

Communities and Culture Committee

CC(3)-16-08 (p3): 1 October 2008

Scrutiny Inquiry : Domestic Abuse

Response from Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU)

We submit this report for your interest and to provide information about our services

- Distinct from Welsh Women's Aid and regional Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators, DASU essentially provides specialist frontline services to victims/survivors of domestic abuse. We believe that the Committee will be interested in these services and in the strategic inputs that we have on a local level.
- We want to provide the Committee with information on the range of services that are provided locally.
- We would like the Committee to consider the impact of decisions taken by Local Authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government on ground level service providers such as ourselves.
- We wish to highlight our concerns over the future funding of DASU services.

Introduction

Until our re-launch December 2007, the Domestic Abuse Safety Unit was previously known as Deeside Women's Aid. We made the decision to change our name in order to reflect the developments in our service provision. We continue to provide the invaluable facility of refuge accommodation, but in addition include a range of other services that aim to reduce the risk to, and maximise the safety of, survivors of domestic abuse. It is also our aim to develop these services so that we can provide support to **any** survivor (male or female) of domestic abuse. Although our refuge facility remains a vital and necessary part of the work that we do, it is only one element of a package of specialised support that survivors can access.

DASU staff are skilled and experienced with a variety of qualifications. We are able to respond to the manifold needs of today's victim/survivor. We currently have members of staff with skills, to degree level in many instances, in
Risk Assessment and Safety Planning

Human Resources

Psychology

Teaching

Training

Counselling

Bookkeeping

Administration

Child & Adolescent Well-being Welfare Benefits Advice

Six staff members have completed Teesside University (Domestic Abuse) Certificates, and four of these are Home Office Accredited CAADA qualified Domestic Abuse Safety Advocates. Furthermore, in response to Flintshire's increase in migrant workers, five members of staff have been TEFL trained (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).

The Range of Services offered by DASU.

- We give expert and independent domestic violence support that will necessarily include Risk Assessment and Safety Planning.
- There is 24 hour access to a network of safe houses, and provision of a refuge in the Deeside area.
- DASU support women to remain in their own homes and assist them to access Target Hardening home safety equipment.
- We provide Advocacy support – four DASU workers have successfully completed the Home Office accredited Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse training.
- We offer six months resettlement support for women who are rehoused from our refuge accommodation. This work is funded by Supporting People.
- DASU have developed the Women's Support Group – a weekly meeting which aims to reduce the social isolation experienced by many women who have been in abusive relationships. It also aims to provide continued support to women who have left the refuge and are no longer receiving Resettlement support.
- DASU facilitate The Freedom Programme – This programme was designed and developed by Pat Craven (2001/2004). It aims to help women understand their experiences of domestic abuse in terms of power and control, to develop strategies to protect themselves and their children in the future, and to reduce the sense of confusion and self blame that they often feel. We have delivered more than 12 of these programmes over the past five years and know that the programme has psychological and emotional benefits for women who take part. It can also be the motivation for women to access legal protection for themselves and their family. (See Deeside Women's Aid - Freedom Programme Evaluation)
- Free to Be Programme – This programme was designed and developed by DASU (2005/2006) as a follow on programme in response to demand from many participants of the Freedom Programme. 'Free To Be' concentrates on the continued personal development and recovery of participants who have taken part in the Freedom Programme. It aims to consolidate and build upon the success of the Freedom Programme in terms of mental well being. (See Free To Be Evaluation)
- Outreach Support - This is provided when / where possible. It can include supporting women through the legal system though we receive no specific funding to provide this service.

