude and response is crucial: it can make all the difference to whether a woman keeps acting to protect herself (and her children), or not.

#### **Don't:**

- Say “It's your fault”.
- Don't say there is nothing we can do about it.
- Don't forget: women will sometimes say they did something to stick up for themselves. This doesn't mean they are responsible for the violence. You need to listen to the whole story.

*“Where the guy (solicitor) said it was kind of my fault, I was explaining the incident to him: the way it had built up through the evening and of the swearing and the emotional abuse and the other things. I had poured a cup of coffee on his (my partners) head. That is where he (solicitor) said I'd started it. And he (partner) got up and threw the cup at me, which split my head open, and there was blood. In that situation he (solicitor) said I asked for it. Sometimes it does look as though we may be contributing but in that kind of emotional situation, you do sometimes try to fight back a bit. Is that wrong? He figured that that was wrong.”*

- Keeping the woman informed and in charge at each stage.

### **3.5 Points in conclusion**

It does appear that some local support agencies are either not clear themselves about how women can access a solicitor and what the present situation is regarding Legal Aid, or they are not checking back what women have heard from the information they have been given. This can lead to a woman being confused and possibly not really understanding the potential benefits for herself in using a solicitor.

Women themselves think that they should have access to both the civil (for immediate protection) and criminal (for long-term solutions such as men attending prevention programmes) processes.

The women consulted strongly support the aim of presenting guidelines for good practice to local solicitors. They emphasise that understanding the nature of domestic violence is crucial, which will in turn impact on both the attitudes and the actions of the solicitors themselves. This in turn will enable them to fully use the service and be in charge of each step as it takes place.

## 4. Health Services

### Health Services And Domestic Violence: February 2002

#### 4.1 Introduction

Standing Together has worked with two Walk-in Centres and one Accident and Emergency to produce a protocol about domestic violence for staff, which includes screening, documentation, assessment and referral to Advocates. The policy is titled: 'Intimate Partner Violence'. This policy and protocol is presently in place at:

- Charing Cross Hospital Accident and Emergency Department
- Charing Cross Walk-in Centre
- Parsons Green Walk-in Centre

This consultation with women will be used to reinforce the protocol, as well as to introduce recommendations for future improvements to these services.

##### 4.1.1 Participants

As facilitator I wrote to all the women who had attended any of the consultation sessions to date. I also phoned and was able to speak with most of the women the week before. Because this was an additional consultation to the original three, it was provided on an evening only. Unfortunately, the weather was awful on the evening of the session: heavy rain with very strong winds. Just two women attended, but as they have had very different experiences they provided us with some important feedback and information.

- Two women attended this session.
- Both were white women, of whom one was Croatian.
- Ages: 30's–40's.
- Time since the violent relationship: 18 months–5 years.

As these two women had been in sessions before together, we had a brief look at the 'ground rules' agreed at the first session, then moved straight into the consultation on health services.

##### 4.1.2 Facilitator's roles

Bhupinder and I had prepared well for the session, reading the policy document, and thinking about how we might incorporate the views of women who had not used health services when experiencing domestic violence. We thought this important in order to involve everyone, but also because sometimes experiences in different health settings can include learning points for other parts of the service.

This session was also a move from the original aim of the consultation — the civil and criminal law processes, so we wanted to enable the women to make this transition.

## 4.2 Consulting on Walk-in and Accident and Emergency health services in Hammersmith and Fulham

One of the women had used Accident and Emergency services on eleven occasions — including after very violent physically and sexually abusive attacks by her ex-partner.

The other women did not use these services, nor tell her GP about the abuse. This was because of her immigration status at the time.

## 4.3 The questions posed by Standing Together

1. When you used Accident and Emergency, what was good/helpful about their response towards you?
2. What was not helpful, or what concerns did you have, and why?
3. What would you think if a health professional had asked you if you were experiencing domestic violence — as a part of asking all female patients (if you didn't have children with you, and you were alone)?
4. Do you think it would be good for an advocate to automatically be called in to see any woman who says she is experiencing domestic violence?

## 4.4 Responses to Consultation Questions

### 4.4.1 When you used Accident and Emergency, what was good/helpful about their response towards you?

Accident and Emergency staff need to see the woman on her own if the man comes with her, so that she can really tell them what is happening, and they can get the correct information. This is very important for her safety.

- Men will often come to Accident and Emergency with their partner in order to stop them getting the police involved.

