



Impact Report 2020/2021

Challenging Domestic Abuse, Changing Lives

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First Words

"I am so grateful that I found VOICES. Initially, I called them because I heard they offered a 'moving on after abuse' course. After great debate and fear of the unknown, I plucked up the courage to call. I was looking for somewhere I could be myself, be listened to instead of being judged. I didn't need another parenting course or help with my caring role. What I needed was a space for myself and time out to find myself again. That was when my recovery started. VOICES is different because it offers help all in one place. No more going from one place for this help and another place for that, having to explain things all over again. They see me and the whole picture all under one roof or service, which is so helpful. There is a kind of unsaid common thread running through all that they do and offer: A safe space, a confidential space, an accessible to all space.

Since making that initial call, the team at VOICES have always been there enabling and helping me with whatever comes up. They have been so supportive, non-judgmental and accepting of me as me. They have been there on the bad days, the new normal days and everything in between. Uniquely they are not just there for 6 sessions or one abuse, unless that is what you would like. For me they, collectively as a team, have been helping me come to terms with all forms of abuse. Helping me to regain my belief in myself, by addressing abuse and what that means but also practically. How do you choose your own phone when you have never been allowed to do that for many years? I didn't know where to start. I am now gradually getting my life back together. What I have got is mine and that's a good feeling.

All was going well until there was talk in the news of Coronavirus. I could see it was spreading and travelling this way. So I stopped circulating (the little bit that I had learnt to do) and stocked up the freezer and larder. Then I turned to how I could help myself. I thought, this is going to be a dangerous virus if it hits the UK, and sure enough it did. To start with I was ok. I tidied, sorted and spring cleaned (in January). Then the lockdown was announced and suddenly it was no longer voluntary or my decision. I was again being told what I could and couldn't do. I felt frightened and very isolated again. All the previous feelings; of violation, no personal choice, money, freedom from my previous abuses came flooding back. I wasn't expecting or prepared to have my historic feelings activated again. Even the word - lockdown - is so emotive and resonates with what I and so many other women have been through, unfortunately. I tried all of my coping techniques from previous times but nothing was working. Luckily VOICES recognised the impact and got back in touch, offering regular support that saved my life. I am still here to share my experiences and I am very grateful to them for everything they have done."



VOICES: a unique survivor-led approach to preventing harm, improving support and transforming recovery from domestic abuse in Bath & North East Somerset

VOICE is an independent Bath-based domestic abuse (DA) charity founded in 2014 by local women with lived experience to support others and to provide a platform for the voices of people with lived experience to be heard by services and policymakers, improving responses to their needs. It is a registered charity (CIO) and a full member of Women's Aid. The charity is unique in offering local people impacted by DA an integrated approach linking group recovery programmes to individual support (with a range of services including free legal clinic and debt/financial advocacy support and combined specialist domestic and sexual abuse therapy) and providing opportunities to feed back insights from lived experience to influence policy and provision.

VOICES aims to become a centre of excellence for domestic abuse recovery, providing training and consultation that is informed by lived experience and long-term support work.

VOICES' model of integrated, accessible and tailored support plays a key role in building stronger relationships in the community; enabling people to fulfil their potential by working to safely address issues at the earliest possible stage, with peer-led and group programmes to combat social isolation and aid reintegration in working and social life. VOICES' integrated support and focus on recovery has proven effective in transforming self-confidence and addressing the root causes of mental health problems associated with Domestic and Sexual Abuse.

VOICES supported c. 160 individual survivors and victims and their families between March 2020 and March 2021, and continues to provide high-quality, effective and bespoke services in the community to support individuals, their families, and the wider community. The charity provides Value for Money services, not only in terms of the benefit to individual clients, but in terms of the wider benefit to local families and communities, and through improving other service responses (e.g. Talking Therapies, housing or DWP) to domestic abuse.

VOICES will continue to develop a unique, women-only safe space in Bath (alongside advice and signposting for anyone in need), increasing options for partnership with other organisations to the benefit of local people and their community, and supporting their wellbeing needs as society emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are many routes into support from VOICES:

"This service has saved my mental health and has provided a safe service whilst helping with coping mechanisms for the future."

"I have just listened to the podcast that you shared on VOICES' Facebook page, re family courts. [...] Knowing that others find/have found the court system difficult to navigate is starting to make me feel less isolated and stupid, which is how I was portrayed to be. And when you hear things enough times you start to believe them. Thank you for all that you are doing."

"I contacted the Citizens Advice Bureau to seek advice as I was finding the behaviour of my husband harder and harder to deal with and I thought I would benefit from finding out what my options were. They asked me some questions and said they had concerns that I might be suffering from domestic abuse and maybe I should give the charity VOICES a call."

"Social Services led me to VOICES. I thought I was the problem, that I wasn't a good enough partner and mother. I felt as if I had something wrong with me. Social Services assessed the situation, explained to me that they felt my relationship was toxic and pointed me in the direction of VOICES. I haven't looked back since."

Challenging Domestic Abuse: Changing Lives

VOICES Mission Priorities:

1. To create a whole-picture service – develop innovative direct support across a whole range of services that address multiple disadvantage from a strengths-based perspective, build resilience, help clients and their families recover and thrive as a local resource and create a nationally relevant centre of excellence in trauma recovery after domestic abuse
2. To create whole-system change by putting survivor voice at the heart of policy & research – develop VOICES as a platform for the unmediated voice of experience, providing opportunities for clients to contribute to research and policy, sharing learning and recovery expertise as a national resource for achieving system change in relation to domestic abuse.

Acknowledging domestic & sexual abuse drive multiple disadvantage

Working long-term with local survivors of domestic and sexual abuse in Bath & North East Somerset since 2014, VOICES recognise that domestic abuse and sexual abuse drive multiple disadvantage, and that economic and social disadvantages are both drivers and consequences of domestic abuse. We believe strongly that support for domestic abuse impacts can only be effective if it is designed with survivors, and follows a “No Them & Us” principle, which does not stereotype or stigmatise “typical” victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse and violence, or ignore those whose abuse goes unnoticed or ignored due to intersectional aspects of their experience and systemic/structural racialisation, marginalisation and discrimination.

This understanding lies at the heart of VOICES whole-picture service approach:

“Many women and girls who have suffered violence and abuse are deeply traumatised and go on to face multiple, complex issues. These experiences can be further compounded by overlapping and intersecting structural inequalities such as racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and classism. National policies such as the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition, where those with insecure immigration status are unable to access public funds, drive migrant women further into multiple forms of disadvantage. Women with extensive experience of physical and sexual violence are far more likely to experience disadvantage in many other areas of their lives.”

