

Domestic Abuse- No Excuse

Annual Report

November 2021

Welcome

In November 2020, the Domestic Abuse Alliance published the Domestic Abuse- No Excuse Strategy, which was a joint venture between victims, survivors and workers to tackle domestic abuse over a 5-year period. Now, a year on, we want to share our progress.

This Annual Report has been written with the assistance of many people who have been affected by domestic abuse and the workers and organisation that have support them. We are grateful to everyone who has shared their stories and experiences. Each of you are helping- helping to improve services and helping by letting others know that they are not alone in living with, through or beyond their experiences.

We hope that this report gives you confidence that we are living up to the commitment made in the Domestic Abuse-No Excuse Strategy, confidence that we are improving our domestic abuse services, and confidence to reach out for help if you need it.

Our ambition is for Wirral to be a place where as few people as possible are affected by domestic abuse, but those who are can get help to end the abuse and go on to live the lives they want. We hope to turn our ambition into a reality by focusing on five priorities:

1. Be there when we are needed
2. Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma
3. Reduce opportunities for perpetrators to abuse
4. Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs
5. A better, kinder future for the next generation

We have used these priorities to structure this annual report and show our progress for each.

When we started this journey, we said we would spend the first two years improving your experiences of support services, making it easier to access support and making sure there is help for everyone who needs it. We said we

would do more to engage with men, older people, people with learning difficulties and disabilities, LGBTQ+, and women who are pregnant. We also said we would invest in new initiatives for survivors and perpetrators, and education for children and young people. We hope from the case studies, information, stories, reflections, and the poem included in this annual report that you will agree we are on the right track.

As you will see, the report is focused on the difference that people and workers are experiencing- the impact. Towards the end of the report there is a section on performance information, which shows what the data tells us about our progress.

You can share your views or give feedback by emailing wecantalkaboutit@wirral.gov.uk

Priority 1- Be there when we are needed

We said: We will work together to give you places to go and people to speak to who know what you are going through.

What we have done: We have opened The Lighthouse Centre, a support hub for victims, survivors, and children affected by domestic abuse. The centre, led by Involve Northwest, brings together a range of partners and services including the Paul Lavelle Foundation (supporting male victims), the Family Safety Unit, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and the We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse Team. Working alongside Ferries Families and Reach Out, the hub provides wrap around support, advice on debt, employment, housing and legal issues, as well as proving a community shop and café area.

If you are worried about or affected by domestic abuse, or have been in the past, we want this to be a place you can come to talk, be heard, and get the support you need from workers and from other people who have had similar experiences.

The difference this is making:

“My children when I mentioned this to them panicked, thinking they were going to be questioned etc, by the end of my visit I couldn't get them out of the place. They are excited to visit again and were so relaxed whilst there, it was lovely to see and brought me confidence if they ever struggle there is other places if they feel they can't talk to me. I felt right at home, and safe. The staff were all amazing, friendly and honest. This is such a good service and feel encouraged I too have somewhere to go when I am struggling or simply to go visit.”

“I knew if I came here, I would feel much better. I enjoy the laughs and the cries.....the happiness we share and the sadness we support each other with. It is a safe place to come.”

“I am not your normal client you will find in a domestic abuse centre.....why is that you may ask? Well, I work in a similar field and because I work, many services are not available to me. I am also aware many people might not think

someone like me would need support and help with domestic abuse, but let me tell you this.....no one is exempted from domestic abuse, it knows no bounds. I came to the Lighthouse as it was truly independent, I felt safe, not judged and accepted and listened to. They recognise my trigger trauma and helped me through it not questioning me or making me feel weak. The membership to the My Time in the evening is considered and has allowed me and others who would not normally be able to access this type of support to do so safely and without it affecting our day jobs. It has done so much for my wellbeing and reduced my isolation and I look forward every week to the group as it is the one thing for me! Please note we are in an era of where women work and so should have more opportunities like this to access services outside of the normal 9-5."

"I come to the Lighthouse as I enjoy the mix of women with like minds and similar experiences. I do not feel judged, and I am able to relax here. It is an opportunity to relax in a friendly environment and to share stories and interests."

"I was referred to the Lighthouse Centre by my GP after I told them about the domestic abuse I was experiencing. I was called and [support worker] arranged a time [they] would be available to meet and greet me. I was very impressed; it was such a welcoming environment. I attend the evening *My Time* where we laugh, and occasional cry, lots of support and fun. I also attended the 4-week Lotus programme which was very good and gave me the opportunity to safely reflect and gain new understandings about my experience."

"I had not heard of the Lighthouse Centre before but [child] had been referred to their Leapfrog course. I rang up to check the progress of the referral and spoke to [support worker] who sensed my distress and informed me of their daily drop-in service and asked me if I would like to come into the centre in person. It felt like a huge task. Going somewhere I had never been before. Being in a centre for survivors of domestic abuse was not for me. It was not

something I thought would help but [support worker] seemed lovely, and my family offered to bring me, so what did I have to lose? So, on July 19th I first set foot in The Lighthouse Centre. All my original thoughts and feelings evaporated. I felt tiny, like a little dormouse not knowing what to do and where to go. My family support worker took me there on the Monday and to my own surprise I went there every day that week. And every day the next week...I started meeting all the staff who worked at The Lighthouse. Feeling for the first time in my life I had a safe space to share things I had been through without judgement or fear. The ease with which I found myself talking to [support workers]. I started talking about past trauma that I had never allowed myself to think of, let alone speak of. For so long I had tried to pretend nothing happened to be able to live but [they] gave me the permission I needed to be able to reveal my past without it coming back to hurt me. Coming to the centre regularly and having this safe space has saved my life. Seeing other women who use the service and drawing off each others experience is so valuable to me. There is a lady who does reiki and crystal healing sessions, a hairdresser and free legal advice. They can provide families with clothes and food and run courses like Leapfrog and Lotus programme which are invaluable sources for me because I am at a stage in my life where I have to relearn to be me."