*“Well, the third time it was Chelsea and Westminster, he actually came with me... I think he didn't want me to get the police involved. I was haemorrhaging from down below which he had damaged with objects. They kept me in overnight, and he was there. They asked me if I wanted the police involved or was it my heavy period — which was what he was saying.”*

*Vicky: “Did they ask you questions at all? About what had happened?”*

*Woman: “Only about my body.”*

*Vicky: “Do you think that they had figured that something had happened?”*

*Woman: “Yes”*

*Vicky: “Was it helpful the way that they asked you?”*

*Woman: “Looking back, no, because he was there.”*

It is important to ask about the cause of their injuries, but if the man is there it is very difficult for the woman to tell the reality of the situation. The man can influence her and potentially the response of the professionals.

*“I couldn’t tell them exactly what he was doing to me. He said I was mental, unstable. You actually doubt your own sanity... it was so difficult even with the nurses, and that, for me to explain to them what he had done. I’ll put it this way, how would you explain that your ex-partner damaged your inside with a bottle? How would you explain that?”*

- The final time (eleventh) this woman used Accident and Emergency the hospital got the police, and she was then linked to ADVANCE.

*“The final time they did help me. And that was when I was taken to Chelsea and Westminster and they did take precautions. They had security down there... the police were called for an investigation... that is when I got the strength to go through the court case... If it wasn’t for ADVANCE, I wouldn’t be here today.”*

Both women were in agreement that it is very important that staff ask about domestic violence.

- The nurses were lovely — their responses can make a real difference: both attitude and actions.

*“The young nurses, they were lovely... the way they were speaking, they held my hands and they saw the bruising which he had said had happened from falling down stairs and that I had fallen over my dog. They didn’t believe that.”*

It was important that the staff didn’t believe his ‘story’. However it took several visits to Accident and Emergency for this woman to get real supportive action.

#### **4.4.2 It can make a real difference for woman experiencing domestic violence if Accident and Emergency tell the woman’s GP about her use of their service.**

- Told GP — who then had the information and he removed my partner from his list, which was very supportive.

*“They (Accident and Emergency) did contact my GP about it and so therefore they did keep my GP in contact with what was going on... He removed him (husband) from his list as well because he was in the same surgery. He got removed immediately. I don’t know if a lot of GP’s do that.”*

#### **4.4.3 What was not helpful, or what concerns did you have, and why?**

Woman who used Accident and Emergency:

- Didn’t remove him when I went the next time with similar injuries, even though there was information on my records.
- Not good to keep man there.  
*“He shouldn’t be there”.*
- You can doubt your own sanity, if the man is there.

Woman who never told health services:

- I couldn’t even tell my GP. This woman was very impacted by another agencies response to her immigration status at the time.

*“Because I felt guilty and ashamed. I wasn’t brought up to go to the police. Once when I had called the police, when the policeman came, I said I was still sorting out my residency in the country and I*

*couldn't leave the country. The policemen said yes you can, and I said no, I couldn't. He said yes you can, your daughter can't leave but you can if you have a problem you can leave, because he is not hurting her.*

*And then I went to Social Services and it was so hard. Because I never went to them before and nobody heard. You know you can go to reception... and just to get the courage to go through the door with my daughter with me to say I'm sorry I can't go back and they couldn't do anything.*

*Because of my immigration status the door was shut when I asked for help."*

When asking women about domestic violence it is important for Walk-in Health services to know that women may have had bad previous experiences when they asked for help which will affect how much they feel they can be open about their situation.

*"When I wanted a refuge space, I called and the woman at the other end of the phone said 'sorry, we can't take her because she can't pay' you know for rental, we can't get money for me. That was it and I felt, I mean, can you imagine you try to pluck up the courage to go and ask for help, and they just shut the door."*

If a woman in a similar situation — with unresolved immigration status is asked about domestic violence, the walk-in service is now able to call ADVANCE to help address these concerns.

#### **4.4.4 What would you think if a health professional had asked you if you were experiencing domestic violence — as a part of asking all female patients (if you didn't have children with you, and you were alone)?**

Yes it is important to ask all women about domestic violence. Both women think this should be standard practice in all health services for the following reasons.

##### **Why?**

- If the worker initiates the conversation, it is easier to say yes and say what has happened to you.

*"I think it is quite important, because in a way, the other person initiates the conversation about that. For the women it is very hard, being the first time to tell someone, listen this is my problem."*

- If the woman says 'yes' when she is asked, then her GP should be informed — so there is more support and safety for her.