(Tackling Women’s Multiple Disadvantage in Manchester, AVA, Agenda, Lloyds Bank Foundation, March 2021) *1

“Mainstream service delivery models do not address the complexity of many women’s lives. To get support, women may need to access multiple and often fragmented services across a range of organisations in different locations. Women’s projects are often able to reach women who would not otherwise engage with services, and can provide holistic, women-centred and trauma informed support that empowers women to find their voice, recover from abuse and transform their lives”

(“How women’s projects combat disadvantage and transform lives”, Learning from the National Lottery Community Fund Women and Girls Initiative roundtable event in the south west, October 2020) *2

“It is vital that the challenges women face are not considered in isolation, or denied altogether, but that women’s needs are understood and addressed holistically. In order for services to meet the needs of women experiencing SMD a whole system approach is required and services need to be gender-informed, collaborative, and tailored to individuals’ needs.”

(“Gender and Severe and Multiple Disadvantage” by Golden Key, a partnership between statutory services, commissioners, the voluntary sector and people with lived experience across Bristol, published March 2021).*3

Links:

*1 https://avaproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Tackling-womens-multiple-disadvantage-in-Greater-Manchester_Final2.pdf?mc_cid=0affdb05cf&mc_eid=9e089c2a1c

*2 <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/documents/how-womens-projects-combat-disadvantage-and-transform-lives>

*3 <https://www.goldenkeybristol.org.uk/gender-report>

A Year of COVID-19

This Impact Report must acknowledge another kind of unique impact, that of the COVID-19 virus pandemic on the whole of society, but in which a particularly heavy burden has been borne by women and by those already suffering the impacts of abuse and violence, compounded by intersectional disadvantages for e.g. black, brown & minoritised women, migrants, refugees, LGBTQ+, disabled, elderly, non-neurotypical or otherwise marginalised survivors. The virus challenged VOICES – as it did society as a whole – to be imaginative, flexible, resilient and brave in taking steps to ensure the sustainability of the independent third sector and a continuity of support for people needing it most.

Smaller organisations are particularly vulnerable to changes in funding and upswings in demand for support, and a limited capacity to apply for new funding opportunities with short timeframes for application and delivery. However, VOICES was successful in achieving short-term COVID-19 emergency funding to continue services such as therapeutic support and to expand capacity to receive and support new referrals, with funds granted by Avon & Somerset PCC, Womens Aid and Comic Relief, and the National Lottery.

The challenge of short-term funding is exacerbated by the enduring impact of the pandemic, since the lockdown which began in late March 2020 was also in place a year later in March 2021, and the virus was still circulating and enforcing continued need for social distancing.

However, one year on from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, and from the beginning of a 5-year Reaching Communities grant awarded by the National Lottery in March 2020, VOICES achieved not only continuity of service to all our existing and new clients, but also produced innovations, including an outdoor drop-in social group in partnership with another local charity that operates facilities set in a welcoming and calming green space, and the development of digital support for survivors, including those going through the family courts. All of the above took place alongside Govt Covid rules and regulations and with safeguarding measures in place for staff and clients.

Referral demand fluctuated due to the impacts of lockdown e.g. school closures, victims and survivors having more limited time to safely seek support, the falling away of other community-based support and increased social isolation and mental/physical ill-health.

“Referral demand doesn’t tell the whole picture – service capacity is affected by multiple factors including funding limitations, staff and partner availability and increased complexity of client need”.

Safelives report on Annual Practitioner Survey results, 2020/21

Nonetheless, by late 2020, VOICES was supporting c. 160 clients, a figure the charity had anticipated working with by 2022/23.

VOICES Impact during the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020-2021

1. WHOLE PICTURE DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT

Mission Priority 1

To create a whole-picture service – develop innovative direct support across a whole range of services that address multiple disadvantage from a strengths-based perspective, build resilience, help clients and their families recover and thrive as a local resource and create a nationally relevant centre of excellence in trauma recovery after domestic abuse

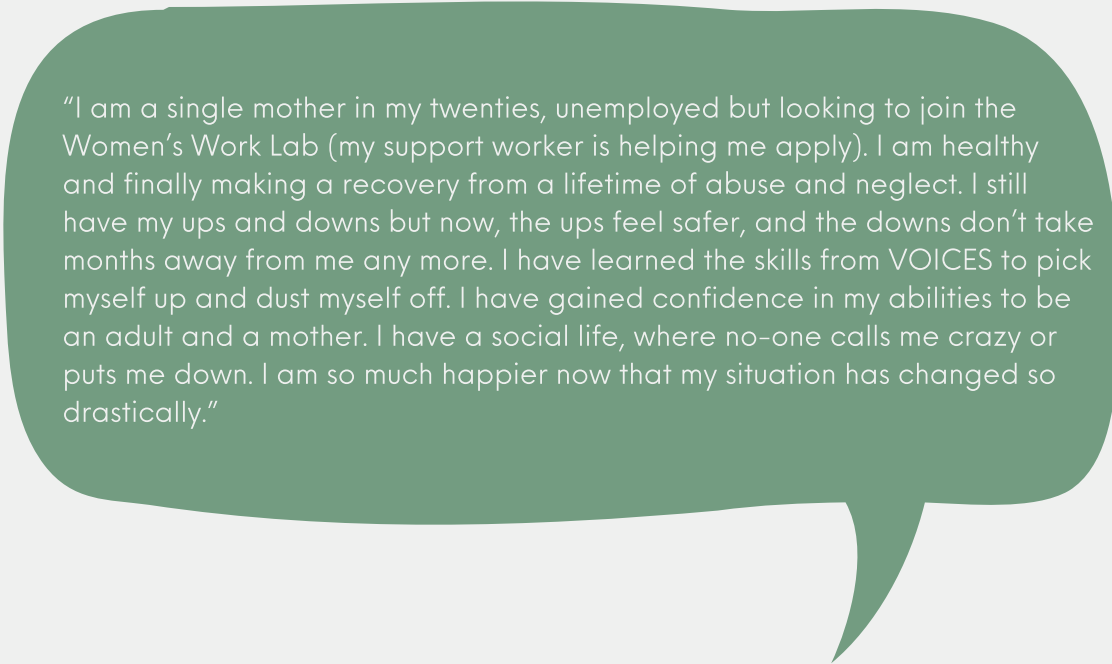
Seven years after a group of local women survivors of domestic abuse started the charity in Bath, VOICES has succeeded in bringing a range of new services to the county, including recovery support, specialist counselling, a free legal clinic, a specialist hardship fund, and training support for professionals. The charity has brought greater funding and resources into the county for holistic and long-term domestic support that would otherwise not be available, among others securing 5-year funding from the National Lottery Reaching Communities grant programme totalling £319,000 in March 2020. This is a significant investment in the safety and wellbeing of our local community.