Priority 1- Be there when we are needed

We said: We will look harder and listen closer to those people who may be at an increased risk of abuse but are unable to speak out, including older people who may be abused by adult children or their caregivers.

What we have done: Across the Domestic Abuse Alliance partnership we have increased and extended our Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) capacity, introducing IDVAs with specialisms for young people, older people, and male victims and survivors.

No matter who you are, your age, where you live, how much money you have, how large or small you think your problems are, we want you to know that there will be someone to listen and someone to help. You may need help understanding what is happening, you may need a translator, or not understand what processes like Clare's Law mean but those are hurdles our Domestic Abuse Alliance can help you overcome.

The difference this is making:

Henry is a 74-year-old male who has worked hard all his life having a successful career which he talks very proudly of and has many fond memories. Henry was married for a long time having three children with his wife, one of which is David, his son, and the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour towards Henry.

When David was released from prison he went, once again, to live with Henry. David struggles with alcoholism. Henry advised that he has helped David out time and time again, setting up new flats for him, furnishing them, giving him money for tools and cars as he really wants to see him doing well. Henry had arranged to meet David at the park after work, however when he got there, he noticed that David had been drinking and had alcohol in a carrier bag. Henry asked him why he had been drinking when he was supposed to be staying clean for his new job. This incensed David, he started arguing with Henry and then assaulted him, which was witnessed by a member of the public, who

contacted the police. This was not the first time Henry was assaulted by David, and a pattern of abuse and control emerged.

Henry was referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) where local agencies come together to co-ordinate support for victims of domestic abuse, and he was allocated an Independent Domestic Abuse Adviser (IDVA). When the IDVA talked with Henry they were able to identify coercive and controlling behaviours. David had a long history of domestic abuse against intimate partners as well as towards his father. Henry initially felt it may have been something he did wrong to cause David to behave this way. The IDVA and Henry talked a lot about his relationships with his children, helping Henry to see he was a loving father who had always shown his children affection and care. Although Henry was able to see this, being a proud man, he struggled to accept he was a victim of domestic abuse. The IDVA continued to talk with Henry on a regular basis, undertaking safety planning, based on what Henry could realistically manage and with respect to his wishes. Henry believes as a father he should not turn his back on his child, and the IDVA worked with him to find ways to do this whilst keeping Henry safe from harm.

As trust in the relationship between Henry and his IDVA grew, Henry shared his experiences and became more aware of the coercive and controlling methods used by his son. Eventually, he made the decision to stop David going to his home. The IDVA arranged for better security measures to be fitted, including installing a CCTV camera, which made Henry feel safer and acted as a deterrent for David. As well as giving him increased safety, Henry has enjoyed watching the foxes that have been caught on camera.

Henry continues to meet up with David, but this is always in a public place, as he decided in his safety plan. He no longer gives David money but will buy him a bus pass, tobacco or some food when he sees him. This helps Henry to feel that he is still being a good parent, something that has always been important to him. Henry has been honest with David, making sure he knows

that people are supporting him and that he will report any incidents, threats or aggressive behaviour.

It has been important to Henry to know that David is being supported too. The IDVA works closely with his probation officer, and David has been given a place on a perpetrator programme which will challenge his behaviour and support him to make positive changes.

The emotional impact on Henry and the rest of the family has been significant, but with safety measures in place, people to talk to, and a network of support, Henry is able to be a father to all of his children, have choices, be respected and be safe.

IDVA Reflections:

“Working with Henry and other similar cases in which the victim is an older person, and the perpetrator is their grown-up child, I have found that it takes much more time and can be very complex. Firstly, it is their child, and they have unconditional love for them, and the grown-up child can often be their carer or main support. In my experience, it is not unusual for the grown-up child to have their own complex needs, such as drugs, alcohol or mental health issues and will often end up living at the victims address as they are unable to maintain their own tenancy. Secondly, the elder victims can be very proud and find it much more difficult to discuss personal issues, talk about their relationships and are often very private people who will try to manage their own situation rather than feel like they are “bothering anyone” or “causing a fuss” . We always try to work at a pace which they are comfortable with and give them choices, respect and support.”

Priority 1- Be there when we are needed

We said: We will work together to provide help no matter who you are or what your circumstances might be, whether this is the first time it has happened or the twentieth, whether it happened today or months ago, whether you want to speak with someone face-to-face or anonymously.