*"When your child goes to Accident and Emergency and they always check, it is part of the process of check for abuse isn't it? So why not everybody else?"*

*I think it is very good, the alarm bells start ringing, and I think also it would make sense for them to contact your GP straight away as well."*

- Children may be involved and need support or services as well.
- Women might be wary about telling if they fear their children might be removed.
- Women who have not experienced domestic violence now know they could ask for help in the future if they needed to.
- Women could be put in touch with support services.

- Sometimes it is easier to tell someone who is not a part of your life: it is confidential.  
*“Sometimes it can just be the first step on the way to a new life... You know sometimes maybe you need somebody who is not your friend, who is not emotionally involved in your life, someone who is completely outside of it, that you can talk to... you don’t have to see the person, they are not part of your life for years to come.”*
- It gives women more access to services — to make choices for themselves.
- Domestic violence can become very ‘normal’ for women, so being asked is a help in acknowledging it for themselves.  
*“Sometimes you get caught up in a circle and that’s something awful because your everyday life, when you think it is not OK but it becomes part of your life. If somebody asks you maybe, not always, maybe, it makes you just ask yourself maybe it is not right, maybe it is wrong, maybe there is something else, maybe.”*
- Asking gives a message that domestic violence is a serious issue.  
*“That gives you the message that it is important, that it is you know, you are asked because it is serious.”*

#### **4.4.5 Do you think it would be good for an advocate to automatically be called in to see any woman who says she is experiencing domestic violence?**

Both women agreed that it would be good:

*“It’s hard to be in right frame of mind, so someone there to talk to you would be good.”*

- When you can see someone you use different ways of communicating. This is particularly important for women whose first language is not English.  
*“Yes, I am all for that. The reason is, looking back; so many times I went to the phone box to call a number. I remember getting some numbers and I couldn’t make the call. It was very, very hard for me because it is so hard when somebody answers the phone, how do I start? Because you don’t see the person because you just need to use your expressive language, you have to use your speech. When you see someone you use different types of language, not just speech, non-verbal communication so you can pause, so I never ever made a call and that is the reason why not. So I would find it much easier if the advocate came and started.”*

I asked the women what, in their view, an advocate needs to provide if she comes to see a woman who has said she is experiencing domestic violence, straight away.

- It may depend on different women, and different stages of the relationship.
- She would need good training, to judge when to push a bit and when to step back.  
*“It depends on what the woman wanted at the time. Maybe the first time, the second time, third time, maybe they want something different than later or maybe I would need something different at different stages so it all depends. So I think the person needs to be trained very well to sense what is needed. They would need to be able to judge when to push a bit and when to step back.”*
- She should give positive, support — not pushing in a way, which would make the woman feel guilty.

- It would be important to give information about routes to safety so she can make her own choices.

*“To know that if you take this road, what is the process and how does it go.”*

#### **4.5 Close**

Being aware that this was our final session together, I asked if it is okay for Standing Together to use this feedback on health straight away?

1. To feed back to health professionals.
2. For fundraising purposes.
3. To develop policy and practice.
4. To include in the consultation final report.

The women indicated that they would be pleased for this to happen, so that more women and children can be supported and protected.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Because the original aim of the consultation was to ask women about the criminal and civil law — how it had assisted them or not when experiencing domestic violence — it may have been a little confusing to add this session on health at a later date. It was also the case that at the time of the third meeting, women came expecting to ‘end’. Although they indicated that they wanted to come to an additional session on a new aspect — health services — there may have been mixed feelings because they were ready to say ‘goodbye’. And then there was the weather!

The two women who did come to this session spoke confidently and openly about their experiences and views. There would no doubt have been several aspects added if more women had been present. However, the comments here do emphasize that these women very much support the existing policy and protocol established in these three health sites. They also think that a more proactive approach should be made to bring in an advocate, in order to reach women when they are able to ask for help. Advocates could also provide women with information about support that they could receive, if they chose to.

## 5. Black and Ethnic Minority Women

### 5.1 Introduction

The final consultation session was with the Horn of Africa Centre's Women's Group. Ten women attended the session, and with the assistance of an excellent interpreter, we discussed their understanding of domestic violence. There is no one word for 'domestic violence' in Somali, so the interpreter used a series of examples to describe it. These included hitting of women by their male partners, control of money and verbal abuse.

Women responded by saying that domestic violence does take place in their community in some families, and is different for the community here in England than 'at home'. They elaborated: "*when we were at home if there were difficulties we called on our families, who would help until the situation stopped.*" On the other hand, some women seemed to accept the abuse, seeing it as a part of the marriage. Once in this country the women seem to tolerate the abuse less, but still want to call on their own community for support.