VOICES have further developed a whole-picture support model that is gender sensitive and trauma informed through 2020-21.

VOICES' trauma expertise has enabled the charity to develop a gender sensitive model of DA and SA support, acknowledging the specific needs of our clients, and while not exclusively supporting women, providing a whole-picture model within a women-only safe space to enable women with experience of trauma to feel safe and supported to disclose, be supported and recover. The range of services provided have been developed with and for survivors and, together with specific therapeutic support, they promote good mental health in a non-clinical environment.

VOICES Services

Stronger together: Group programmes



"I am a single mother in my twenties, unemployed but looking to join the Women's Work Lab (my support worker is helping me apply). I am healthy and finally making a recovery from a lifetime of abuse and neglect. I still have my ups and downs but now, the ups feel safer, and the downs don't take months away from me any more. I have learned the skills from VOICES to pick myself up and dust myself off. I have gained confidence in my abilities to be an adult and a mother. I have a social life, where no-one calls me crazy or puts me down. I am so much happier now that my situation has changed so drastically."

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdown from March 2020, VOICES continued to run groups for clients, including the Freedom Programme, the Recovery Toolkit and a social/drop-in group for clients. Shortly before lockdown, staff assessed their entire case load to adapt support plans, ensuring that all clients could receive continuity of support in the way they wished and needed. A mixed approach of remote and direct support continued throughout the pandemic year, and there was no period in which the charity stopped delivering direct support entirely. A small number of clients with acute mental health or other challenges were supported throughout in liaison with other services, to ensure their safety and wellbeing. The model allowed staff to be responsive and flexible, and to support women to leave relationships safely even during strict lockdown conditions and achieve safe housing or relocation, while adhering to the Govt lockdown rules.

Remote delivery of trauma-informed working practices were piloted during the summer with a social and creative evening group running through July-August. The learning from this group enabled a remote Freedom Programme to be designed to run from September 2020.

Face-to-face group work resumed from September 2020 when it became possible to resume the delivery of the Freedom Programme and the Recovery Toolkit, a follow-on programme to support recovery of people no longer in abusive relationships. These programmes were delivered at COVID-safe venues sourced and funded by VOICES in the community in Bath.

VOICES provided the only face-to-face group programmes for domestic abuse survivors during lockdown in Bath & Northeast Somerset

VOICES' approach to continuing direct and tailored support for clients and resuming group programmes as soon as possible ensured that an increased number of local people could access the life-changing benefits of the Freedom Programme despite the pandemic, and meant that face-to-face support for domestic abuse victims and survivors did not stop entirely in the Bath area as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of clients stated that face to face opportunities for support were vital for their physical and psychological safety during this period.

Clients have consistently told us the flexible, choice based, trauma Informed support from VOICES has made the difference between returning to or entering into another abusive relationship and focusing on their recovery and a fulfilling future for them and their children.

"I was sceptical at first that the Freedom programme would suit me. However, from the very first session I felt very at ease in the women-only environment. We were all from different walks of life, with slightly different experiences, but we all had something in common. We had all been victims of abuse, and we all needed a safe and kind place to be able to meet and deal with what we were going through. Some were still in their relationships, some had left, but meeting other women and hearing about some of their experiences made me realise that what I was going through wasn't just in my head. I felt believed, listened to and cared about. I started to feel stronger and more confident in my own thoughts and feelings."

"It felt great to be in a women-only environment as I needed to be around other women who understood and because of my mental health struggles (PTSD) due to the abuse, it felt safe. I have also done the Recovery Toolkit, which was very useful."

"The Freedom Project allowed me to understand the abuse and changed my perceptions of my ex. Recovery Toolkit gave me the strength to move on."

Individual recovery support

No client was turned away from VOICES who sought support during the pandemic. The charity continued to offer whole-picture support on an individual basis, supporting people either remotely if wished or directly with safety and safeguarding, family court proceedings, education and child contact issues, statutory services involvement, housing & refuge, financial abuse, debt and benefits advocacy work.

While fewer groups were running, the VOICES team focused on individual support, ensuring capacity existed to meet the increased complexity of clients' situations.

During COVID, clients continually told us how much they appreciate the fact they can still engage with VOICES support at this time in a way that suited them. The charity provided intensive support to those most at risk, and continued to also facilitate counselling sessions either in person, on phone or by zoom. An individual strategy for each woman rather than a blanket policy allowed us to maintain the support of our most vulnerable clients, reducing the risk of statutory services having to become involved and safeguarding their mental health, and stabilizing recovery and personal safety.

"My child and I were left without shelter, I moved into a homeless hostel with my son. I had little to no money, the only furniture I had was a high chair & a crib for my baby. I was also left scared and alone. I didn't know who was safe and who wasn't. I didn't know how to go about claiming benefits, I also didn't trust my own intelligence to fill out the forms correctly. I would often go without eating so that my child could. I became very afraid of being alone, of going out with my son alone, I felt as if I was a child, caring for a baby. I had no confidence in my abilities as a mother.

I lost my home to my ex-partner, I had no income, I had to quit my job to take care of our sick child. I was completely dependent on my ex-partner. I needed to start claiming benefits. VOICES helped me claim UC and PIP.

I was offered the Freedom programme, the Recovery Toolkit, 1-to-1 long-term therapy, MATES social and outdoor groups, financial support to help access white goods, support to claim benefits. I have been offered access to the Law Clinic & a staff member has come to solicitor appointments with me. A member of staff offered to come to crown court with me."

Support for Families

Almost everything VOICES does in terms of individual recovery and education/group work is crucially influential in the lives of the children whose parents we support.

Due to COVID-19, home schooling and mental health of children has been a new area of support for VOICES – connecting women with resources and guidance to reassure and advise them in this area, and liaising with schools around expectations and places for children in vulnerable situations.

In the Freedom Programme the sections on the Bad Father and Effects of Violence on Children are instrumental in helping mothers identify the effects on them and on their children of their situations. As they move forward with their lives, they are better informed and more able to avoid similar situations.

Younger children benefit from future relationships which are hopefully healthier. Older children have mothers who have tools to teach them about moving into their adult life in a responsible and respectful way and this will have an effect on any children they may go on to have, thus benefiting future generations.

