

Chance for Change conference, March 2016

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My agenda for today

Coercive control

- Extent and impact
- A case in point: the family courts and Women's Aid Child First campaign
- What survivors tell us
- What needs to happen?
- Change that Lasts:
 - Earlier disclosure and help
 - Meeting needs
 - Supporting resilience and recovery

Coercive control: not just one type of domestic abuse

- Coercive control is at the centre of domestic abuse
- 95% of women using a specialist domestic abuse service have experienced coercive control
- Lack of understanding of coercive control is at the root of most of the problems survivors experience at the hands of professionals

The new offence

- Impact on the victim is key: the behaviour must engender real fear and affect daily life
- Abuse must be intentional and repeated
- The offence gives a strong message – but that message must be reinforced
- Professional understanding is vital, and not just from the Police

What women experience

- “He stated that she assaulted him and she admitted she did, saying she was frightened. She was arrested” – police officer
- “Why doesn’t she just leave?” – professionals, family, friends
- “If you don’t protect your children, they will have to be taken into care” – social workers
- “This woman was literally shaking in front of me, she couldn’t articulate anything, she was completely unable to express herself” – Family Court judge
- “She said she wants them to stay together and we must respect that” – relationship counsellor
- “The violence ended several months ago and I see no reason why you should not do all you can to help your children see their father” – Judge

The Family Courts

Women's Aid survey of women survivors of domestic abuse with experience of the Family Courts:

- 55% were not given any protection measures
- 73% thought that protection measures would have made a positive difference to their experience of the family court
- 25% were cross-examined by their former partner/abuser in family court proceedings
- 89% reported feeling frightened or scared while in the family court
- 39% were verbally or physically abused by their former partner in the family court

Control and abuse in the family court

- He sat down next to me and said if I didn't agree to joint custody he'd make sure I never saw my son again, he also made other threats
- Threats to kill
- His family were verbally abusive outside court
- Tried to say I was mentally unstable to the court and would stare at me to make me cry
- He didn't need to say or do anything to be intimidating
- He threatened to go to where I was staying and kill my dog and threaten my mum
- He tried to keep coming and sitting close to me to intimidate me in the waiting room... and whenever we were out of the courtroom he would stare at me continuously
- He called me names and followed me to the loo
- Calling me names and aggressive shouting in the court room
- We had to sit near each other for waiting and he kept telling me to die
- He tried to run me over in his car outside it with my son in the car also
- Threats and intimidation in the waiting area
- My ex partner was loud swearing and shouting at me. He attempted to come towards me and was removed from court
- He got angry & shouted that everyone will know that I am a liar
- Verbal abuse, he made repeated accusations against my mental health, alcohol intake and ability to parent...all false and proven to be false by my having to present medical records, he was still given shared residency
- Stated on numerous times I know where you live, I find out everything
- Verbally abused in the court room in front of the judge and nothing was done.
- Shouting and jeering at me by his whole family when he received supervised contact
- He would always look daggers at me, tut at me, shake his head
- He stood in doorways 'holding the door for me'
- He verbally attacked my barrister in the waiting area. Cafcass saw. Didn't make a difference. Constantly put me down to the judge who then started saying the same things

What must improve

- Understanding of
 - impact of abuse on children
 - coercive control
 - post-relationship abuse
 - importance of online abuse
- Use of Practice Direction 12J
- Cultural change – an approach that goes beyond managing risk

Developing Change that Lasts

- Two phases of consultation with survivors: quantitative, qualitative, Survivors Forum
- Bringing together the knowledge of Women's Aid Federation of specialist services
- Partnership with Welsh Women's Aid
- Advisory Board comprising housing, drug and alcohol, advice, criminal justice, health, social care agencies and specialist services including BME, disability
- Review of research
- Development of Theory of Change
- Place-based systems change approach: change behaviours rather than structures

Key recent findings 1

Marianne Hester/Bristol University research in Middlesbrough:

- 39 women, all with 2 or more repeat presentations to MARAC, with children (69 in total, 20 “removed”), very high risk, some level of engagement but no reduction in risk
- “Person-centred” approach taken: strengths-based, needs-led
- 31 out of 39 cases saw measurable improvement
- 65% reduction in reported repeat incidents – and bear in mind previous unwillingness to report
- 15 cases had no more incidents and report being “safe”
- 16 cases have restraining or non-molestation order in place
- 12 convictions including 7 custodial sentences

“I don’t know why I didn’t accept help before, I just couldn’t cope, I can’t believe how low I got, but I’m getting there now.”