Two women spoke of their own experiences of violent relationships. One said that when her ex-husband had hit their children in addition to abusing her, Social Services had come in and had been a great help. He was taken to court, and she hasn't seen him since then. This approach protected herself and her children.

The women agreed that a man hitting a woman is not a good thing. "*It shouldn't happen*" they said. I asked what they would want to do in this situation. Several said they would want the support of the police and of their community. This seemed to be a major aspect of what the women were saying. The statutory agencies can't act alone, and the community organisations need the partnership in order to get appropriate resources to the family. Women can be very confused about what services are on offer, and need the community support as well to understand and use the agencies. On the other hand, statutory agencies should **not** make assumptions that the women will 'go back to their community'.

### 5.2 Recommendations from the women

- The police are there to make us safe. If we call on them they need to listen and hear what we want. If we say we want to be away from our community for safety, then they should help with that. They proposed that the police should have a 'link person' with community organisations. Then the women could be assisted quickly (including with interpreting) and more appropriately. This would save time and resources and ensure greater safety.
- The women like that the Walk-in Health Centres use a protocol, which involves asking all injured women if they have experienced domestic violence. They also think these Centres could have links with community organisations, so that women can use advocate services. They stressed that the man (or other family members) should not be used as interpreters, and asked me if interpreters are available through these health services. It is clear that there needs to be clear information out to women in community languages, which helps them access interpreters if they need them.
- Women are concerned about the stress for families where 'child contact' is set up a long way from their community. They proposed that it be provided through their local community organisations.

- Most of the women know nothing about the courts and domestic violence. Information is needed to assist them to know their rights.
- Expectations from the wider society that minority communities should fit into Western ‘cultural norms’ do not help build trust for women to call on services for support about domestic violence. All agencies need to be willing to hear different ways of responding to the issue, whilst ensuring that women and children are protected.

Helena Ismail, Co-ordinator of ‘Horn of Africa Community Centre’ wished me to share the following account of one of the Centre’s service users experience of using both the courts and then Child Contact services, when fleeing domestic violence.

*“We had a woman who used our Centre who decided to leave her violent husband. It was very hard supporting her to use the courts, because it took so long and was so stressful for her. But she did go through with it and get a separation and to live without her husband.*

*The next stage — arranging for her ex-partner to have contact with their three children was too much. She had three children, all less than 8 years old. She didn’t speak English, or read it. She was also an Asylum seeker. She had to get to the Contact Centre near Oxford Street, and it was exhausting for her. Her ex-partner had set it all up to put stress on her, and eventually used the contact to manipulate her to come back to him.*

*There needs to be better services near by for women in her situation. Maybe contact could be arranged at a Centre like ours, in her own environment and with the support of the community.*

*Also, her solicitor was very good at her job, but would make appointments at difficult times for the women — like at 4pm when she had all her children with her. People working with our community need to think about these things.”*

Helena explained that when people are new to this country and unfamiliar with ‘the system’ they can find it hard to ask for things to be changed, especially when they know an interpreter has been booked for an appointment.

### **5.3 Consulting Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Hammersmith and Fulham**

Asylum Seekers and refugees can find it particularly difficult to access services to ensure the protection of women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Ayar Ata, Co-ordinator of Hammersmith and Fulham Refugee Forum told me “we need to be able to tell women where to go”. He continued by informing me that the age, gender, class and education of refugees in the U.K. varies, so it is not possible to generalise about how women react if they experience domestic violence.

Ayar stresses that community organisations and ‘mainstream services’ must work together. Neither can ensure the safety of women and children without one-another. He stressed the following points:

- Open dialogue with community groups and voluntary organisations is needed: the communication lines need to be open. Sometimes poor decisions can be made without this partnership approach.
- Action research is needed through supporting communities to conduct their own surveys into domestic violence: carried out by community outreach workers.

- Where there are 'women advice workers' available through local community organisations then women can be more assured of getting to be heard and supported to use local services. Funding refugee communities to employ women workers assists with bridging the two cultures. This not only provides a voice for the community; it hugely benefits the mainstream community in providing appropriate services.
- It is important to aim to break down assumptions and miscommunications of refugee communities. Trust is needed to ensure that families are supported when experiencing domestic violence, and where communities are seen as people who contribute to the whole rather than as 'takers', then their skills can be utilised fully.
- It would be good if Standing Together could consult women directly on these issues at a later date.