Because the mothers of pre-teen children who come to us receive help in terms of practical and emotional support around housing/debt/benefits/social aspects/education etc. we are instrumental in providing a stronger and more reliable foundation than there may have been for these children.

Case study

Sue

Sue has a child age 5 who was born with physical difficulties. The child has now finished his reception year at school and entered Year 1. Because of his physical difficulties there were many problems that were causing the child extreme anxiety and this was affecting his relationship with his peers, his mum and his learning.

The school was not to blame, as staff were unaware of some of the difficulties the child had. It was with support from VOICES that Sue was able to ask for a meeting with the school. During the meeting, Sue was supported and able to explain the situation, as was the school. A plan was put in place to support the child in a way that was wholly appropriate.

The child's future is now much brighter – he has begun to enjoy school, his learning has improved monumentally, his teachers are really happy with him, he is making friends and Sue trusts the school and feels able to communicate with them.

Without timely support from VOICES we believe this young child would have begun to behave in a way that would have caused disruption and despair for both the school and for Sue, but most importantly for himself and his future relationships with adults and education.

* Name changed to protect confidentiality

Family work during COVID-19

VOICES' whole-picture approach to domestic abuse involves a strong focus on family, and particularly children. Parenting challenges included the effects of lockdown on traumatised parents and children and ongoing abuse and harassment by abusive ex-partners, which often centred on child contact and home schooling arrangements. Most of our clients received support during lockdown with parenting and 65% reported improvements in this area of concern to them.

Although VOICES was established to help adult survivors first and foremost, the team also extended their activities to provide direct support to children impacted by domestic abuse, including access to mental health support and advocacy on their behalf at multi-agency meetings. Almost a quarter (24.5%) of clients had children directly supported by VOICES.

Examples of outcomes benefiting parents and children during the COVID-19 lockdown period include:

- Securing safe housing by getting them on the housing priority list (Band A) for 3 women with under 12s.
- Liaising with schools in at least 5 cases over issues such as contact arrangements, homeschooling, school meals and pupil premium awards.
- Supporting a mother to apply for an assessment for her child to address her special educational needs.
- Providing a bridge into other services including Southside Family Support and children's centres.

- Liaising with midwives and health visitors to help them understand the domestic abuse a mother is suffering and the impact on the baby/ child.
- Being an active partner in child protection conferences for the same reason.
- Accessing safe accommodation (refuge) for one woman and her teenager who are now recovering from 15 years of post-separation abuse.
- Supporting a client throughout lockdown to access the right education setting for her son and to obtain a job in healthcare.
- Enabling a client we have been supporting for 2 years through separation, family abuse and care proceedings to begin her medical career with St Johns Ambulance.
- Ensuring a client of 3 years can move home, away from toxic neighbours, by securing her priority band A status on the housing register. This had been delaying her recovery process as she felt unable to completely escape the abuse, she turned to the perpetrator for protection.
- Supporting 2 mothers of under-5s through Care proceedings in court. There is no other service providing this level of support. Both women had IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors) but they were not able to provide support with this.
- Our outdoor group welcomed 15 children under 12 from January-March 2021, providing their only social/ educational contact while schools were shut. We provided a childcare worker to take them on nature walks and play outdoors safely together whilst their mothers (all lone parents) were able to have a break from their 24/7 childcare responsibilities. One woman told us without this group to look forward to, she wasn't sure if she would have survived the second lockdown without a mental health crisis.

"My son no longer witnesses an angry father punching things, my son no longer copies his fathers behaviours. He doesn't have to listen to horrible arguments, he doesn't have to hear the terrible language used against his mother. Most importantly, my child has 1 loving parent and not 2 parents at war. Together through VOICES and a solicitor, my son gets to have safe visits with his dad now once a week.(I chose to let him see his father, as long as contact is safe at all times, VOICES helps me enforce this regularly)."

"I don't have a lot of healthy family members, but I do have VOICES, and I can honestly say that all the members of staff are always there for me in a time of crisis. I don't know where I would be today without them. My life could have gone the other way very easily with my family history. I genuinely feel like VOICES saved me from so much pain and heartache, VOICES helped clear the path for me, and I cannot thank them enough."

Long-term working & whole picture support.

The following case study is an example of how the trauma-informed multi-disciplinary approach by VOICES has enabled a client and her children to leave an abusive situation, be rehoused and now start to rebuild their lives. It also demonstrates that when a woman is left in a vulnerable position after domestic abuse she is often subject to further abuse and that long-term practical and emotional support is key.

Case Study

Marla

Marla approached us in 2019 and asked to attend the Freedom Programme as she explained she had experienced an extremely violent relationship and was still struggling with the psychological impact 7 years later.

At VOICES, a client journey begins with a meeting at a time and venue chosen to meet their needs, so we can talk about what we offer and assess what will make a difference to a woman and her children (if applicable). When we met Marla we found that she was currently living with her 2 children and one grandchild (also a victim of DA) in a friend's property just outside of the Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES) area. She explained that when she left refuge accommodation several years earlier, she had wanted to be close to extended family (including adult children) in B&NES and that the mutual support they provided each other was essential.

Marla and the children lived in one room and all benefits money was taken by her friend to cover rent and shopping. Marla was living purely on her teenage child's DLA money. As Marla built trust, and learned from the Freedom Programme the tactics of abuse, she revealed that although the person she was living with had been kind to offer her a home originally, she now felt trapped and controlled and was increasingly worried about his behaviour towards herself and the children. Her teenager (SEN and PTSD) would not leave their room, and was not attending school. Her other child was struggling in school also.

Marla had approached the local Housing Options team and been told she should look for private rental accommodation. She had no savings or landlord references and the Local Housing Allowance would not cover the rent so this option seemed impossible.

VOICES offered Marla a place on the Freedom programme alongside 1-to-1 work to address her housing situation and make referrals to other services for the family.

We supported her to make a homelessness application to B&NES on the grounds it was unreasonable for her to stay in her current home. We had to advocate for the family in several meetings as the Housing Options team maintained she had no local connection because the friend's home was a few hundred metres outside of the B&NES. The nature of the relationship with the friend was questioned and when Marla explained how she felt she was told she should maybe go back into a refuge. Marla knew that her teenager would not cope with this and VOICES were aware that by moving out of the area to refuge, she would be far away from her extended family, who needed her support.

VOICES advocated for the family's needs at repeated meetings over 3 months before we were finally successful in obtaining the decision that B&NES had a duty to house Marla's family. During this time we were also able to engage the family with a local family support team.

Marla was placed in temporary accommodation by B&NES in the winter of 2019. She was then moved to a temporary flat with support. She was able to have control of her money again and started saving for her move to a new home.