What we have done: We are very privileged in Wirral to have a range of excellent third sector organisations in our Domestic Abuse Alliance. These organisations are at the heart of communities, with welcoming centres, experienced and caring staff, and they are committed to working as a partnership for all people across the borough. During the Covid-19 pandemic they have played an important role, continuing to be there when needed to provide support, advice, services, and a listening ear. It was noted during the pandemic that there was an increase in people wanting support for what we call *historic* domestic abuse- that is abuse which happened sometime in the past but was still impacting on wellbeing and mental health. Our local organisations went above and beyond to continue to deliver great services. A snapshot of activity, taken in spring 2021, showed that our community organisations were providing the following:

- 702 adults engaged in recovery services
- 317 children engaged in recovery services
- 112 trained volunteers/mentors for domestic abuse
- 516 people benefitting from peer support

As individuals we all have preferences about how we would like to be supported. Some people like groups, or structured programmes, other prefer something more informal like coffee and conversation, some like to meet with people who have been through similar experiences. It is okay to have a preference and our community partners will be able to find the right support for you.

The difference this is making:

Throughout the pandemic, support for domestic abuse has not stopped. Often new methods of delivery have needed to be found but our Domestic Abuse Alliance has found ways of being there when they were needed.

As part of their Emergency Delivery Model, Tomorrow's Women Wirral continued to provide a service for women despite having to close their community centre to the public. They adapted support to be mainly virtual, offering telephone *Welfare Calls* to continue contact with women, reaching up to 500 calls per week for emotional and practical advice. In addition, they continued vital interventions, delivering 1:1 courses via telephone including their domestic abuse programme *Finding Me* which helps women understand what abuse is, how to recognise warning signs and importantly how to move forward with their lives.

Tomorrow's Women knew that whilst their virtual support was enough for some women, others, due to level of risk and crisis, needed more. They provided a Covid-secure, physically and emotionally safe space for women to attend prearranged 1:1s or crisis visits should they need risk assessment, safety planning or safe exit plans. Tomorrow's Women remained fully staffed throughout the pandemic with relevant social distancing and other safety measures in place to continue to provide a crisis centre for women.

Thinking creatively about how they could continue to have contact with women during lockdown, Tomorrow's Women started their *Femme 2 You* project, funded by Comic Relief. By delivering sanitary products to women, they were able to combat period-poverty and have contact with people who may need their support. This helped women in a number of ways, but most importantly, showed them that they had not been forgotten about because of the pandemic.

Tomorrow's Women also work with women who have been both victim and perpetrator of domestic abuse and may have been involved with Criminal Justice Services, using their courses, *Changing Me* and *Red to Pink*. A short case study demonstrates the impact of their work:

Due to violence at home, Fiona had had her children removed from her care. Following a further incident, she received a community sentence and began working with Tomorrow's Women and probation services. Fiona engaged with courses and counselling, which helped to improve her mental health, increase her confidence, and gave her the skills to work on improving her family relationships. For Fiona Tomorrow's Women provided a safe place, support and the services she needed. She went on to engage in their well-being course and make use of the wider support network they offer. Fiona has had her children returned to her care, has a new baby in the family, and continues to be supported by this valued community organisation.

Priority 2- Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma

We said: We will involve those of you who wish to share your experience in the training of workers and wherever possible, the delivery of services.

What we have done: We secured funding from What Works for Children's Social Care to pilot a new approach to delivering child protection processes. This includes employing Domestic Abuse Practice Professionals to guide and advise social workers and employing Domestic Abuse Family Advocates to work with parents and children to help them better understand and engage with statutory child protection processes. The pilot, We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse, will work with up to 216 children/families to help them engage fully in the process, to be understood and appropriately supported.

The difference this is making:

Thomas was a baby when he first became known to social workers, throughout his young life he had been a victim of domestic abuse due to the controlling and violent behaviour of his father, Peter. Thomas had only experienced his mother, Linda, in the capacity that she too was a victim of domestic abuse. The abuse Linda suffered meant that she could not relax, be herself, or enjoy life as a new mum.

A Social Worker became involved with the family following an incident that required police involvement. Linda felt devastated about being involved with social care and worried what it would lead to. When the social care assessment started, Linda told her Social Worker that the relationship with Peter had ended, that he was no longer a risk to her or Thomas but there was evidence that they were still in regular contact. The Social Worker, concerned about the level of risk to Thomas, convened an Initial Child Protection Case Conference.

Before the conference the Social Worker took part in a reflective session with a Domestic Abuse Practice Professional who helped them to understand that it is a normal trauma response for a victim of domestic abuse to be scared that social care will remove their children and therefore not unusual that they may find it hard to engage or will want to try to manage the behaviour of the

perpetrator on their own. The Domestic Abuse Practice Professional also helped the Social Worker to consider the behaviour of the perpetrator, as Peter appeared to be engaging well with professionals, communicating with confidence, presenting himself as an engaging parent and describing Linda as someone who needed help.

The Initial Child Protection Case Conference went ahead, and Thomas became subject to a Child Protection Plan. At the conference Linda agreed to have support from a Domestic Abuse Family Advocate, someone employed to help families understand and engage with social care processes. Linda was quickly able to form a relationship with the advocate who helped to explain what was happening, listen to her and helping her to engage.

Possibly feeling that Linda was moving away from him, Peter lured her, using emotional manipulation, to a location where he assaulted her. Immediately after the incident Linda called her Domestic Abuse Family Advocate, told her everything and asked for help. The Domestic Abuse Family Advocate supported Linda to report the incident to the police. The case was then referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference where an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser was allocated for safety planning, target hardening and a non-molestation order to be put in place.