# Section Four

## Conclusions and Recommendations



### **I. General strengths of the consultation process, and learning for the future**

#### **I.1 I would recommend that any such process never be carried out by a sole agency.**

The primary strength to this project was in my view the background work that Standing Together had done to build a team of partner agencies in Hammersmith and Fulham before commencing this consultation, which came out of the long history of working together as part of the Hammersmith and Fulham Domestic Violence Forum. The trust already in place between these agencies and local women survivors mean that women were ready to come forward and participate.

#### **I.2 The women survivors hugely appreciated being consulted and valued for their thinking.**

There was some concern for agencies and facilitators that we should not ‘use’ the women or put them under unreasonable emotional stress during this consultation. The women told us they felt empowered by being consulted and would be pleased to provide further guidance in the future.

#### **I.3 Providing two facilitators — one white and one black — was a strength of the project. It was also important that time was given to clarifying their different roles.**

With the two of us working together we could hold the process of consultation in place as well as assist women to handle emotions as they expressed their views in response to the questions asked. We also both come from different cultural backgrounds, which reflected some of the diversity of the women in the group. This diversity, along with the fact that Bhupinder presently works with survivors whilst I largely co-ordinate inter-agency domestic violence work, appeared to provide more ‘safety’ for the women to talk about differing experiences. This included their concerns about racism in one agency, what it was like to experience domestic violence as an immigrant in this country, and how important it is for agencies not to make assumptions about their needs based on background or culture. I would therefore recommend that similar consultations with women survivors include two facilitators, ideally one white and one black.

#### **I.4 Creating an inclusive way of consulting women survivors as well as meeting their practical needs were important. This ensured greater diversity of women participating, and did not pressurise the women to fit into our ‘schedule’.**

As the women expressed differing needs about what time of day to have the sessions, we decided to hold both morning and evening sessions in order to engage as many women in the process as possible. Women appreciated this inclusive approach, and the availability of both travel costs and childcare facilities. Having access to an interpreter was also important, as was the availability of a safe and accessible venue.

**1.5 Providing copies of each session report to the women was important. It ensured they had an opportunity to correct any misrepresentations.**

The women were informed that they would receive each session report at the beginning of the project. It ensured that they could see how the information they gave us was being used, and reflected back to them the reality of their contributions.

**1.6 Making time for the Standing Together staff to come and thank the women and directly hear their feedback on the consultation made the process less isolated.**

Standing Together staff were pleased to thank the women directly and feed back how they had been using the reports written after each session. I would recommend that all such consultation projects include this direct contact. It makes the results more personal.

**1.7 It is important to inform women well in advance about any changes to the consultation process.**

Our failure to give the women a clear message that we would like to add an additional session to the original three they had anticipated probably did impact on the lower numbers who attended it. I would certainly recommend taking a little more time to check in with one-another as consultant/facilitator and project co-ordinator as the process develops, to check what messages women may be receiving about the planning and stages of the process.

**1.8 Women are the experts. We need to listen to how they think services should make improvements.**

The women stated clearly to agencies how the services need improving in order to ensure the safety of greater numbers of women and children experiencing domestic violence in the U.K. If we listen well, a great deal of agencies' time and money can be saved by responding directly to their recommendations.

**1.9 It was important that the agencies were well prepared to receive the feedback from the women.**

Standing Together had built good relationships with the agencies we consulted the women about. This meant that the information provided by the women was not left in a void. It was used immediately to raise awareness, provide guidance for policy and practice changes and train front line workers in four key agencies which women use when experiencing domestic violence.

**1.10 Women are clear about how agencies need to respond when they ask for help.**

Women may express a range of responses to their different experiences and require differing resources when experiencing domestic violence. However there are several key factors, which will greatly increase the level of service given:

- Listen to what women are saying, and believe them.
- Provide women with information that they can use to protect themselves and their children.
- If a service is not responding appropriately, how can it be changed?

- Take action to protect women when they are under threat from their violent partners, e.g. bring in an advocate, use the legal process on their behalf. In doing so, listen to their feelings and respect their needs in order that they are not disempowered.
- Remember that women need support after they are away from the violent relationship. It takes time to adjust to the changes in their lives and to support their children (if they have them). This support can make all the difference in how their life progresses after they are free of the violence.

## **2. Recommendations to the four agencies**

The details of these recommendations are included in the reports on each service consultation under 'Findings' (see Section 3). To summarise, the following are some key elements relating to each agency.

### **2.1 The Courts**

- Women should be able to visit a court to see what happens and be informed about the court process before attending as a witness.
- Women should be well supported in order to attend court as a witness.
- The male defendant should not be able to see them/make eye contact with them, e.g. they should be able to give evidence behind a screen or by video link.
- The male defendant should not be able to cross-examine them himself.
- Sentences should reflect the seriousness of the crime, as with 'non-domestic' crimes.

