



# Community Planning Aberdeen

<b>Progress Report</b>	Project End Report 10.6: Increase by 15% victims of domestic abuse receiving support by November 2022
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Derek McGowan, Chair of Community Justice Outcome Improvement Group
<b>Report Author</b>	Lucy Simpson, ACC
<b>Date of Report</b>	12/12/2022
<b>Governance Group</b>	CPA Board – 15 February 2023

## Purpose of the Report

This report presents the results of the LOIP Improvement Project Aim of ensuring victims receive access to the right support by Increasing by 15% victims of domestic abuse receiving support by November 2022 and seeks approval to end the project.

The project was delivered between November 2021 and November 2022

## Summary of Key Information

### 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Domestic abuse significantly impacts people's lives and across all sections of our communities. Domestic abuse can exist in all types of relationships between partners and ex partners, irrespective of gender, race, religion, or type of background although, as a form of gender-based violence, domestic abuse is mainly perpetrated by men against women. The Police and Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service agreed definition of Domestic Abuse is -

“any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse, which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere including online.”

1.2 All too often when people think of domestic abuse, they think of physical violence, but it is usually much more than that. It spans the entire spectrum of behaviour by perpetrators – including isolated incidents, as well as a course /pattern of conduct with both violent and non-violent abusive behaviour. Sometimes this will involve elements and tactics of coercive control, which can involve a range of behaviours designed to control and harm a victim. The below table shows the number of Incidents of Domestic Abuse recorded by Police nationally and in Aberdeen:

	Scotland	Aberdeen
2017-18	59209	2763
2018-19	60110	2483
2019-20	62907	2566
2020-21	65251	2610
2021-22	64807	2579

- 1.3 In 2020, 2004 people reached out to or were referred to specialist support services because of domestic abuse, this accounts for 76% of recorded incidents of domestic abuse by Police. However, these statistics do not reveal the incidence of all domestic abuse committed since not all incidents are reported to the police.
- 1.4 In conjunction with the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS), the statistics help to assess the extent and impact of domestic abuse in Scotland. There are various reasons for such under reporting i.e., victims experience fear and shame as common effects of domestic abuse or it may also be caused by an accused physically preventing a victim reporting the domestic abuse. This will represent as a continued challenge, as victims come to an acceptance of this behaviour as 'normal' and part of the relationship.
- 1.5 One area in which we saw significant underreporting of domestic abuse was with young people aged 16-25. Young people impacted directly by domestic abuse by a partner or ex-partner continue to be the 'hidden' victims of domestic abuse, with only 1% of those aged under 18-year-old accessing support services. This is despite young people (16-19-year-olds) experiencing the highest rate of domestic abuse of any age group (Safe Young Lives, 2017).
- 1.6 A recent study conducted in Aberdeen with young people found that the majority young people surveyed were aware of what domestic abuse was and were confident in identifying abusive behaviours. However, the majority of respondents were unsure of how to actually access domestic abuse support.
- 1.7 Local statistics further highlights this with 244 young people (aged 16-25) seeking support from local services. This number accounts for only 11% of those seeking domestic abuse support in Aberdeen. In addition, the young people that participated in the Whole Lives Aberdeen study stated that their main reason for not seeking support was 'shame'. Awareness raising around reducing the stigma of seeking support for domestic abuse will be key to ensuring that young people get the support that they need.
- 1.8 Families may live with domestic abuse for a significant period before getting effective help. There are many reasons why families live with domestic abuse for a significant period or return to their abuser after attempting to leave. It may not be apparent to the victim that a relationship is abusive. They may be afraid of the abuser and fear the consequences for others if they disclose the abuse. The victim may not know where to turn for help.
- 1.9 Research by Safe Lives found that victims are experiencing abuse for long periods before getting specialist support, despite seeking help from other agencies and attempting to leave the perpetrator. In Scotland, the average length of abuse before seeking support was 4 years compared with 3 years in England and Wales. Furthermore, a quarter of clients experienced abuse for more than 10 years before receiving support, and 10% experienced abuse for more than 18 years.

1.10 We know that domestic abuse occurs across the city but that there is a higher preponderance of abuse in areas of deprivation and a correlation between domestic abuse and severe and multiple disadvantages. Those with substance misuse problems often experience relationships with domestic abuse. A lack of training in domestic abuse with substance misuse staff was identified with staff not feeling confident in how to respond to disclosures of abuse and/or knowledge of where to signpost on to support.

