

Section Two

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2 Executive Summary

2.1 *The project*

In September 2020 Rock Pool was awarded £85,350 from the Big Lottery Coronavirus Community Support Fund to work with nine partners to pilot delivering the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit via an online platform. Before the outbreak of COVID-19 the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit was delivered in a classroom, face to face for two hours a week over 12 weeks. The online version of the programme was delivered for 40 online programmes to 233 participants from October 2020 to April 2021.

2.2 *Impact of the programme*

Feedback from delivery partners and participants demonstrated that the online programme delivered the same key outcomes as the “in-room” programme. This included the following benefits:

1. Enables individuals to understand they were not at fault or responsible for the abuse they experienced.
2. Enables individuals to identify the coercion and control they have experienced and has given them techniques to address this.
3. Enables participants to realise that they are not alone in their experiences, that others share similar experiences and also that recovery is possible.
4. Significantly improves individual self-esteem and assertiveness in a way that means they can negotiate healthier lifestyles and remain abuse free.
5. Provides real hope and potential for participants to have in the future abuse free lives and improved relationships with their children.

2.3 *National impact of domestic abuse*

1.6m people in the UK stated that they had experienced domestic abuse in the UK¹

A review of the impacts of domestic abuse by Safe Lives² revealed that:

- Domestic abuse has significant psychological consequences for victims, including anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviour, low self-esteem, inability to trust others, flashbacks, sleep disturbances and emotional detachment.
- Domestic abuse victims are at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder.

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2.4 The Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit

The Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit was developed in 2005 to help survivors of domestic abuse recover from their experiences of domestic abuse. The programme provides participants with techniques to challenge their negative thought processes, enabling them to develop self-confidence and assertiveness and integrate back into society and explore their full potential. More than 100,000 survivors of domestic abuse have benefitted from the programme.

2.5 Context

The COVID-19 lockdown created a “perfect storm” for domestic violence with

- Reduced access to support services.
- Reported increases in amount and intensity of domestic violence.
- The negative impact on mental health of the isolation of lockdowns and fear of the pandemic challenging the resilience of those recovering from domestic violence.

There was increasing evidence that “lockdowns” were having a significant effect on the scale and the degree of domestic violence as families were locked in with their abusers.

2.6 The partners

Nine partners trailed and tested an online version of the programme:

- The SUsie Programme at Barnardo’s Cornwall
- Birmingham Children’s Trust
- Feathers Futures - Great Yarmouth
- Wight DASH - Isles of Wight
- Swindon Women’s Aid
- Nottingham Women’s Aid
- West Mercia Women’s Aid
- I Am Cherished - Hertfordshire
- Safe in Sussex

All the partners delivered a wide range of support services to victims of domestic abuse, and all had experience of delivering the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit programme “in the room.”

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2.7 Impact of COVID-19 on organisations and staff

All the partners responded quickly to the challenges of COVID-19 and all managed to adapt most of their services to online delivery. Their involvement in delivering the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit programme needs to be understood in this wider context. Going on-line and delivering a range of “virtual services” challenged approaches to service delivery and required upskilling (especially in IT skills). It demanded a lot of work in a short time to be able to continue to successfully deliver support.

Partners recognised the on-going impact of working isolated at home was leading to increased stress for staff. They worked hard to look after the well-being of their staff teams and volunteers and for some organisations overcoming the challenges brought them together closer as a team.

The team members worked hard at providing support to our members and to each other. We became more open as a team in discussing our feelings and introduced “permission slips”, which we could issue to ourselves if we needed to take a little time out. We took self-care very seriously and prioritised it in all team meetings. (Wight DASH - Isles of Wight)

Partners reported the difficulty they had in working with other agencies who had furloughed staff. At the same time they were experiencing more referrals from partner agencies as other charities had closed down or had furloughed staff.

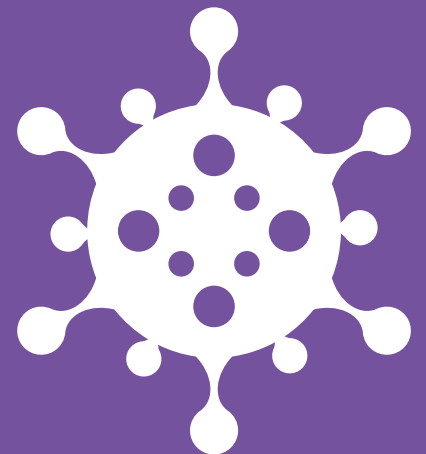
2.8 Impact of COVID-19 on survivors

In line with national trends, many partners reported that clients were under greater stress during lockdown and that overall clients had more complex needs and poor mental health.