- Children's Support – We have a Children and Young People's Well-being Advocate who provides help and support to children (and their mums) in our Refuge. We are also able to provide Saturday Sessional work for children who have recently left the refuge (their resettlement!) with Children in Need funding.
- We have an Information Centre with Drop In facility four days a week. We are based in an Enterprise Centre so people can access our service more safely and less conspicuously.
- We provide Training and Awareness Raising for other Agencies – recent examples of this are with North Wales Police, Flintshire Fire Safety Units and Sure Start Community Parents.
- We work in schools – most recently, we had contact with over 600 year 7 children during 'Crucial Crew'. We have also developed programmes that we facilitate in partnership with the North Wales Police Schools Liaison Officer, Pc. Petra Ashton, in local High schools. These are delivered to Year 9 and Year 11 pupils and aim to show pupils how to recognise healthy / unhealthy behaviours within intimate relationships.
- In addition to these services, a member of DASU is Chair of the Flintshire Domestic Abuse Project Group, we attend the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and sit on the LSCB Audit Sub Group. We are active participants at the Flintshire MARAC and the Domestic Violence Panel.

Issues around Service Provision

- Lack of core funded posts – this leads to difficulty in planning ahead and creates insecurity for post holders. Potentially this could threaten service provision .
- Until this Inquiry by the Communities and Culture Committee, there has been no audit of domestic abuse service provision in Wales. We hope that this process will ensure that future funding will secure front line services such as DASU and avoid the costly implications of duplicating services.
- Domestic abuse can be overlooked or not deemed the main issue to address in cases of substance misuse and mental health referrals. All issues need to be addressed to ensure best possible service and cohesive response to the victim/survivor – Galvain & Humphreys (2005) in their work 'The Impact of Violence and Abuse on Engagement and Retention rates for Women in Substance Use Treatment' highlight the lack of attention to dual issues and state that services should be ' asking about domestic abuse and addressing those needs as well as substance misuse needs'
- An individual's experience of Domestic Abuse is not part of routine enquiry for all support agencies. Following the success of routine enquiry becoming part of the Care Pathways in Ante/ Post Natal Care, could there be the possibility of extending this to Mental Health / Drug & Alcohol services? Implementation Guidance (2003) to the Women's Mental Health Strategy (2002) highlights the role of domestic abuse in mental illness and states it should be 'a priority

to lay the foundations for routine enquiry about violence and abuse in assessment and care planning’.

- Funding for our interventions such as the Freedom Programme and Free to Be is sporadic and has generally come from slippage money. The beneficial outcomes of the programme, and its follow on programme Free to Be, are such that it would be financially effective in both the long and short term to make the funding more readily available.
- In their Statement of Principles and Minimum Standards, the organisation, Respect, stress that Perpetrator programmes should ‘never be run in isolation and should always be integrated with specialist, pro-active, associated women’s services’. Non mandatory perpetrator programmes in North Wales appear to be neither working with, nor consulting with, existing services (such as DASU) to make sure that support is available for partners of perpetrators.
- There will be one Sexual Abuse and Rape Centre (SARC) for the whole of North Wales and limited availability of specialist support services for serious sexual assaults. Sexual Violence is often a component of Domestic Abuse but is not currently funded as such. Funding for the specialised training of Domestic Abuse staff within current support services (such as DASU) would give sexual assault victims a much needed local service too.
- Will the Committee consider funding domestic abuse directly at a local level as well as considering funding national organisations such as Welsh Women’s Aid? Could they examine the benefits of funding at a local level; we believe it would give better value for money than funding posts at a regional level.
- There is currently no specific support service for men in Flintshire – we intend that our name change will eventually lead to a change in our constitution so that DASU can support any survivor of domestic abuse. With this in mind, we have met with, and will be attending training delivered by The Dyn Project.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. We have included / attached relevant documentation and are happy to provide any further information on request. We would be pleased to meet with the Committee to answer any queries that may arise and look forward to hearing the outcomes of the Committee’s Inquiry.

Free to Be – End of Programme - Evaluation – Domestic Abuse Safety Unit

This evaluation of the programme called Free To Be is laid out in five parts; the Introduction, the Method of evaluation used, the Results of the evaluation, a short Discussion about the results and a Conclusion. It is written in this way for ease of reading.