### **2.2 The Police**

- Women think all police officers should be trained about domestic violence.
- Women call the police when they are in danger, and they need a fast response.
- Women want to be believed, not judged or comments made by the police such as "what did you do?"
- Women want to be asked what happened away from the man when the police arrive.
- Any questioning of neighbours or their children should be checked with the woman first. Children need to be asked very thoughtfully.
- Having some support in the next couple of days is crucial in helping them make decisions.
- The police need to assist women to find these other resources. The support needed might be with physical changes, or it might be with emotional changes.
- Stay in touch sufficiently for her to take up other agencies support and resources.
- Women support the police taking the decision to prosecute out of her hands, as long as appropriate support to them is also provided.

### **2.3 Solicitors**

It does appear that some local support agencies are either not clear themselves about how women can access a solicitor and what the present situation is regarding Legal Aid, or they are not checking back what women have heard from the information they have been given. This can lead to a woman being confused and possibly not really understanding the potential benefits for herself in using a solicitor.

Women themselves think that they should have access to both the civil (for immediate protection) and criminal (for long-term solutions such as men attending prevention programmes) processes.

- The women consulted strongly support the aim of presenting guidelines for good practice to local solicitors.
- They emphasise that understanding the nature of domestic violence is crucial, which will in turn impact on both the attitudes and the actions of the solicitors themselves.
- Women want to check that their statements are correct before going to court.
- Women want to fully use the service and be in charge of each step as it takes place. Solicitors need to keep them well informed for this purpose.
- Women would appreciate being told about local support services, which should in turn benefit the solicitor in taking forward their case.

#### **2.4 Health Services**

- Women very much support the existing policy and protocol established in these two Walk-in Centres and one Accident and Emergency.
- They also think that a more proactive approach should be made to bring in an advocate if women disclose that they are experiencing domestic violence. This would reach women when they are able to ask for help and hear about support that they could receive, if they chose to.
- Women would like to see all health professionals using the opportunity they have when women use their services to check in regularly about whether they may be experiencing any type of domestic violence.

#### **2.5 Responding to Black and Ethnic Minority Women**

- Statutory services need open dialogue with black/ethnic minority community groups and voluntary organisations: poor decisions can be made without this partnership approach.
- Funding black/ethnic minority/refugee communities to employ women workers assists with bridging the two cultures, and will hugely benefit the mainstream community in providing appropriate services when women are experiencing domestic violence.
- Build working links with community groups — their skills can then be utilised fully, e.g. to support black/ethnic minority women with child contact arrangements.



# Appendix A

## Standing Together Protocol for this Consultation with Survivors

### 1. Purpose of the consultation

- To take a step towards ‘accountability to survivors’, a cornerstone of Standing Together.
- 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** the 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 is to be made by agencies using a standard letter drafted by Standing Together. This letter will be sent out on each agency’s own letter headed 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 given. They will be asked to get in touch direct with Standing Together if they are willing to be involved and to say how they can be contacted. Each individual contacted will be provided with a stamped, self-addressed envelope in order to do this.

Standing Together will hold individual details (name, address, phone, e-mail) in their office and will not share them with any other agency and will only use them for this consultation. Standing Together will only contact women in the way they have described as safe for them.

Dates of meetings and details of any outside speakers (e.g. it may be that police would like to send a speaker to describe present practice and hear feedback) will be sent in advance. Venues will not be included on this notice. Women will either be asked to ring the Standing Together office for venue details or Standing Together will contact them. Women will be offered the chance to give their views by phone or post if they cannot/do not want to attend a meeting.

### 4. Format of consultation

Standing Together feels it would be more practical to hold meetings but will aim also to offer women who volunteer a choice of written or telephone consultation. Standing Together is hoping for quarterly meetings, at which we will present information about Standing Together and recent progress and current plans, and then invite survivors to comment. In the meetings Standing Together is envisaging mainly “conversational” consultation, i.e. no requirement for reading or writing.

*NB. The meetings are not supposed 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 have details of local agencies that can provide support; and will refer women as appropriate. Standing Together will provide facilitators at each meeting, so there will be someone available to offer individual support if needed during the meeting.

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, and Standing Together will be careful at the meeting to make sure they stick to this.

## **5. Access to consultation**

Standing Together want to respond to the specific needs of women who are willing to be consulted, and will attempt to find out what these are in our initial contact with those who respond. Standing Together will book an accessible venue. Standing Together can pay travel, childcare, and interpreter’s costs. Standing Together intends to provide a free crèche at the meeting venue for survivors.