When Marla suffered a significant bereavement in lockdown, VOICES were able to tailor her support to take account of the grief the family are experiencing and ensure she had a trusted worker to help her manage the number of services involved.

Throughout lockdown Marla and the children (in a 2 bed flat with no garden) were provided with fresh fruit and veg by VOICES and telephone support for her to talk through homeschooling challenges, signpost to activities and resources to support the whole family's mental health.

Finally, in mid-2020, the family moved into a 3-bedroom home in a local village, which is social housing, affordable and long term. Grandchildren are now able to visit regularly. VOICES continued to be involved, as the impact of Covid and Marla adjusting to having her own home has proved an extremely challenging time for the family. The safe environment of their own home has finally allowed Marla and the children to begin to explore the ongoing effects of past trauma but at the same time the global pandemic has raised anxiety for them all.

VOICES chaired multi-agency family meetings and ensured the whole family had support in order to address the mental health needs that were emerging. We linked the family with a local church community providing volunteers to decorate their home. Marla has accessed Talking Therapies trauma support. Her teenager has a home tutor provided and her other child is receiving professional support to identify how she can successfully reintegrate in secondary education. VOICES' 1-to-1 support has been helping Marla budget and deal with debt so the family is financially stable. We have also been able to ensure she is not penalised by her younger child's school for their sporadic attendance, and have liaised with the educational Welfare Team.

Having completed the Freedom Programme with VOICES in 2020, Marla will attend the Recovery Toolkit group. She is active in helping other women understand the nature and impact of DA in groups and has support in turn from the other members she has made friends with.



Staying accessible through the pandemic

VOICES was able to achieve COVID-19 funding from the PCC to take on an experienced Referrals Coordinator and Law Lead with legal and Mackenzie Friend expertise and experience of chairing MARACs and managing refuge provision. This new role ensured that we were able to provide an accessible DA specialist gateway service into support at a time when many survivors had only been able to access helpline or remote advice from services, if any.

VOICES are now able to respond to referrals and assess women quickly. This enables a smoother pathway into the right VOICES service for self and agency referrals and improves multi agency working. This flexibility has meant women can still receive support in a way they choose and feel safe with during the pandemic. This has reduced the risk of harm for women and children, prevented crises and the need for statutory support and resources to be involved. We have maintained support and contact with all existing clients and increased our caseload also without having to resort to a "one size fits all" approach.

It also means that we were better able to "hold" the situations facing people who were coming to us, even when they were not able to immediately access a service, or not able to safely make changes at that point.

"VOICES have been so important to me from the first contact I made with them and throughout the past year and a half. They have been kind and caring, and enabled me to see that things that were happening in my married life were not normal nor acceptable. I was still living with my husband during the beginning of the pandemic, and the situation at home became even worse during this time. The Freedom Programme that I had started attending had stopped due to lockdown, and my husband was making it practically impossible for us all to leave the house at all. Even through all this, VOICES were there for me and I felt supported. I felt that someone knew what was going on in my life and cared about whether I was OK or not. I was able to grab a phone call with my support worker whenever I could sneak away from the house, and it was so comforting to talk things over. They helped me have the confidence and strength to plan to leave my home, and the abuse."

Domestic and Sexual Abuse counselling

Domestic and sexual abuse often coexist, and the traumatic impacts of these experiences are often misunderstood or go unrecognised while survivors receive interventions or find themselves in court processes. Yet the harm caused to mental health and wellbeing is profound and widespread: recent research published in the British Journal of Psychiatry revealed that women who have been abused by a partner are 3 times more likely to suffer depression or severe conditions such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder than other women. Generic approaches that are not trauma informed or specialist in nature may fail to address or even worsen a client's trauma and PTSD.

Being able to continue with domestic and sexual abuse counselling both face to face and remotely through the pandemic provided a critical service to stabilise and improve psychological wellbeing for clients who are particularly badly affected by lockdown. In response to people's needs, VOICES provides specialist psychotherapy support addressing both domestic abuse and often co-existing sexual abuse, or childhood abuse experiences. This is long-term, trauma-informed and person-centred psychotherapy with a focus on stabilisation and recovery. It provides added value to group work, as women are able to attend while receiving support with embedded trauma.

We use trauma informed psychotherapy (TIP) and psychoeducation. Most forms of counselling and psychotherapy use self-reflection for better understanding, however a traumatised person, especially one who has been repeatedly blamed in abusive relationships, can experience psychotherapy as a spiral into greater depths of self-blame, and if the practitioner is not trauma informed the client can be re-traumatised, deepening the harm caused in the DA relationship. It is innovative to use TIP alongside group work, the Freedom Programme and recovery work, allowing the person to grow in the therapeutic relationship and within the VOICES community, being seen and validated, which consolidates progress while reducing the risk of being re-traumatised.

The teamwork is innovative and very successful in stabilising clients as they progress. Many organisations compartmentalise different needs, mental health, physical health, and practical services, but clients can feel invisible and misunderstood. VOICES uses this approach to integrate their response.

The impact in terms of local community benefit is that women who don't meet different services' criteria can access support at VOICES and recover from the impact of Domestic Abuse, mentally and physically. Many service users are mothers; recovery means they are able to care for their children, meaning the children are less often in care and are better equipped to cope with their own recovery. Well mothers and children save the state a vast amount of financial support, together with the intrinsic value of people's well-being contributing to a positive society.

Case study

Lily

VOICES groups helped Lily understand her partner was toxic, but she hadn't accepted how dangerous he was and the impact on her extended family. His behaviour included violence, sexual violence and humiliation in front of family and friends. He groomed her to believe she was worthless and deserved this. Now the children have left, she is isolated and sinking into deeper dependency. The concern was his violence was escalating and he was controlling her finances. During a previous attempt to leave, she had collapsed with anxiety; her return strengthened his sense of total control.

Therapy sessions dealt with the impacts of low self-esteem, and anxiety. Supporting growth in self-care, resilience and self-worth, in tandem with understanding 'trauma bonds' and 'traumatised responses.' This allowed Lily to separate fear from truth, and to maintain boundaries. She left him and gained a fair financial settlement, meaning she could house herself. This plausibly saved her life, and gave freedom from a life of sexual degradation and violence.

She has improved her relationship with her daughters and grandchildren, who can also move on.

Lily said:

"You have helped me change, my outlook is better. I have learned to love myself."

"Women who have been abused by a partner are 3 times more likely to suffer depression or severe conditions such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder than other women."