Initially we had many women return to us, that had previously moved on. Many felt trapped and unsafe, and this triggered trauma in them. They felt they were helpless and were often frustrated with themselves, as the most unusual thing was triggering, and they felt unable to cope. (I Am Cherished - Hertfordshire)

Before long it became apparent that for many women, the collective trauma of the pandemic was having a cumulative effect on past trauma. They contacted and spoke about a sense of hopelessness, of feeling pulled back in to past harmful relationships, struggled to manage with their children. The majority reported high levels of mental distress. (Wight DASH - Isles of Wight)

Clients were under greater stress during lockdown



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2.9 Benefits and drawback of going online

All the partners were very positive about delivering the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit online and how important it was for their clients that they did so during the pandemic.

The success of the online delivery, including increased contact with clients, has been fantastic and the team are in a stronger position than before, feeling more connected to each other. (The SUSie Programme at Barnardo's Cornwall)

All partners found significant advantages in accessing more isolated clients (rural isolation, disability etc.) and clients who found it awkward to leave the house to attend sessions e.g. those with pre-school children, did not want family members/neighbours etc. to know what they were doing.

Online delivery also allowed the more vulnerable/shielding individuals to participate from the safety of their homes. (Swindon Women's Aid)

Previously we have struggled to engage Asian women as they often fear being seen by their community. They were much happier to learn online. (I Am Cherished - Hertfordshire)

Partners reported that they could offer a more flexible approach to delivering the toolkit and that evening sessions did attract more survivors who were in employment.

...we have always offered evening provision but reports from women in employment was that it was better to attend online than to rush home just to go out again for the group or attend straight from work. (Wight DASH - Isles of Wight)

Partners reported that the programme's focus on self-care was particularly relevant in times of COVID-19. It gave participants tools to help them deal with the stress of lockdown and some participants used the techniques taught with their children.

All partners said they would continue to offer the programme online post-pandemic as it significantly increased their reach into the community.

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2.10 Impact of the online programme

The delivery of the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit online had a significant positive impact on the participants. Pre-course, 68% (77) of participants scored below the self-esteem threshold on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. Post-course this figure fell to 31% (36). This represents a highly significant shift of 54%.

Prior to attending the programme 27% (30) of participants scored less than 10 (an indicator of very low self-esteem) and post course only 3.5% (4) scored less than 10. A shift of 87% of participants out of the lowest score band.

The average variation in pre and post course scores on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale was 6.2 points, which is highly significant on a 30-point scale.

- 10% of participants scores returned the same or marginally lower scores for pre and post course
- 34% moved between 1 and 4 points
- 27% moved between 5 and 8,
- 18% moved between 9 and 12 points
- 12% moved more than 12 points

In rating their ability to be assertive in 10 different situations 64% of pre-course answers illustrated non-assertive behaviours and this dropped to 27% post-course which gives some evidence that there were considerable changes in participants' perception of their ability to be assertive.

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2.11 Potential savings generated

The Home Office research report “The economic and social costs of domestic abuse.”³ (2019) states that the total cost of domestic violence is £66bn. It further states that, *the biggest component of the estimated cost is the physical and emotional harms incurred by victims (£47 billion), particularly the emotional harms (the fear, anxiety and depression experienced by victims as a result of domestic abuse), which account for the overwhelming majority of the overall costs.* They also calculated that the average cost to the UK economy of domestic violence per individual was £34,015 based on impacts lasting for up to six years.

56% (121) of the 216 individuals who successfully completed the programme increased their Rosenberg self-esteem scores by at least 5 points - a reasonable indication of a significant degree of recovery. If the programme was responsible for shortening participants’ recovery time by only 25%, (i.e. 18 months) then the savings generated would be £1,028,953 (121 participants x £34,015 x 25%). This represents a saving of £12.5 per £1 invested (Big Lottery Investment £85,350). Across all project costs of £131,7128 this represents a saving of £7.8 per £1 invested Whilst these figures are illustrative they do demonstrate the scale of savings which this programme probably generates and supports the case for more detailed research.

2.12 Next steps

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1. We would like to work with partners to undertake research, with a much larger number of participants, into the longer-term impacts of delivering the Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit and “in the room”
2. We would like to work with a large cohort of participants to gather robust evidence of the savings created through this early and cost-effective intervention
3. We would like to explore how we can further improve the effectiveness of online and “blended” delivery

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