With the Social Worker accessing advice on domestic abuse from the Practice Professional, and Linda being supported by the Family Advocate, they were able to help Linda understand and engage with the Child Protection Plan without feeling re-victimised by the statutory process. Linda better understood the risks and actively worked with professionals, completing direct work with her Social Worker on post-separation risk, and regularly updating her safety plan. Supported by her Domestic Abuse Family Advocate, Linda joined the Gateway programme. As Linda accepted support her confidence grew and she started rebuilding her network of friends who had been alienated by Peter, she was even able to go back to work. On top of that, Linda was able to enjoy being a mum to Thomas. At the first Child Protection Review, it was agreed by the multi-agency panel to step the case down from Child Protection to Child in Need status, thereby offering Linda and Thomas

continued support whilst they recover. Linda continues to benefit from supportive relationships and Thomas is thriving in her care.

Reflection from the We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse Team:

“This case highlights the value of having a domestic abuse hub where workers can come together to work with the family to keep them safe. It also showed how importance the role the Domestic Abuse Family Advocate has in building a relationship with the parents, so that when they are ready, they are able to reach out for support and be there when needed, without judgement or fear.”

Priority 2- Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma

We said: We will work together to ensure that victims have the choice to stay at home or move, and where they wish to stay at home they are supported to do so safely.

What we have done: Improved our multi-agency approach by giving people affected by domestic abuse choice and ensuring they benefit from partnership working that is consistent and co-ordinated well. We are recognising that whilst moving a family to a new area may feel safer for professionals, it can further traumatise victims who then lose their support network. Rather than move victims and their families, we have been working with them and partner agencies to find safe ways to support them.

Having a home where you feel safe is a basic need for all of us. Being the victim of domestic abuse should not mean that you always have to give up your home and start again somewhere else. We will work with you to find the solution that suits you best and keeps you safe.

The difference this is making:

Michelle and Paul had been together for a number of years and had baby Isaac. Domestic abuse had been a feature throughout the relationship however Michelle had never pursued prosecution as she was fearful of the consequences from Paul. The case was referred to Children's Social Care following an incident when Michelle suffered significant injuries.

During the social care process Michelle made links with family who live outside of the borough, and she made the decision for her and her child to move closer to them. They went to stay for a short period but once there felt that this was not the right decision. Michelle saw Wirral as her home, where she had much more support from friends. She worried that Isaac would lose his connection to the area he was born. Michelle made the decision to stay in Wirral with Isaac. Children's Social Care and other professionals were apprehensive of the decision, they felt that it may place both Michelle and Isaac at risk from Paul. Professionals questioned her reasoning and if she was failing to protect her son by putting her own needs first.

The We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse team completed reflective practice session with the Social Worker. Working together they were able to identify the positives of Michelle and Isaac being able to stay in Wirral, their being supported by existing networks and to mitigate against any potential risk posed by Paul. The Social Worker was helped to reflect on the impact of domestic abuse on Isaac and how the multi-agency partnership could best support Michelle, whilst holding Paul accountable and disrupting his abusive behaviour.

The We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse team supported the Social Worker to update the safety plan for Michelle and Isaac as part of the Child in Need process. Together they worked with Michelle, her support networks of the neighbours and introduced code words to ensure that should Michelle and Isaac be at imminent risk they could contact emergency services. An application was successfully made to Merseyside Police to ensure a TAU (treat as urgent) marker was placed on the address. Safety planning together highlighted that the front door to the home was not secure, Michelle had been wedging a pram against it for safety. An application for target hardening was made to the Early Intervention Team. Within 24 hours additional locks were placed on the front door and windows of the property and within 48 hours CCTV and security lights were also fitted. This provided Michelle and Isaac with reassurance and immediate safety.

Risk is a dynamic factor in any domestic abuse case. The reflective sessions between the We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse team and Children's Social Care provided space to consider the short and long-term impact of moving out of area for Michelle and Isaac, and to weigh this against the possibility of safely managing risk through a robust partnership plan.

Michelle and Isaac continue to be supported by our multi-agency partnership in Wirral, surrounded by their friends and services who know them well and can help them to move forward with confidence.

Priority 2- Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma

We said: We will provide specialist advice/advocacy and target hardening measures, such as new locks, to victims who believe it will help to make them safer.

What we have done: We removed the high-risk threshold for target hardening and in the past year have provided target hardening to 143 homes, which is 111 more than in the previous year.

We know from listening to survivors of domestic abuse that when the perpetrator is an ex-partner they often know your home environment very well- knowing who may have a spare key, or a window in your home that does not close properly, or they know your routine and when you will be in or out. There are simple things we can do to help you improve your home security and we will take your fears seriously.

The difference this is making:

Family A were referred to the Gateway programme, for people who have survived domestic abuse, and the 5-year-old child had been referred to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) because of the impact the domestic abuse had had upon him. He would not sleep in his own room or play in the garden due to fear of the perpetrator. It was not just the child who had worries, the wider family were concerned that even though the relationship was over, and the perpetrator had moved out, that at any time they may return to the property. Target hardening was provided to the family as part of the support plan. Following the installation, the parent commented:

“We had two cameras and two spotlights put in yesterday and me and the kids had the best sleep ever last night and also [5-year-old child] is playing nice by himself in the front garden at the moment. Thank you so much.”