## **2. IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AIM**

2.1 Against this background, in November 2021 the CPA Board approved the project charter for the initiation of an improvement project which aimed to increase by 15% the victims of domestic abuse receiving support by 2022.

2.2 Ensuring that people who experience domestic abuse have access to appropriate specialist domestic abuse support is a key priority of Aberdeen's Violence Against Women Partnership as part of our commitment to Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. There continues to be barriers which lead to people experience domestic abuse not seeking support. These include the stigma and shame, not recognising that what they are experiencing is abuse, not knowing where to access support and/or being prevented from accessing support by their perpetrator. In light of the background position detailed above the project focused its change ideas on young people and people accessing substance use services.

## **3. WHAT CHANGES DID WE MAKE?**

3.1 Several changes were tested throughout the project and are listed below.

### **1. Information Sessions**

Online information sessions with students were held as a method of increasing young people's awareness of local support services. The sessions focused on what domestic abuse is, what it may look like for young people and how young people can access support.

### **2. Domestic Abuse Champions**

We looked to establish a domestic abuse champions model and recruit a number of volunteers. Champions were recruited from Housing and Support, Community Learning and Development and Adult Social work teams. Our domestic abuse champions received an in-depth train the trainer programme from domestic abuse specialist's Safe Lives giving them the ability to deliver training to their colleagues and services to increase knowledge of domestic abuse, how to recognise the signs and to signpost on to support.

### **3. Training**

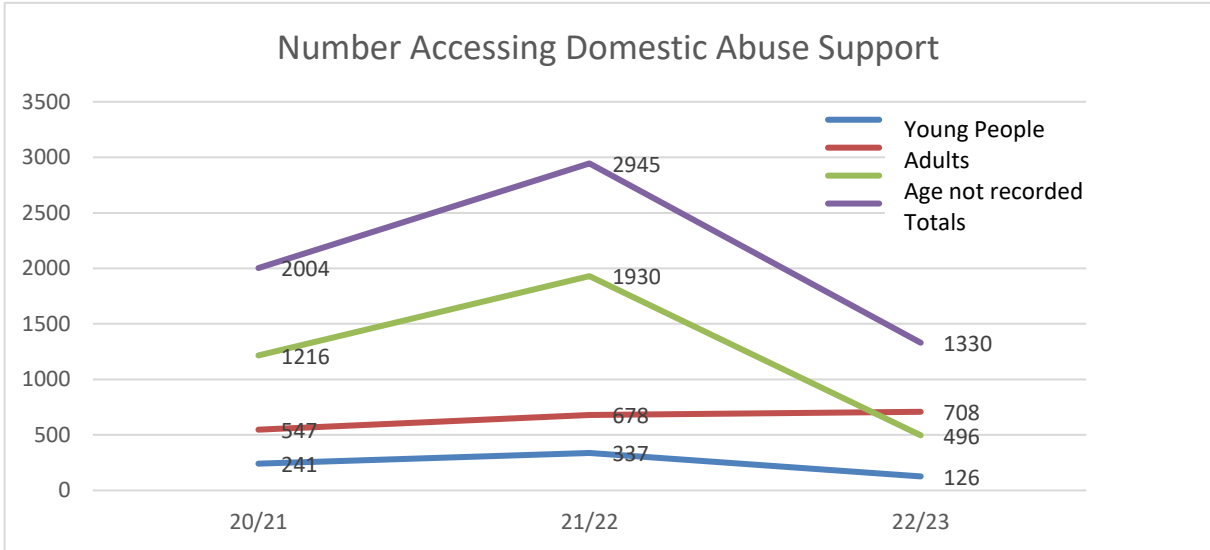
In-depth domestic abuse training sessions have been held with staff from substance misuse services. The training focused on the dynamics of domestic abuse, how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and how and where to refer service users on to support.