Introduction

The Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (previously Deeside Women's Aid) have been facilitating the Freedom Programme (developed by Pat Craven 2000 / 2004)

since 2002 running an average of 3 programmes a year. As facilitators of the programme we became increasingly concerned that participants needed additional group support and deserved the opportunity to develop the insights gained during the Freedom Programme in a safe and structured way. They stated that they had benefited from the group setting and had established a secure environment in which they could explore sensitive and difficult issues. They felt they still had 'unfinished' issues to deal with.

'Free to Be' was devised and developed by DASU (2005/06) in response to demand from clients and to fulfil a gap in service provision. The aim is to consolidate and build upon the success of the Freedom Programme. To do this Free To Be concentrates on the continued personal recovery and development of participants' well being by covering topics relevant to women who have experienced domestic violence and who have completed the Freedom Programme. To date we have completed 4 programmes of Free To Be.

The course runs for two hours a week over a period of seven weeks. Each session will cover an aspect of 'The Liberated Woman' who is Creative, Assertive & Confident, a Positive Thinker, a Real Role Model, and a Sexual Being. Each of these aspects makes up a session that focuses on the themes of Creativity, Confidence & Assertiveness, Positive Thinking etc. Each session is designed to be specifically relevant to survivors of domestic violence, covering topics such as Coercive Control, Stockholm Syndrome, Stages of Change, Cognitive Dissonance and Investments in a format that survivors can relate to.

As facilitators of the programme DASU were aware of the success of the programme in terms of improved mental health, but were struggling to show this improvement in the evaluation that we used for the first three programmes. It was clear that in order to show this improvement, we needed to have information regarding participants' feelings of well being before the programme began as well as at the close of the programme to highlight any differences. To achieve this we needed to ask participants to respond to some potentially emotive statements about their feelings of well being and we were aware that this could cause them to feel exposed or more vulnerable. Careful consideration and a sensitive approach were vital when asking clients to participate and we made it clear that their contributions would not be viewed or evaluated by DASU until the end of the programme (April, 2008) and that these would remain private should this be requested at any point. We assured participants that there was no obligation to take part but that in doing so they would have concrete 'evidence' of any personal changes, adjustments or transformations that may occur over the course of the programme. All participants completed self awareness forms and one participant decided that she would keep the form in her possession.

Hypothesis: Women who attend Free To Be will have improved mental health and well being

Method

In April 2008 we completed our fourth Free To Be. At the start of this programme in February 2008 we asked participants to complete a personal awareness form (see Appendix 1). In this form participants were asked to assess their responses to a number of positive statements with 'never / rarely / sometimes / often / or always'.

They were also asked to complete a statement in their own words – it began – 'I would like this course to help me to / help me with -----'. They were asked to put their name at the bottom of the form. We explained these forms would be placed in a sealed envelope until they had completed the second assessment at the end of the programme. Then, both they and us could compare the before and after assessments. We explained that we would be using the outcomes in confidential evaluation. No names would be included in the write up, but the information arising from these would be used. All participants agreed that this would be interesting and were happy to take part. At the close of our last session we gave participants the second personal awareness form (Appendix 2) with the same positive statements and a revised statement to complete which began, 'This course has helped me with / helped me to -----'.

When this was completed we gave back to participants their first self awareness form in order to compare the two, with some surprising results. We also gave participants a further evaluation form (Appendix 3) to complete that gave them the opportunity to write a few sentences about how the course has helped them and how it might be improved.

Results

The results table shows a marked improvement in most of the responses to statements by participants. The higher percentage shifted from the negative responses 'never' and 'rarely' to the more positive 'sometimes' 'often' and 'always'.

At the end of the programme, 52% of participants said that they 'often' or 'always' like themselves, however before the programme 0% of participants responded so positively.

Participant's decision making skills showed an improvement moving from mainly 'rarely' and 'sometimes', to 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always'.

All participants are better able to identify abusive behaviours with the majority feeling as though they can do this 'often' or 'always' and 80% state that they can now protect themselves emotionally 'sometimes' and 'often'.

By the end of the programme 87% of participants prioritise their own needs at least 'sometimes' and most find it easier to respond positively to change.