Family B were referred to the Early Intervention Team for support following a domestic abuse incident which took place after the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator had ended. The victim was a female parent who was subject to ongoing threats and harassment, she feared for her own safety

and that of her young child, who the perpetrator had threatened to abduct. A risk assessment indicated that a referral for an emergency house move was required. In the meantime, target hardening was completed to the property where the family lived, including fitting of CCTV. Filming from the CCTV provided evidence that supported a Non-Molestation Order and evidence of harassment to the Family Court after the perpetrator applied for contact with the child. When the family were rehoused so too was their target hardening equipment, the Early Intervention Team arranged for it to be moved on the same day as the family. Now that they have settled in their new home and feel safe, the family have been able to engage in therapeutic support to assist their long-term recovery and are being supported through the legal processes, which are ongoing. The parent states that this support "saved my life. I had hit rock bottom."

Family C had recently moved to Wirral from another local authority to escape domestic abuse. Their case transferred from the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in their previous local authority to the Wirral Family Safety Unit. A support plan was put in place with the Early Intervention Team and Early Childhood Services, as the family included a 2-year-old child. Both parent and child were looking to make a fresh start, but mum was unnerved when she discovered from a support worker that the perpetrator had been in contact with the Early Childhood Services, trying to establish if they were working with them. The safety plan for the family was reviewed immediately. Mum was in fear and felt the only way the perpetrator could have found out where she was living was through tracking her mobile phone. The phone was replaced and a safe way of communicating with support services established. Security measures were applied to their home. Both mum and child had formed a new support network and desperately did not want to move again, with target hardening in place they did not have to. Mum said, being able to check outside her property before she leaves has made a huge difference to her stress levels. She is also able to check if anyone has been there while she is in work and moving on positively with her life.

Priority 3- Reduce opportunities for perpetrators to abuse

We said: We will improve the lives of victims, and their children if they have them, by introducing an evidence-based programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse, available to anyone who wants help to stop abusing their partner (current or ex).

What we have done: We have introduced a new, evidence-based programme called Drive, which works with high-harm, high-risk and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent their abusive behaviour and protect victims. By October 2021, Drive was working with 51 perpetrators, who had negatively impacted the lives of 56 victims and 108 children and young people.

If you are someone who is harming a family member or partner (current or ex) through violence, abuse or control, you need to stop. There are people who can help you to change, and now we have local programmes that can support you to do that.

The difference this is making:

The Drive programme is in its early phase and has not yet been in operation long enough to fully understand the impact it may have but early signs are promising. When the Domestic Abuse- No Excuse strategy was co-produced, many survivors did not think that perpetrators would engage meaningfully in a behaviour-change programme. Most survivors had experiences of perpetrators doing 'enough to get services off their back.' However, the Drive team are already experiencing a different, more productive working relationship with service users beginning to happen.

Case study example, in which the service user will be referred to as SU:

Since beginning the Drive programme, SU has engaged in every appointment and has built a good professional relationship with their case manager. SU has engaged in reflective discussions about their childhood experiences, the impact of the death of their mother, the negative effects that alcohol and substance misuse are having on their behaviour and mental state. Facing up to their jealousy, fear of rejection, and need to control others.

Using a timeline, SU and their case manager have plotted out incidents and what was happening that led to SU behaving violently. This has helped SU to better understand triggers, the choices they had, how they acted, the implications of their behaviour and to consider the alternatives they had.

SU has committed to accessing support from their GP, working with Wirral Ways to Recovery treatment services, and wants to return to employment. SU will continue to work with the Drive team over the next year. It is hoped that the meaningful engagement shown so far will lead to long-lasting change.

Priority 3- Reduce opportunities for perpetrators to abuse

We said: We will help you to know your rights and access support as described in The Victim's Code, helping you get Peer Support to help you through legal processes, and use schemes like Clare's Law.

What we have done: We have delivered training to professionals on both The Victim's Code and Clare's Law, promoting awareness and how to encourage victims of domestic abuse to use these processes to help them understand their situation and relationships.

We understand that sometimes it feels easier not to know, but it is so important that you do, sometimes your safety really depends on it. We will be there to help you understand what it means and support you to take any next steps.

The difference this is making:

Abigail was referred to the Pre-Birth and Infant Team with partner Azi by their Social Worker when Abigail was pregnant. Abigail and Azi wanted to be assessed together, they presented as a united couple at first and both willing to engage in any support that was being offered.

Abigail did not recognise the warning signs in her relationship at first, she felt she knew Azi and believed that he had been honest with her about his previous convictions. Abigail refused a Clare's Law enquiry and defended Azi on numerous occasions, minimising incidents that happened, and excusing his behaviour towards her. He minimised them too and was very credible in his presentation. Abigail was extremely reliant on support from Azi and his family. Relationships with her family and friends had broken down, she had low self-esteem and was dependant on Azi financially. When baby Sonny arrived he and Abigail moved into a mother and baby placement while assessment continued. During this time, Abigail was developing a trusted relationship with her Infant & Family Worker, and she was learning about domestic abuse through the Gateway programme.

With an improving understanding of domestic abuse and a supportive worker, Abigail agreed to a Clare's Law disclosure. This was a turning point for Abigail,

getting the factual evidence helped her to see how she had been manipulated by Azi. She decided to end the relationship with Azi. After this she began sharing a lot more information about the abuse she had experienced. His attempts to control, intimidate and undermine Abigail escalated after she ended the relationship. He actively sought to make allegations against her and discredit her as a parent. Safety planning and supportive measure were swiftly put in place to keep both mum and baby safe and in control of their situation.