## **4. HAVE OUR CHANGES RESULTED IN IMPROVEMENT?**

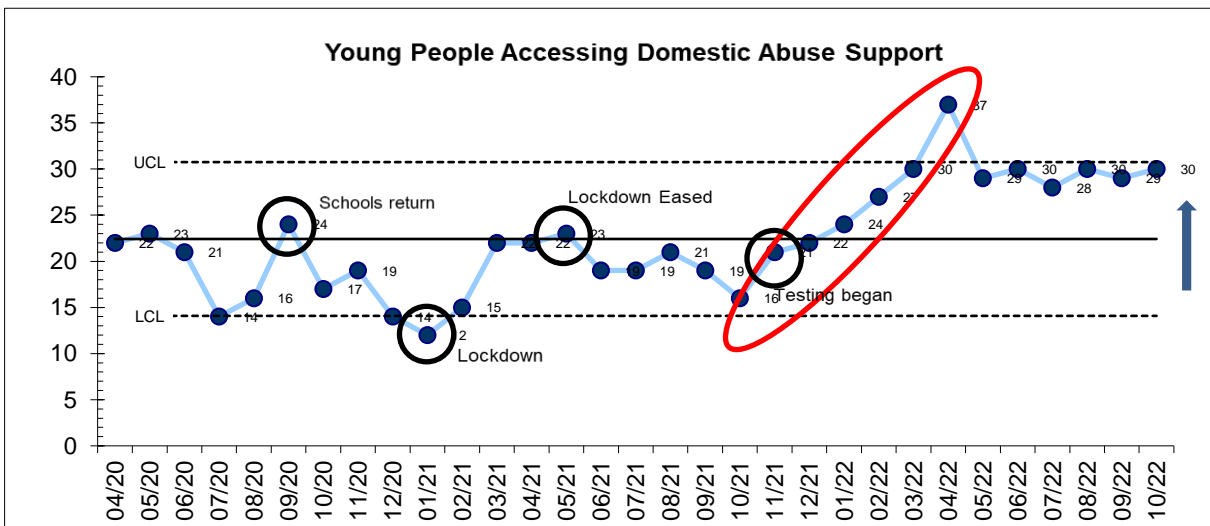
4.1 The project has surpassed its aim of a 15% increase with a 47% increase in the number of people accessing domestic abuse support from November 2021 to November 2022. In 2020/21 we saw 2004 people accessing support and this increased to 2945 in 2021/22. This data shows improvement which has been sustained over time. We have seen an

increase of 40% in the number of young people accessing domestic abuse support and 24% increase of adults (25+ where age has been recorded).

4.2 Going into 2022-23 we are continuing to see an increase in those seeking support for the first two quarters. We are also recording age ranges more accurately this year.

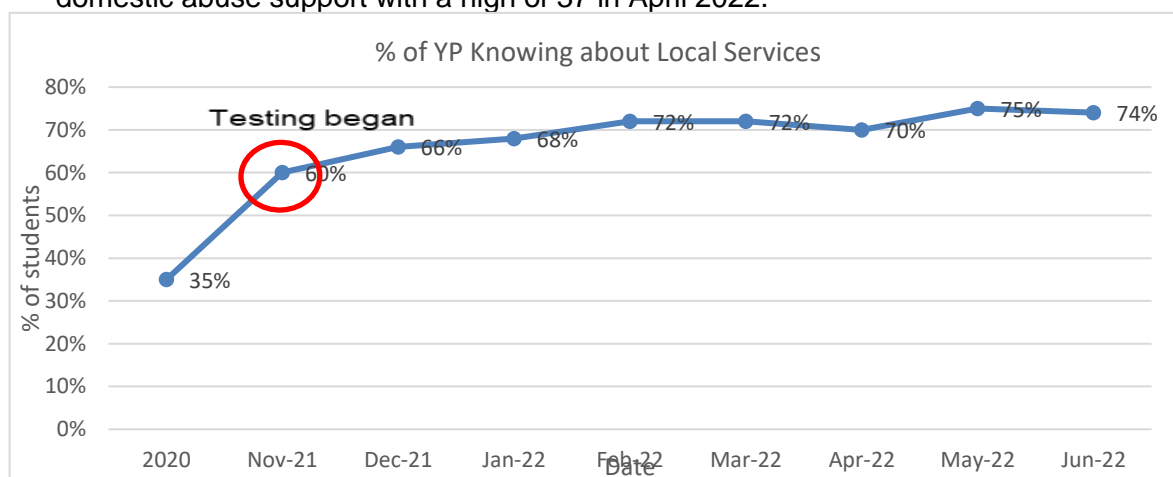


4.3 The chart below details the number of young people accessing domestic abuse support. We have seen an increase of 40% in the number of young people accessing domestic abuse support in 2021/2022. In general, we can see a trend in the data going up from when we started testing in November 2021 with this continuing to go up for the next 5 consecutive months. This is positive as it highlights that the changes to the system having the desired effect and influence that we wanted. We also started to see a shift in the data with referrals from January onwards all above the median line. This evidence's a steady increase in young people accessing domestic abuse support and suggests that our changes are being sustained.