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

## **6. Recording of consultation**

Standing Together needs to record the content of the consultations but not the names of the survivors. For note taking Standing Together will use initials. For passing on the record of the consultation Standing Together will not use any initials or names at all.

# Appendix B

## Letter inviting women survivors to participate in the consultation

Dear .....

(Agency woman knows) has links with a project in Hammersmith and Fulham called 'Standing Together against Domestic Violence'. It aims to make women and children safer by improving the way police and the courts respond to domestic violence. It also includes the offer of individual support from an independent women's organisation called ADVANCE for every woman who calls the police about domestic violence (please see the enclosed information about Standing Together).

Standing Together wants to talk to women who have experienced domestic violence about how they think the system could be improved, and what they think of what has been done so far. This consultation is a chance for you to be involved in making changes that will help other women going through domestic violence.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be involved. If you are, the details you fill in on this letter will be given to the Standing Together office (and not to anyone else). If you would like to come to these meetings Standing Together will write to you, or if you would like, Vicky Grosser (the consultant) will phone to speak with you. We don't expect the meetings to have large numbers of women, and we would be very pleased if you can join us.

We can pay childcare and travel costs for the meeting.

If you choose to assist us, then the information you give to Standing Together will be kept strictly confidential.

We have enclosed a stamped addressed envelope for your reply, and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

.....

## **Note**

The following appendices are the programme plans for each of the four consultation sessions with women survivors. They are included as a guide for others considering similar consultation processes in the future. Please credit both myself, Vicky Grosser and Standing Together when using them.

# Appendix C

## Standing Together Stage I Survivors Consultation Meeting Plan

The Courts: July 6th and 10th 2001

These consultative meetings need to create relationships *between* the women, in order to make it 'their' space:

- a. This is more likely to lead to an on-going group in its own right
- b. such a group is more likely to feel able to speak up/take initiative and make concrete recommendations to Standing Together, which will have positive impacts on the work in the future.

### 1. Welcome and very brief recap

...on why this meeting is taking place. Stressing importance of survivors input in order to make real changes for women and children experiencing domestic violence in the future.

### 2. Introductions of women and facilitators

*Vicky*: worked in refuge, then counselling/support service for women, now domestic violence prevention project in a London borough. Believes in consulting survivors as part of long-term prevention.

*Bhupinder*: refuge for women 1<sup>st</sup> language not English, currently support to women experiencing domestic violence. New to consultancy and looking forward to it.

*Women*:

- Why are you pleased that you're here?
- One other thing you'd like others here to know about you.

### 3. This is about consultancy — not a 'therapy' or support group

Setting some 'ground rules' for working together:

*What is one thing you'd like to have in place so you can speak up here and say what you think? For example:*

- Confidentiality: what do we mean by this?
- Listening to one another/taking turns.
- Different views and experiences: impacted by age, culture, etc.
- Okay to disagree with one-another/have a different views.
- Having some fun!

## **Break and Refreshments**

### **4. Check it is okay to tape sessions? (All held at Standing Together and copy to Vicky)**

Clarify Vicky and Bhupinder's roles (process and support)

*Vicky:* I'm more about getting the consultancy done.

*Bhupinder:* Support the process, support women, and as local agency representative with Standing Together, assist in getting women's voices heard.

### **5. What is the aim of Standing Together, and how does it work at present?**

(Handouts and flipchart). More about the plan for this consultation.

### **6. This is about your comments and recommendations**

The police:

- What makes a woman experiencing domestic violence call the police?
- What would make you want to call on the police more?

Courts training for magistrates in September — (criminal and civil)

- If you used the courts, where you informed about what was/is happening? If so, who by?
- What makes the day in court go okay?
- What do you think should happen to the people who abused you?
- What could the courts do or how could men be treated in order for you (and your children) to be safe?

### **7. Ending**

- a. What did you get out of the session for yourself?
- b. Will you be joining us for the next stage, and can we contact you with dates by letter?
- c. Vouchers distributed

### **Note: we will need to keep considering the balance between:**

- a. Creating a group dynamic which will make it most likely that the group will continue beyond this consultation, and
- b. Achieving sufficient feedback/recommendations for Standing Together to take its work forward effectively.

# Appendix D

## Standing Together Stage 2 Survivors Consultation Meeting Plan

The Police: September 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2001

### 1. Welcome and very brief recap

...on why this meeting is taking place. Stressing importance of survivors input in order to make real changes for women and children experiencing domestic violence in the future. (This is particularly for the new women who will join us.)