Azi is having supervised contact with Sonny whilst court proceedings continue. Abigail continues to be supported and to gain strength and confidence in herself as a woman and as a mother.

“Living independently has given me the confidence I need going forward with Sonny.”

Priority 4- Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs

We said: We will invest more in peer support and peer mentoring for all of you- victims, survivors, perpetrators, children and young people, friends and family.

What we have done: Across the Domestic Abuse Alliance we have increased capacity for peer support and peer mentoring. All community organisations offer peer support in a variety of formats and public services have been learning from them, not only linking people up with community groups but initiating opportunities for greater peer support within their own services. A data snapshot showed that in community organisations 112 people were trained as peer mentors and 516 people were benefiting from peer support.

People affected by domestic abuse have told us that they often feel ashamed or embarrassed about their experiences but when they meet other people, who have similar experiences, it makes a big difference to their recovery. If we can talk about it, we can start to make a change.

The difference this is making:

"This isn't just an organisation to me now. It's become a band of people that really have my back. They help me see that I will come through this. Throughout your life, people touch your heart, and maybe when you are at your lowest you feel that touch more, but I will never forget what the Paul Lavelle Foundation has done / is doing for me. If you're reading this and considering contacting them, do not hesitate. Heartfelt thanks to all those involved."

To date, Journey Men have 382 men have registered with them and taken part in their Walk & Talks, Walking Football at Tranmere Rovers FC, drop-ins at Prenton Rugby Club, sea-fishing trips, crewed narrowboat trips, photography and gardening clubs and joined in peer-to-peer befriending chats both online and in person. Supporting both men and their families, Journey Men are aware that almost 50% of the men who come to them do so when they are having suicidal thoughts or actively self-harming. Using peer support alongside their

therapeutic programmes, Journey Men aim to remove the stigma of men asking for help, talking about their feelings, mental health, and wellbeing.

Got the Tee Shirt, a peer-mentoring programme co-ordinated by Involve Northwest supported 136 people throughout the pandemic, and where face-to-face support was not possible they used calls and text messages to keep in touch.

“I have needed support like this for years, thank you so much for coming into my life” .

Priority 4- Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs

We said: We will work with our partners to provide you with tailored opportunities for lifelong learning and employment.

What we have done: We created jobs within our We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse service, to give people with lived experience of domestic abuse and/or child protection processes a key role in helping us to improve our support offer.

The difference this is making:

My name is Donna and I am a Domestic Abuse Family Advocate, it is difficult to put it into words what this job means to me, for you to understand it is important to know where I came from....

My whole life was chaos from childhood right until the age of 49, without too much detail I had a number of "labels" pinned to me, physical abuse survivor, addict, domestic abuse victim. My life was a world in which chaos thrived and despite being a mother to my beautiful children the pain and the trauma always won. I did not have a good relationship with my children, they were in foster care and I believed that this was all the fault of social workers, I hated them, I blamed them, they spent their whole childhood in the hands of a corporate parent whilst I continued within the world of chaos which I could not and would not take responsibility for any part I had to play. I had given up. I was waiting to die.

When I was 49, a friend, someone who had been in my world of chaos asked me to listen one day, just listen and to give him a chance. He took me to an NA meeting, narcotics anonymous, and from that day my life started to change. I spent a long time learning I was more than my labels, and for the first time I could see things more clearly. Now I am not pretending that this was an easy road for me to walk down. Its ten years later as I write this, and I am still learning about myself all of the time.

When I joined the We Can Talk about Domestic Abuse team I could not believe it, I could not imagine for one second when living in the chaos, that person becoming someone who would eventually help people through the social care processes. Being part of a team implementing change with others, being accepted for my past and being asked to use my experience to help others, it blows my mind still now. I lived my life being unacceptable and here I am being accepted and promoting change in others.

I thought I understood social care processes having lived through them with my own children, but when you go through it yourself you can only see it from your own side. This experience of being an advocate has awakened me to how the children are at risk and the impact on them, to understand it is not the social worker mainly making the decisions as they have their own processes to follow. I can also see the amount of help that is offered before it gets to the point children are removed.

This is the first time ever women who have suffered from domestic abuse have had advocacy in children social care, and for me to be that person who can sit with another woman and tell her it is okay I have been there, I understand, but this is what we need to do to keep you and your children safe, well I do not think people will grasp how much of a big thing that is to me, it is an honour.

But I have not just worked with women individually, we created a service user group for our women, The Voice Group. I was that woman who was not being heard, so to be part of a group who by sharing experiences will shape the provision for future women is amazing, for women to come and share their voice and for statutory services to be listening to their voice is amazing. To be asked to take part in the domestic abuse alliance, sitting with people in positions of power, listening to me. It has taught me that I am enough, my experiences are important, my work is important.

I want women to know, you are not alone, you can do this, there is a life waiting for you.

Priority 4- Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs

We said: We will work together as a partnership to increase access to recovery programmes and counselling in a variety of ways and locations.

What we have done: Through the Domestic Abuse Alliance we have strengthened our local partnerships, working together to create a local offer which meets a range of situations, experiences and needs. We have a dedicated group of multi-agency workers, the *What We Do* group, that oversees the partnership offer and helps get more funding to provide services. In the past year we have secured over £400,000 in additional funding for domestic abuse services.