(Research published in the British Journal of Psychiatry, reported in The Guardian, 7 June 2019)

Free legal clinic for VOICES clients

VOICES' family law advice service continued throughout the pandemic, despite the temporary closure during 2020 of our free Law Clinic because of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown affecting our partner, the University of the West of England Law Department. With pro bono support from a family law firm in Chippenham, and individual support from the team, women were able to continue to gain advice and support to attend remote court hearings at a safe space with a support worker or at home if preferred. There is strong uptake of this service, which is provided free of charge by VOICES, and 41.5% of clients achieved positive outcomes to legal issues due to working with the VOICES team and partners.

Due to funding achieved in late 2020, VOICES now has a dedicated member of staff to manage referrals, assessments and legal support (running our online Law Clinic) This need is a prominent theme of our work as many women and children are having to negotiate the Family Court process through the pandemic and beyond.

“After leaving, my husband remained living in the family home and refused to vacate this to allow me to return with the children. I applied for an occupation order, however the court was unable to deal with this at the first hearing and I did not have the financial resources to pursue this further. The children and I lived with my parents for 4 and a half months, with my daughter and me sharing a bedroom. Then in December 2020 we moved into rented accommodation. The abuse caused a lot of financial strain. Whilst in the marriage, financial threats were made on regular occasions, with him threatening to withhold money from me. This financial abuse continued after I left as he refused to provide any financial support. I have had to borrow £14,000 to date to pay for legal fees. I have now reached the point where I cannot afford legal representation and so I have represented myself through child arrangement order hearings and shortly will start on the financial settlement alone also. I have never claimed any benefits before, but now I receive Universal Credit to top up my salary, meaning we can afford to rent a house, pay for food and bills etc. I have used the Law Clinic on 3 occasions.”

Practice Education

VOICES provides annual practice education to social work students from Bath University. Students have the opportunity to learn in a practice setting from VOICES' team about trauma-informed approaches to domestic abuse support and the importance of involving survivors in the design of their own service. This provides expertise and insight, which they can take into their own working practice as they begin their professional lives. In return, VOICES benefits from their engagements and support with both group work and CRM.

Financial Abuse Support

VOICES Hardship Fund

Through our individual support work and the experience of running group programmes since 2014, we have identified that the multiple and complex needs of adults and families impacted by abuse mean that people cannot access crisis loans or grants. Crucial, small-scale financial and practical help at the right time can be instrumental in helping survivors make significant progress towards recovery and a productive and fulfilled life after domestic abuse.

Clients subject to coercive control and financial abuse are particularly vulnerable to short-term debts and problems caused by a perpetrator. This can restrict access to other forms of financial support, and evidence of income/outgoings is particularly hard for many domestic abuse victims to provide. Specialist advocacy from VOICES and elsewhere is critical in understanding the whole picture around finances, debt and need that together create hardship for adult and child victims of domestic abuse.

12% – almost 1 in 8 of VOICES clients – received Hardship funding to overcome barriers at transition points in their recovery.

During COVID, the Hardship Fund has proven an innovative and flexible way to address unexpected expenses over lockdown for women who have had a drop in income or needed to update tech in order to homeschool. Examples are as varied as the individual circumstances of our clients, and include:

- Fresh food and heating costs, together with budgeting support, for a client with complex PTSD and a young child
- Health monitoring equipment for an unwell client with anxiety, living alone
- A replacement mobile phone for isolated client with depression/anxiety, enabling them to keep in touch with family in her country of origin
- A mattress for a client denied access to family home and belongings by ex-partner
- UCAS application fee for a client wishing to access higher education
- A replacement mobile phone for a teenage child at risk of harm and isolated by the need to move to safe accommodation
- Removal costs to enable a client to leave accommodation and cut ties with abuser, until a refuge place became available
- Travel costs to out-of-area family court hearings

This approach has delivered new knowledge about the nature of financial/economic abuse, about gaps in provision of short-term crisis funding for abuse survivors, and about the barriers hindering recovery for survivors and their families. Targeted crisis funding such as this has recently been recognised nationally as an effective approach, through a national scheme called the Circle Fund, run by SafeLives and NatWest, involving specialist services around the country. VOICES' CEO is a member of the steering group for the national project.

Hardship fund case study

Rina

An attendee at one of our groups disclosed that she had failed a law studies exam, having passed all others, and did not have the funds required for her retake, so faced the prospect of a delay of 1 year to be able to qualify and work professionally to support her children. She did not have family support and had young children, yet had managed to continue her studies despite her experiences after leaving an abusive husband, losing her home and social network. VOICES were able to cover the exam fee, and thus open the way for her return to work and professional and personal development.

"We moved into our rented home a week before Christmas and we were so touched and grateful as our support worker dropped a hamper of Christmas goodies to us a couple of days after we moved in. She helped us with furniture as my daughter didn't have a mattress for her bed, and she arranged for us to have a new mattress via the Hardship Fund that VOICES have."

(A client)

VOICES in numbers

Outcomes in Figures and Percentages

Measurable impacts of work with individual clients:		
Reducing anxiety and fear	85	90%
Reducing isolation and improving social integration and healthy relationships through peer support	77	82%
Improving safety for survivors and their children	87	92.5%
Improving mental health & wellbeing	73	77.5%
Improving physical health & wellbeing	30	32%
Improving housing situation	33	35%
Addressing debt/benefits/ finances concerns	35	37%
Supporting working, skills, training and volunteering opportunities	16	17%
Addressing legal and rights concerns	39	41.5%
Improving parent/child relationships	61	65%
Providing support specific to children's needs	23	24.5%
Support with multiple needs/dual diagnosis/high risk/safeguarding	34	36%
Clients receiving 2 or more VOICES services	44	47%
Hardship payment made	11	12%
Number reporting outcomes in 5 or more areas	76	71%
Number reporting outcomes in 8 or more areas	41	43.5%
Number reporting outcomes in 10 or more areas	19	20%

*Data based on number of clients with full records i.e 94 total

2. WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE THROUGH SURVIVOR VOICE

Mission Priority 2.

To create whole-system change through putting survivor voice at the heart of policy & research – develop VOICES as a platform for the unmediated voice of experience, providing opportunities for clients to contribute to research and policy, sharing learning and recovery expertise as a national resource for achieving system change in relation to domestic abuse.

To enable survivors to contribute to knowledge about domestic abuse, support to recover sufficiently must be provided. VOICES set out to fund and provide this kind of recovery support, so that whole-system learning, and change, becomes possible.

Our role in development and research alongside academic and strategic partners offers our clients the opportunity to use their lived experiences. They transform negative experiences into valuable insights for policy makers and we know this is healing, and empowering. Effective change and successful services can only happen through co-creation.