Rogerson, B (2015) ‘How a needs-led approach to MARAC cases delivers effective outcomes: the evidence’ in *Safe The domestic abuse quarterly*, Issue 52, Winter 2015, pp. 10-14

Key recent findings 2

“Finding the Costs of Freedom”, London Metropolitan University/Solace Women’s Aid, 100 women and their children tracked over 3 years:

“Across all agencies domestic violence was still being reduced to incidents of physical assault, which led not only to an exclusion of some women from services and support when their abuse was more characterised by coercive control, but also a minimising of post-separation abuse. This misunderstanding also meant that many professionals underestimated the toll living with abuse had on women and children, expecting that separation, in and of itself, would not just create safety but also lift all the other burdens. Women may have moved on but the shadow of domestic violence had not been rubbed out. The current policy focus on short term risk reduction contributed to this misunderstanding, and failure to recognise women’s current and persisting support needs.”

Kelly, L, Sharp, N & Klein, R (2014) *Finding the Costs of Freedom. How women and children rebuild their lives after domestic violence*, Solace Women’s Aid & Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University: London

Findings of our consultation and desk research

- Risk assessment is increasingly the main gateway to support, and management of risk is the main criterion of success. This does not promote long term positive outcomes, as risk can be managed without meeting survivors' and their children's needs.
- Victims of domestic abuse with additional and complex needs are falling through the net.
- Survivors are in frequent contact with many agencies who could help, but either disclosure is not possible, or the response is not helpful – opportunities are missed.
- Many survivors are not engaged formally with services at all, and there are no “safe spaces” in communities where women feel disclosure is encouraged and abuse is not tolerated.

How Change that Lasts will respond

- Cross-sector: community (including commercial), statutory and voluntary
- Strengths-based, needs-led model
- Making the most of opportunities to help
- Support for survivors and their children to retain and build resilience
- Removing barriers and facilitating the shortest, and/or most effective route to safety, freedom and independence
- Local solutions for local communities: it won't look the same everywhere

Four main elements

Ask Me

- Communities where survivors can disclose abuse early, be heard and believed, and get the help that they need
- Individuals at a range of “safe spaces” equipped with basic skills, knowledge and tools for an initial appropriate response
- Spaces for action reflect the culture, diversity and identity of an area, identified by local women

The Trusted Professional

- Ideally someone the survivor already trusts or from an agency she trusts
- Building on the best examples of models such as Troubled Families
- Provides a holistic response and coordinates support for survivor and family, referring to specialist support in response to the needs and resilience of individuals

Strengths-based, needs-led assessment and support planning

- Underpins all responses
- Builds on the strengths and resources available to the survivor
- Identifies what resilience and independence will look like for that individual and how to get there

Specialist strengths-based, needs-led intensive support

- Aimed at survivors with the most severe and complex needs



Change that Lasts

women's aid

until women & children are safe

Ask Me

community-based response including:

- raising awareness
- safe enquiry
- signposting for support
- community believes survivors and doesn't accept abuse

Trusted Professional

support, advice and safety-planning in range of service settings, e.g:

- health visitor
- children's centre
- drug/alcohol support
- family intervention project
- housing

Specialist Support Services

specialist domestic violence services, e.g:

- outreach/community workers
- refuges
- advocates (Dapa, Idva)

Strengths-based needs assessment

- Agreeing outcomes the woman wants to aim for
- Plan to get there, including safety plan for her and her children

Safety, freedom and independence

Current status and next steps

- Tools and training in development, working with local partners and those from other sectors
- Geographic and thematic pilots: now at planning stage
- Presentations to local areas for discussion
- Evaluation outcomes
- Further information available at www.womensaid.org.uk or email info@womensaid.org.uk for:
 - Change that Lasts summary
 - Infographics
 - Theory of Change document