If you are the victim of domestic abuse, our workers will be there to help make you, and your loved ones, safe. Initially a lot of the focus may be on dealing with the immediate issues, working together with Police, housing, or health services, but when the time is right there are a range of programmes, counselling services and support groups to help you recover and move on with your life.

The difference this is making:

“My name is Rob, back in November I did a self-referral to Journey Men due to a few difficult issues I was having based on domestic abuse due to the relationship I was in and a past relationship that was a bit rocky still. Without going into too much info, I was subject to a lot of control, actions and words. It put me in a bad mental state, and I was depressed and struggling to parent well to my little boy. He has time with his mum and time with me, but there was a lot of strain on the relationship with his mum and my ability as a parent as well as, my head was not in the right place because of all the actions that were happening to me.

So, when I referred to Journey Men I was invited to come along to *Walk & Talk* they were doing first, which helped a lot because it meant I was getting out and away from the situations, as well as being able to talk to other men, and I got offered support. I started getting some counselling as well and then it came to light more and more that the relationship I was still in when I started

my journey came to the forefront. It ended up with Police because the domestic abuse got really bad with threats and some of the stuff she was doing. I was having silly thoughts of doing stuff but also it was majorly impacting on my parenting which then brought more family court issues over my little boy because of the impact of the relationship. It was impacting on my parenting and my relationship with my little boy and his mum.

So then Journey Men helped me with all that and we did the counselling and then I got offered a place doing the Gateway programme which was an absolute eye-opener and made me realise a lot of things as well. It shows you how to recognise signs of controlling relationships, abusive relationships, strategies, and ways to be able to cope with it as well. It was a hard course to do but it helped a lot to get me where I am now.

The court case hopefully will be ending soon as well, with a successful outcome, but now I have come round since November- almost 12 months and I am in such a better place parenting-wise, as a person myself, relationship with my little lads mum, happy co-parenting and now I am a volunteer with Journey Men, so I have come full circle.

So, I came to the door to self-refer and now I am part of the team here wanting to help everyone else as well and show that there is support. Journey Men are a vital organisation to help support people especially with the gateway programme that was done with me and the counselling, and the actual support from the team, especially [my worker] who was like a rock. He let me call him, text him if I was struggling, he was there and now it is my turn to be able to help others."

Priority 5- Create a brighter, kinder future for the next generation

We said: We will use your experience and voices of local people to raise awareness, encourage people to talk about domestic abuse and to get help.

What we have done: Established a Voice Group for domestic abuse survivors.

The difference this is making:

The meaning of a life (A Poem by a member of the Voice Group)

To go through the years of turmoil and trauma in ways some beautiful souls do to survive through these days, the meaning of a life is so valued they say today has me bursting with pride to know we have a collection of people who have in their own way been in a situation that connects us with passion and life to help the broken adjust to the light.

It means so much to come out at the end of things with a spirit, motivation and feel so alive to stop the cycle of trauma in someones dear life.

To matter to people who you have never even met is the most valuable thing in life that is so humbling and to meet women of courage in life like myself, to be a voice in an alliance and a voice for the recognition of the voiceless in the hidden fight to survive.

To go through hell through life and be told by the devil to watch the storm and for me to whisper right back to him I am the storm with will in my heart. Life has given me a need and desire to help them in need and I do this with a fire of empathy and compassion and respect. I do indeed.

To be given a focus with helping give a voice to the voiceless I strive to come alongside some angels and kindred spirits within a "voice" to be heard. Who have been through hell with the devil and weathered their storm who have the life now to help others with integrity and the love of us women for ourselves like a flame.

Again, I say to be humbled and part of an alliance this validates for me part of the nightmare of life. There is a light shining bright. The survivor has been

through hell, who always relate and have experiences to tell on all that was wrong and their version of hell.

The survivor will work hard for a cause as they have lived through experience and fought to the end knowing the self-love is all they need to empower themselves to get up of their knee is my story of life and I hope you can see.

To know how a victim will always defend, but the strength will prevail and bring those barriers down so we can all come together for the bits that are broken together ref we will mend we start as strangers and end up as friends.

My personal tribute to a survivor that is me.

Priority 5- Create a brighter, kinder future for the next generation

We said: We will co-ordinate education programmes and learning for children, from pre-school to adulthood, on healthy relationships, kindness and respect.

What we have done: Delivered healthy relationship programmes to young people across the borough through our Health Services in Schools Team, Youth Matters Services, Creative Youth Development and community organisations, such as the Paul Lavelle Foundation who have delivered the Fair Play game to hundreds of young participants.

People who have been affected by domestic abuse tell us they want a different future for their children and that education on relationships is so important. We want to work with you as parents, grandparents and carers to provide that education.

The difference this is making:

The Fair Play board game, delivered by the Paul Lavelle Foundation, is an educational tool used to instigate group discussion around various topics surrounding domestic abuse, characteristics of healthy/unhealthy relationships and mental health and wellbeing. The sessions involve voluntary participation, participants can just sit and listen if preferred. The game also advises where advice and support can be accessed by both males and females, in relation to domestic abuse and any concerns with unhealthy relationships.

Participant feedback:

"I liked it because the game teaches you in a fun way and lets you express your feelings and helps your classmates get to know you better."

"I thought that the game was good because it taught us that if you feel sad it is always okay to tell an adult that you know."

"I have learnt what a healthy relationship is."

"It is fun and you get to talk about how to be safe."

"I think the game was fun because we talked about good things and bad things."