### 2. Introductions of women and reminder of facilitator's role

*Vicky*: worked in refuge, then counselling/support service for women, now a domestic violence prevention project in London borough. Believes in consulting survivors as part of long-term prevention.

*Bhupinder*: refuge for women 1st language not English, currently support to women experiencing domestic violence. New to consultancy and looking forward to it.

Women:

- why are you pleased that you're here?
- one other thing you'd like others here to know about you.

### 3. This is about consultancy — not a 'therapy group'

- Reviewing the 'ground rules' for working together.
- Making additions to the ground rules.

### 4. This consultation is focusing on the role of the police

- Check okay to tape sessions?
- Clarify Vicky and Bhupinder's roles (process and support)

*Vicky*: I'm more about getting the consultancy done.

*Bhupinder*: Support the process, support women, and as local agency rep. with Standing Together, assist in getting women's voices heard.

### 5. Recap aim of Standing Together, and how it works at present

- Handouts and flipchart.

### 6. Review what the women in the first session raised

...about policing domestic violence. See copies of report on session 1.

**7. This is about your comments and recommendations**

*Policing 'at the scene':*

Use questions on attached sheet on the police, provided by Debbie.  
Ensure that women get time to all contribute.

Bhupinder: watch for women's emotional responses and boundaries.

**8. Ending**

- a. What did you get out of the session for yourself?
- b. Will you be joining us for the next stage?
- c. Vouchers distributed

# Appendix E

## Standing Together Stage 3 Survivors Consultation Meeting Plan

Solicitors: November 26<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 2001

### 1. Welcome, and brief recap on purpose of the consultation

This is particularly for the newer women to the groups.

### 2. Introductions of women, and reminder of facilitator's role

*Vicky:* process, *Bhupinder:* support.

*Facilitators:* why pleased to be here for Stage 3

*Women:* something going well in your life.

### 3. Reviewing the 'ground rules' for working together

- Making any additions to the ground rules.
- Feedback from the women on report of Stage 1.
- Give women copies of report on Policing (Stage 2).
- Bhupinder feed back about how police training is going.

### 4. This consultation is focusing on the role of solicitors

Recap criminal and civil Process.

### 5. This is about your comments and recommendations.

If you used a solicitor:

- When you used a solicitor, what was good/helpful about their response and work for you?
- What was not helpful, and why?
- Solicitors need to be 'instructed':
  - Did they give you clear options to choose from?
  - Did they give you information about tactics: e.g. about 'child contact'?
- Did the solicitor keep you informed about developments/how should they best do this?

Essence is about:

- Explaining clearly their role and the process to women, including Legal Aid, etc.
- Not leaving the woman feeling as though she is 'on trial'

- Moving the case forwards quickly
- Keeping the woman informed and in charge at each stage

**6. Thanks from Standing Together**

- Debbie will join the group to thank the women, and get feedback on the process.
- Ask women if they are interested in taking the group further, e.g. possible January session on health, followed by a 'focus group' if funding is successful.
- Vouchers to be distributed.

# Appendix F

## Standing Together Stage 4 Survivors Consultation Meeting Plan

Health 'Walk-in' Services

4<sup>th</sup> February 2002 (both groups: evening)

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

...as this is the first time the two groups will come together (evening and day).

*Women:* something going well in your life.

### 2. Reminder that this is an additional session, and the final one

### 3. Reviewing the 'ground rules' for working together

### 4. This consultation is focusing on the walk-in Health services: e.g. Accident and Emergency

- Okay to tape sessions? (transcripts held at Standing Together and copy to Vicky)
- Policy at Charing Cross Hospital Accident and Emergency

### 5. This is about your comments and recommendations

If you used Accident and Emergency or a Walk-in Centre:

- When you used Accident and Emergency, what was good/helpful about their response towards you?
- What was not helpful, or what concerns did you have, and why?
- What would you think if a health professional had asked you if you were experiencing domestic violence — as a part of asking all female patients (if you didn't have children with you, and you were alone)?
- Do you think it would be good for an advocate to automatically be called in to see any woman who says she is experiencing domestic violence (as in the US)?
- Is it okay for Standing Together to use this feedback on health right now? To feed back to health professionals, for fundraising purposes, to develop policy and practice, and include in final report.

### 6. Ending

Inform about next steps, and say goodbye to one another. Inform women about final report: that they will each receive a copy in the post.

## **7. Check**

...that the women would still be okay about being contacted for any consultation on services in Hammersmith and Fulham in the future.

- Vouchers to be distributed.