Everyone feels better about themselves more often than they did before the programme began. Those that 'never' or 'rarely' felt good state that now they 'sometimes' feel good and those that did feel good 'sometimes' now 'often' or 'always' feel good.

Participants responses show a marked improvement in ambition. Before the programme 96% stated that they 'rarely' had ambition. On completion of the programme 88% can identify that they have ambitions.

At the end of the programme 0% participants responded 'never' to any of the statements except 'I feel safe from abuse' when 11% still never feel safe.

88% of participants feel confident in themselves at least sometimes, 100% feel more confident in their abilities and 88% feel more confident to express their views.

Finally, 74% of participants 'often' or 'always' feel positive about the future. Participants generally got what they hoped for from the course as is shown by the following examples. Bear in mind that participants were not reminded of their original statement when they wrote their end of programme statement so these examples are pretty staggering really.

'I would like this course to help me to / help me with -----

Look forward to the future'

'This course has helped me with / helped me to -----

Looking forward to the future in a happy positive way> excited about the future'

'I would like this course to help me to / help me with -----

Feel more confident & positive about myself & the future. I would like to feel less anxious in a big group & some situations'

'This course has helped me with / helped me to -----

Building my confidence. I don't find it as hard to speak up for myself. I also feel i'm getting better at being satisfied in my decisions'.

'I would like this course to help me to / help me with -----

Be more confident and assertive, rely on instinct about people, most of all to be able to be emotionally stable. To be happy again about myself.

'This course has helped me with / helped me to -----

My confidence, aware of abusive people and signs to look for while i am embarking on a new relationship. Assertiveness is better and i feel i have made good progress to get on with my life'.

Further evaluation

One participant stated that the course has given her the impetus and confidence to access further education. She says, ' the programme encouraged me to reflect on myself, my own personality, my abilities and what I would like from my future'.

Another suggests that learning about 'cognitive dissonance' has given her insight into the difficulties that she has and has even helped her with on going court proceedings. She says, 'It has helped me understand that cognitive dissonance kept me in the relationship, that and my commitment to my son made me return to a more dangerous situation'. This participant has finally left her abusive ex partner and is now in a safe accommodation in an area not known to her abuser.

Another participant has found that the support from DASU and other participants on the course proved most beneficial. She says ' I could come and talk and put things in perspective has been the most important thing – and the laughs have certainly helped!'

Further comments are ' I'm sure I would have stayed an emotional wreck if it had not been for the programme – I will miss it terribly'.

'We shared our experiences without being judged. I have become (am becoming) the confident person I once was as I now know that it (his behaviour) is not my fault'.

Suggestions for improvement

'I would really love to learn more on how to be more assertive – I think that women coming out of abusive relationships need longer group courses'.

'The only downfall I find with this programme and the Freedom Programme is the length of the sessions as we seem to have to rush through each session'.

Discussion

The results of this evaluation support our hypothesis that women who attend the programme will have improved mental health and well being. All participants gave more positive responses in the end of programme assessments and also found that their hopes for the course were met (some with quite staggering accuracy!)

At the end of the programme 11% of participants still responded 'never' to the statement 'I feel safe from abuse'. This is likely to be because safety is out of one's personal control in some ways. Though participants may have taken all the steps that they can to minimise the risk of further abuse, it is not possible to control the behaviour of another person. It is feasible that in this response participants are saying that they still remain very uneasy about their own safety because of the behaviour of the abusive person who may continue to harass them. They may have continuing court proceedings which may add to their feelings of fear and uncertainty.

Most importantly, by using this new method of evaluation, we have been able to illustrate to participants the improvements that they have made. Women can be very self effacing and do not often acknowledge their achievements. This evaluation has helped participants to see how 'far they have come' in terms of emotional and psychological well being and recovery from abuse. This has been a triumph in terms of giving them an insight into the hard work they have done and providing an extra boost of confidence. We hope that this is just the beginning.

Conclusion

The original aim of this course was to 'build upon the success of the Freedom Programme' in helping women to recover from the trauma of domestic violence. All participants on this programme have shown a marked improvement in feelings of well being. Two have progressed to further educational courses stating that the programme has given them the confidence and the impetus to take this step. One participant has taken up voluntary work for a local charity, and one has returned to work after a long period of sick leave suffering from PTSD.