Teacher feedback:

"The case studies were really good- they are linked to real life scenarios which are common- children have experience of these. Some of the responses from the children were really eye-opening and I have identified who I can do follow up work with."

"The workshop was fantastic. All children were engaged and the staff leading the workshop were really approachable... Since the workshop, the children have been asking, constantly, if they can play the game again. The message of not using violence in any situation came across really well and the children are still talking about their afternoon."

Priority 5- Create a brighter, kinder future for the next generation

We said: We will provide learning opportunities for workers, services, organisations and partners to help them to better help you and future generations.

What we have done: Every 3 months we have been auditing domestic abuse cases to learn about practice and what we need to do to improve the support we provide to people affected by domestic abuse. Once the audits are completed, we write and share a Learning Report with Social Workers and other workers. The Learning Reports make recommendations on what needs to change, and action is then taken. A recurring theme in the report was language, how the language used by workers can sometimes alienate or discourage people affected by domestic abuse.

Acting on our learning, we have worked with people who have experienced domestic abuse, to gain their expertise and advice on language, producing training and guidance for workers. This aims to stop them using jargon or acronyms, to discourage them from applying labels to people or to use 'stock phrases' but instead to 'see' the person they are working with.

We want you to have a good experience with your workers, to feel respected, understood and treated as an individual. Your feedback helps us to improve, so keep talking to us about what we can do better.

The difference this is making:

We have hosted Learning Events and training on domestic abuse, reaching approximately 400 workers across Wirral. We asked workers attending training, "Do you think attendance at the event will improve the way you work with victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their families?" 97% said Yes.

We asked workers attending training, "What were your key learning points from the session and how will they help in your practice?" Here are some of their responses:

“Even as an experienced practitioner, I have learnt a lot about the impact coercive control has on children and their relationship with the protective parent from these learning events. These events are invaluable in terms of developing understanding and practice across different agencies in Wirral.”

“Abuse can happen to anyone and to some people it is the only life they have known. I would like to attend more sessions around domestic abuse as I still have a lot to learn.” “

“Hearing first-hand from survivors of domestic abuse at these events is so important. We must continue to develop a better understanding around domestic abuse and how it can have such a long-lasting impact on the families we work with, even when the relationship has ended.”

So, what difference is it all making?

- During the period 2020-21, the number of domestic abuse crimes in Wirral **reduced** by 2.8% from the previous year.
- During the period 2020-21, contacts with social care due to domestic abuse **reduced** by 19%, a reduction of 527 cases from the previous year.
- High-risk referrals to the Family Safety Unit **reduced** from 1,187 in 2019-20 to 999 in 2020-21, a reduction of 16%.
- The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan in 2020-21 **reduced** by 16% from the previous year, with 70 less children requiring child protection because of domestic abuse than in 2019-20.
- Referrals to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in 2020-21 **reduced** by 10% from the previous year, with 63 less people being referred due to high-risk harm.

Whilst this data suggests improvement from the previous year, it is to be considered with caution as we appreciate that 2020-21 was a very unusual year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout the year we monitored data on a fortnightly basis, anxious to know if rates would increase to an extent we would struggle to cope with or worse, that victims may not be able to reach out for help. We are acutely aware that the drop in domestic abuse reported this year may be followed by an increase next year as Covid-19 restrictions

ease, relationships change, and we may become aware of harm which has been hidden over recent months.

Whilst we are taking a cautious approach to interpreting the data above, we can be more confident that the data below shows improvements in our approach to working with people affected by domestic abuse and that the culture of our partnership is improving.

- The outcome of domestic abuse contacts to Children's Services has changed significantly with a 37% **decrease** in the number of contacts receiving *Information and Advice* only and a 68% **increase** in referrals to early help services. This demonstrates that more people are being linked up to support services at the earliest point.
- 89% of people working with the Family Safety Unit reported feeling safer at the point of case closure. This is **higher** than the national average of 84%.
- In quarter 1 of 2021 the number of singles/families at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse had **reduced** by 24% against the same quarter a year earlier. It is expected that the significant **increase** in annual target hardening, from 32 to 143 homes receiving enhanced security provision, has contributed to this.
- From January to March 2021, 96 domestic abuse risk assessments were completed. Over the next 3-month period, April to June, this **increased** dramatically to 252. The increase, can in part, be attributed to the launch of the We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse project, which supports social workers to undertake the DASH risk assessments.

Next Steps

We will continue with our transformation phase. This will include:

- Investment in trauma-informed practice across the workforce to ensure that whomever you speak to they respond in a helpful, non-judgemental way and have the information and tools at their fingertips to help

- Doing more work to engage with under-represented groups to understand how they are affected by domestic abuse and the help they need, making sure we have the necessary skills and expertise in our workforce
- Promoting media campaigns and engagement with the Criminal Justice System and Family Courts
- Ensuring we are fulfilling our duties relation to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, particularly in terms to safe accommodation and recognising children and young people as victims of domestic abuse
- Successfully delivering new programmes and learning about what works

Above all we want to continue working with you, people who are affected by domestic abuse, to improve our services and support offer.

Join Us

If you would like to be involved, you can:

Join our Voice Group (contact wecantalkaboutit@wirral.gov.uk)

Become a Supporter of the Domestic Abuse Alliance (visit www.itsneverokwirral.org)

Or contact our domestic abuse team to share ideas by emailing wecantalkaboutit@wirral.gov.uk