VOICES' founding mission was to ensure survivors are at the heart of the conversation locally and nationally around how best to prevent and respond to domestic abuse. After 6 years of building relationships in the research world, as well as among national partners including SafeLives and Women's Aid, the spectrum of VOICES' consultation work has grown to include family law (family law professionals and training needs, Cafcass and child contact), health and mental health (Violence and Abuse Mental Health Network), and local government (advocating for survivor to be creating, not rating services at local area level).

Women's Voices at the Centre

The involvement of survivor's voices via VOICES in developing strategies for the prevention of domestic abuse testifies to the reach a small, local, survivor-led charity can have, through its focus on long-term recovery work and advocacy for survivors to help create services. The UK Government's current move towards developing a Women's Health Strategy points to a similar focus: A consultation opened via a call for evidence, which listed six core themes, the first of which is "Placing women's voices at the centre of their health and care."

However, as a recent letter in the BMJ notes:

"A strategy that aims to place women's voices at the centre of their health and care must not simply require women to carry on shouting into a void. It should require system leaders to start taking patient experience more seriously: treating it as evidence, and building it into practice."

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/05/13/placing-womens-voices-at-the-centre-of-their-care/>

VOICES is a member of:

- The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board in Bath & North East Somerset (the only non-commissioned specialist service and survivor voice organisation on the Board)
- Women's Aid's national Research Policy, Consultation and Campaigns Group (RPCC)
- SafeLives Domestic Abuse Services CEO group, meeting regularly through the pandemic to discuss service delivery and challenges
- The Violence and Abuse Mental Health Research Network
- The Mental Health Collaborative for Bath & North East Somerset
- The LGBTQ+ Action Group for Bath & North East Somerset
- The Trauma Informed Network in the South West

A key outcome of VOICES' whole-picture support model and survivor consultation was the development of the **VOICES Plan on a Page**:

This is a planning tool for holistic DA service commissioning and delivery

- Offered to the Domestic Abuse Partnership board ahead of the new Domestic Abuse Bill becoming law and bringing with it new obligations and recommendations for Local Authorities ("Supporting the development of an integrated domestic violence and abuse care pathway for BANES").
- Provided a whole-picture DA service delivery model to the Mental Health Transformation partnership leads for BANES, as part of advocating for Domestic Abuse to be included in the initial MH Transformation delivery plan.
- Provides a framework for a whole-picture and long-term Domestic Abuse response by organisations and local areas and used to inform a presentation about the importance of supporting meaningful consultation with survivors to over 500 participants in a DA Bill Ready workshop organised by SafeLives in March 2021.

VOICES' Consultation and Research involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020 includes:

Local consultation

VOICES were an integral part of the local response to supporting DA survivors in the community when lockdown began, through:

Domestic Abuse Partnership (DAP) Board – as members of the local board coordinating domestic abuse response, providing a focus on survivor voice, holistic support and recovery needs, advocating for mental health support for local victims and survivors, and advising on public messaging and pathways to support for Local Authority and police communications teams.

VOICES provided a position paper to the DAP in February 2021 on survivor consultation and integrated domestic abuse response for B&NES.

Covid-19 DA Taskforce group – coordinating local domestic abuse response through the first 6 months of the pandemic.

Compassionate Communities hub – provided DA awareness and referrals information to the helpline staff working directly with members of the community.

National consultation

Cafcass

VOICES' CEO Ursula Lindenberg with other members of the Cafcass Learning & Improvement board took part in the first independent Cafcass case moderation audit chaired by Professor Eileen Munro. The team assessed case records and moderation. She subsequently contributed to an independent Cafcass Complaints Review process, and to the development of the Cafcass Learning & Improvement Plan, due to cover all aspects of training, practice and feedback from 2021. She is a member of the Cafcass Family Forum, established in 2021.

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

The MoJ research unit looking at **Repeated Returns to Court** in family justice settings consulted directly with VOICES staff and clients to compile a report provided directly to the Justice Minister.

SafeLives

VOICES CEO Ursula Lindenberg is a SafeLives Pioneer, who featured in the podcast <https://safelives.org.uk/reach-in> as part of the national **Reach In campaign** to raise community awareness of domestic abuse and bystander support.

Home Office

As a Pioneer, Ursula supported the development with SafeLives of the Home Office's **Ask for Ani campaign**, allowing people at risk from domestic abuse to seek confidential support in pharmacies.

National Perpetrator Strategy

VOICES is a signatory of the national call to action for investment in a national strategy to address perpetrator behaviour.

Survivor voice in national health strategy

On 10 December 2020, VOICES' CEO provided a keynote presentation to a national conference, **"Identifying and Supporting People Who Are Experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse: Improving Practice during Covid-19"**, speaking alongside Kenny Gibson, NHS Head of Safeguarding.

Survivor Voice in the development of local area response to the new Domestic Abuse Bill

VOICES' insights into the benefits and challenges of survivors creating, rather than rating, domestic abuse policy and provision meant we were delighted when our CEO was invited to deliver a presentation together with SafeLives Authentic Voice Coordinator Rosie Bacon to over 600 participants at a national DA Bill Ready workshop held by SafeLives for local authorities and statutory bodies in March 2021, on the benefits of meaningful survivor consultation for policy makers and practice.

This resulted in a request from 2 local area domestic abuse leads for VOICES to provide a workshop on meaningful survivor consultation for local multi-agency forums tasked with domestic abuse policy in their Local Authorities.

VOICES supports clients to take part in the project steering group consulting on research design and implementation with the PRECODE project by University of Bristol Medical School, looking at the impact of COVID-19 upon GPs' ability to identify and support survivors of domestic abuse through remote consultation. This research will help shape new national guidelines for the health response to domestic abuse at primary care level.

VOICES are members of the Violence and Abuse Mental Health Research Network, and have provided survivor consultation to inform the design of a University College London research project assessing domestic abuse outcomes for mothers and children, through 2020 and 2021. Two further consultation projects, looking at maternal health and care proceedings, and health visiting and domestic abuse, will begin in late 2021.

Recognition for VOICES work and impact

Co-authoring a paper published in the BMJ

VOICES' work with health researchers led to a request to provide lived experience insights to a research project looking at education of medical doctors in identifying and responding to domestic abuse among their patients, and to co-authorship of a paper published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) in May 2021. The BMJ, which has a circulation of 80,000, is a leading international medical journal, and the article highlighted concerns about medical professionals listening and responding to survivors' needs for care and safety.