## Information Sessions

4.4 We held 8 sessions in total with students at NESCOL over an 8-month period. These sessions were held online with the project team initially taking the lead for the first 4 sessions and NESCOL staff taking the lead for the last 4 sessions. This was to ensure that changes could be integrated into standard practice with students. At our online awareness sessions, we ask pre and post training questions. An average of 71% students at the end of the info sessions reported an increased awareness of local support services. Since the sessions started, we've seen an increase in the number of young people accessing domestic abuse support with a high of 37 in April 2022.



4.5 Feedback from the online sessions with students further highlighted the need for awareness raising with young people:

“Only today have I really noticed I’ve been through abuse myself. It’s so normalised for me to go through some things that were classed as abuse in previous relationships, that I didn’t think twice about. I suppose I’ve opened my eyes” Young Person, aged 16

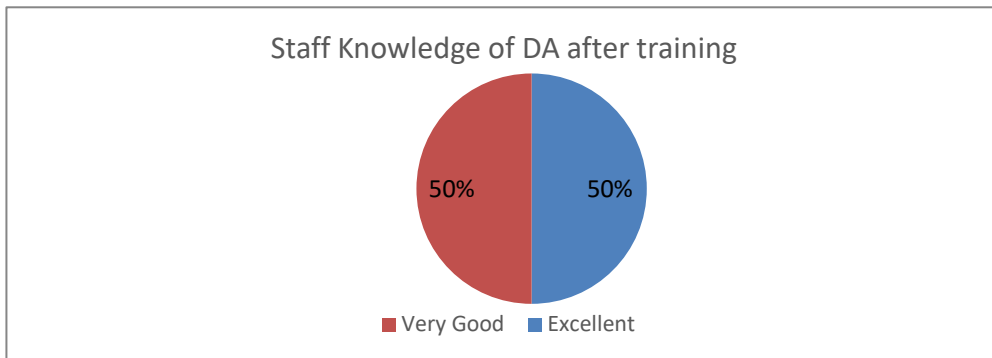
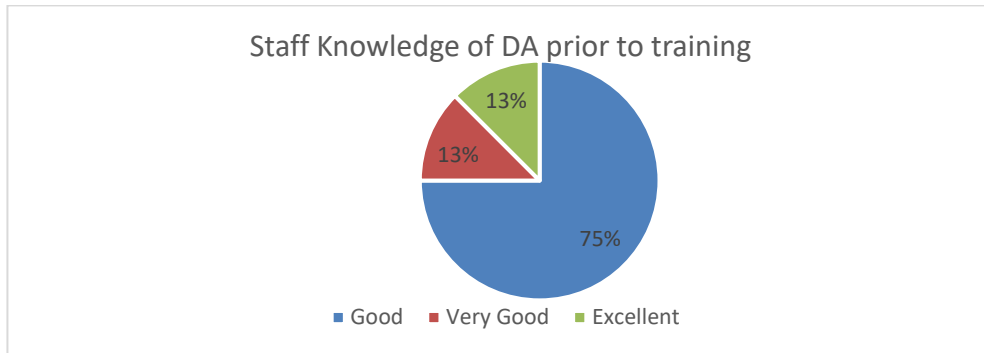
4.6 Information sessions have now ended as NESCOL have created a module on gender-based violence on their online learning portal however work continues with the college and plans are in place to approach the University of Aberdeen to undertake a similar project.

## Domestic Abuse Champions

4.7 Domestic Abuse Champions established and have completed in-depth domestic abuse training. Our domestic abuse champions received an in-depth train the trainer programme from domestic abuse specialist’s Safe Lives giving them the ability to deliver training to their colleagues and services to increase knowledge of domestic abuse, how to recognise the signs and to signpost on to support. This includes staff from the housing and support team, repairs, duty social work, libraries and community learning and development. To date domestic abuse champions have trained 22 staff from the Community Learning and Development team and 15 staff from the Housing and Support team.