The results of this evaluation support the hypothesis that women who attend the programme will have improved mental health and well being. We believe that this programme has consolidated the recovery process for participants; it

has provided a safe place for them to heal psychologically and emotionally and has assisted them to progress on to other work, education or interests. However, we do also believe that improvements to our service provision can be made with adequate funding. This would enable us to plan ahead and further develop our programmes. Given the funding opportunity we would pilot a 22 week domestic abuse intervention programme that would incorporate the Freedom Programme, Free To Be, Self Defence, Healthy Eating and the opportunity to access Personal Counselling. This would provide survivors of domestic abuse with an holistic package of care that should maximise and maintain recovery and mental / emotional well being.

Clients Evaluation Of The Domestic Abuse Safety Unit

Perceptions of DASU Service

All responses in this survey were completed and returned by post i.e. they were not completed in front of DASU staff

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Value</u>
<u>%</u>	
Overall Helpfulness of DASU	
Very helpful	83.3%
Helpful	16.7%
Neutral	0%
Unhelpful	0%
Very Unhelpful	0%
Effect of Meeting with DASU on danger to client	
Decreased danger	88%
Had no effect	15%
Increased danger	3% *
DASU helped reduce violence/ threat of violence	
Strongly Agree	57%
Agree	36%
Neutral	6%
Disagree	0%
Strongly disagree	0%
Scale of 1 to 10 how effective DASU helping obtain a safe outcome	
Mean response = 8.96	
10 = most effective	
6	= 3%
7	= 3%
8	= 27%
9	= 27%
10	= 40%
Overall satisfaction with DASU	
Very satisfied	78%
Satisfied	22%
Mixed	0%
Dissatisfied	0%

Very dissatisfied 0%

* clients did not accept contact with safety services while they remained with the perpetrator

Clients responses to

In what ways has DASU helped you -

- 'Helped me be more positive'.
- 'Helped increase my confidence.'
- 'Helped me get back on my own two feet'.
- 'Helped me understand what happened in my abusive relationship'.
- 'Helped me recognise what domestic abuse really is'.
- 'Helped me reduce the isolation I felt and meet people who have had similar experiences'.
- 'Helped me escape'.
- 'Helped me know that I am not on my own'.
- Helped me evaluate and change my life'.
- Helped with practical things such as solicitors/making new friends/support/
Freedom Programme'.
- 'Helped me with court'.
- 'Helped me get the locks changed'
- 'Helped me with paperwork'.
- 'Provided a local point of contact for me'.
- ' Provided support throughout the court process'.
- 'Provided advice on how to deal with my matters'.
- ' Were non judgemental'.
- ' I would not be here today without their help'.
- 'Arranged for neighbourhood wardens and safety proofing at home'.
- 'Gave practical advice on how to protect myself, my children and my home'.
- 'DASU has supported me in refuge with practical and emotional support'.
- 'Gave me the strength to break free'.
- 'Put me in touch with other agencies'.
- 'Gave me the opportunity to share my experiences and recover'.

In what ways has DASU not been able to help

'Counselling for children'.*

'Help with finances'.+

'I wasn't able to accept help when under the influence of my ex husband which was when I needed it most'.

* We do refer families to NCH or children to the CAMHS team. Children in refuge receive support from our children's worker & we have some input for two families from the WWA regional childworker. We also have a sessional weekend worker providing refuge support for children and on an outreach / resettlement basis.

+ We do help with benefits advice and support with claims. However we refer to CAB for complicated financial matters and are unable provide clients with money

Suggestions for improvement

Run more groups for women – assertiveness training

DASU staff should do awareness raising at Mum & Toddler Groups

Children's Groups / Women's Groups / More refuges

Any other comments?

Thanks for all you have done

Thank you

Staff are very helpful

Thank you – I have regained my confidence

I will never let this happen to me again

Great team – very helpful