## Training

4.8 45 substance misuse staff have completed in-depth domestic abuse training in September and October 2022. Attendees were surveyed after the training and asked if they would change their practice as a result of the training. The below charts highlight the increase in staff’s knowledge of domestic abuse prior to and after the training session.



4.9 In addition, 100% of substance misuse staff surveyed advised that they will change their work practice following the training.

The following quotes were taken from the post-evaluation questionnaires from staff who attended the training:

“I feel more confident around signposting and advising clients’ around domestic abuse. I also am more aware of what to look out for in terms of pattern of behaviour.” Substance Misuse Worker

‘More confident in approaching and dealing with patients experiencing domestic abuse.’

‘Very much so. The safety planning will be very helpful for when I am assessing/ reviewing patients especially those who feel they can't attend designated services. I also never really appreciated the Prochaska model of change being so well connected to this area and think this will give me a better concept of readiness for the person I am working with.’

## 5. HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

5.1 The data shows that the improvement has been sustained with a continuous increase in the number of young people aged 16-25 accessing support each month as of March 2022. To ensure this continues to be sustained the changes tested have been adopted as business as usual and will continue as they have increased the number of people accessing domestic abuse support. The multiagency project team will continue to meet ensuring that existing changes continue, and further changes are identified.

5.2 Improvements will also be sustained by scaling up the successful changes into other groups/staffing cohorts as described at section 7.

5.3 Should it be agreed that the project is ended, the data recorded will continue to be monitored and reported to the CJG, as well as added to the Outcomes Framework/Improvement programme Dashboard to ensure that performance continues.

5.4 Ensuring that people who experience domestic abuse are able to access appropriate and timely support is a key priority of the Violence Against Women Partnership and will continued to be monitored within our Implementation Plan.

## **6. HOW WILL WE MONITOR THESE IMPROVEMENTS?**

6.1 Domestic abuse data will continue to be gathered and collated quarterly for the local Violence Against Women Partnership data dashboard. While still a work in progress, the dashboard is fed into the Chief Officers Group for oversight.

## **7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALE UP AND SPREAD**

7.1 The project focused specifically on increasing the number of young people aged 16-25 and people accessing substance use services accessing domestic abuse support. The project recognised that targeted awareness raising can be effective when the messaging is designed for the audience. The effectiveness of each of the change ideas as shown by the outcomes achieved through our initial testing with a specific age group, it is clear that there are further opportunities to scale these changes up and apply them to other age ranges where domestic abuse is underrepresented.

7.2 Domestic abuse champions will focus and target other under-represented groups such as older people. Discussions are underway to look at recruiting domestic abuse champions from a range of services and organisations, including adult and care services in the NHS.

7.3 Training will be scaled up and rolled out across frontline services such as housing and libraries staff as well as all our Mental Health First Aiders.

7.4 It is clear from not just our project, but local research that many victims of domestic abuse don't recognise that what they are experiencing is abuse so further targeted awareness raising is needed and will be continued.

### **Recommendations for Action**

It is recommended that the CPA Board:

- i) Agree that testing is concluded and that this Improvement Project is brought to an end on the basis that the project aim has been achieved and change ideas now embedded as business as usual.
- ii) Note that the dataset for the overall aim will continue to be reported via the Improvement Programme dashboard to ensure progress is monitored.
- iii) Note that the project team and Violence Against Women Partnership will continue to scale up and spread the change ideas as described in section 7 with a view that a further increase in awareness of what domestic abuse is and where and how people who experience abuse can access support.

### **Opportunities and Risks**

**Opportunities:**

To offer Domestic Abuse training to further non-specialist services to non-ACC partner organisations and staff groups.

To recruit Domestic Abuse champions in organisations out with ACC

**Risks:**

Domestic Abuse services become overwhelmed and demand for support increases waiting lists and wait time for people experiencing domestic abuse.

### **Consultation**

Community Justice Group

Violence Against Women Partnership

CPA Management Group

### **Background Papers**

The following papers were used in the preparation of this report.

[10.6 Increase Access to Domestic Abuse Support](#)

Contact details:

Project Lead; Lucy Simpson, [lumcnicol@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:lumcnicol@aberdeencity.gov.uk), Development Officer, ACC