Providing survivor voice nationally

"VOICES' plays a unique role working alongside SafeLives and with our stakeholders in our mission to end domestic abuse. VOICES is a highly trusted, valued and respected organisation and CEO and SafeLives Pioneer Ursula, courageously leads staff and clients to use their lived experience as expertise to authentically inform and influence our work, playing an important part in transforming the national response to domestic abuse. This has spanned 6 years and their expertise, bravery and influence keeps growing.

In relation to Covid 19 their experience resulted in podcasts on our website for friends and families of domestic abuse victims and Family Courts which have been accessed over two thousand times, and were instrumental in developing the Ask for ANI scheme, available in 5,000 pharmacies across the UK and is utilised once every 30 hours by victims at risk of often serious harm, and were at the heart and start of creating our #ReachIn campaign. For the last 6 months we have been developing a Public Health whole systems response to domestic abuse which has been co-created with VOICES expertise, leading to a model and tools and our new DA Bill ready programme of work which Ursula helped launch at an event in March for over 500 participants.

They have guided and worked alongside us to from challenging the response to survivors and children in the Family Justice system, influencing the whole family response to domestic abuse and child safeguarding, to supporting local areas to be DA Bill ready. Challenging the accountability and responsibility of those in positions of power and elevating the role of survivor voice and expertise.

From 2018 and a meeting called by Jess Philips MP and Cafcass, to the 2020 review of Cafcass' Domestic Abuse Pathway, to most recently participating in national training of Cafcass practice staff, VOICES have brought their unique perspective of lived expertise to how processes, tools and structures impact on child and adult victims of domestic abuse.

VOICES critical, expertise and solution focused approach has influenced Cafcass improvement framework and gained their trust to be invited to join the Learning and Improvement Board established as a result of the Harm Report and participate in the Moderation Panel led by Dr Eileen Munro.

Cafcass' Assistant Director of Policy said: Ursula from VOICES has been a member of the Cafcass Learning and Improvement Board since it was established in September 2020 to oversee an improvement programme for Cafcass' work with children and families who have experienced domestic abuse. Ursula's input has been invaluable and has ensured that the voice of those with lived experience of domestic abuse has been at the heart of our improvement plans. We hope that the improvements will have a long lasting impact on the experiences of the children and families that Cafcass works with.

Other key moments include in 2021 staff and clients participating in a Ministry of Justice Review to understand the causes of repeat cases. VOICES provided client expertise and challenged the approach the MOJ team were taking to their research. Results included paying survivors for their time, an expectation VOICES lead on, to demonstrate the value and equality of lived expertise.

Legal Education Funding, which we secured in 2020 was almost entirely down to VOICES and Ursula who've pushed us for over 5 years to pay attention to what is happening in Family Court and the impact this is having on children and adult victims/survivors of domestic abuse. This uniquely collaborative project will train lawyers/barristers in family courts, shaped by understanding survivors' perspectives to get better, safer judicial outcomes for adults and children. VOICES will lead the transformation of system reform and the impact on survivors of domestic abuse having faith in the system, in believing their safety and that of their child is paramount and better, safer social justice outcomes are achieved.

VOICES are a trusted specialist service whose expertise and insight we need as a second tier organisation to influence national media, Government bodies, statutory organisations and even Royalty – through our patron the Duchess of Cornwall, and to reach out to survivors nationally. We cannot do this as authentically or powerfully without the lived expertise that VOICES brings to these conversations.

We bring together voice, data and practice to the doors and ears of those with the power to make change, providing a platform for VOICES to be heard and most importantly to directly reach survivors and their families across the UK. Transforming how engaging with services feels for them and improving safety, outcomes, health and opportunities to live the life they want beyond domestic abuse."

Michelle Phillips, Director of Practice, SafeLives

Looking ahead: Next steps for VOICES

New website for VOICES, a new service for survivors

VOICES have been busy developing a new and more accessible website for the charity together with MODULAR Digital in Bristol. This work was funded by Comic Relief/ Women's Aid and supported by the Dot Project. The new website was developed with survivors and will enable the charity to provide more services remotely for those who cannot directly attend groups and individual support, and to provide more information about our survivor voice activities.

The new website launched in November 2021: www.voicescharity.org

VOICES Safe Space Centre for Bath

The charity has been raising funds for a move to new premises, from which to provide trauma-informed, holistic services to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The aim is to provide co-located services alongside partner organisations and charities, to further VOICES' mission priorities as set out in this Impact Report and also to deepen collaboration and synergies from working with partners. At the time of writing this report, the charity is planning to move in January 2022.



VOICES thanks:

Grants, Foundations and Donors

The National Lottery
Lloyds Bank Foundation
Awards for All (COVID funding)
Ministry of Justice (COVID funding)
Law Works
The Legal Education Foundation
Comic Relief/ Womens Aid Federation England (COVID funding)
St Johns Foundation
Quartet Community Foundation (The Bridging Fund Charitable Trust)
OPCC (MoJ COVID funding)
The Care Forum
Allen Lane Foundation
Bath Building Society
McGreevy No 5 Charitable Trust
The Ludlow Trust
Bath Women's Fund
The Indigo Trust Trustee donation
St John's Foundation Trustee donation
The Sperring Charity
The Pat Newman Trust
Ray Harris Charitable Trust
Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust
Rotork Bath
Renishaw
Rotary Club Bath
University of Bath Student Union

Supporters and pro bono donors

Our dedicated volunteers and experts by experience for their time and very valuable input
Sporting Family Change for their support for families we worked with during lockdown in the summer of 2020

Dot Project for their amazing help in planning work with digital partners

92 Minutes Ltd. for their specialist social media training and support

Csquared Ltd. Bath

Battens solicitors, Bath

Withers LLC, London

James Carlin BEM and 3SG for their consistent support to VOICES and other local third sector organisations throughout the pandemic period.

Last but not least, our wonderful Board of dedicated and knowledgeable Trustees, who have supported and guided VOICES through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and whose contribution is immeasurable.

Concluding Words

"Once I have finished my therapy for complex PTSD I want to go back to work to show my 2 daughters that they are strong, independent and no matter what they face they can get through it. Yes, challenges (pandemic) still certainly had a detrimental effect on my children, who both have trauma issues due to their father, family court system, etc. but recovery and freedom is worth every bit of work.

Thank you for all that you did for me and you continue to do for so many others."

"I make my own rules for me, I am the boss of me! I no longer take responsibility for other people's problems or emotions. I do not people please anymore, I please myself and my child only. I know where my boundaries lie, and I feel confident enforcing them. I no longer feel like I am a child caring for a baby. I am a mother, a strong, kind and caring, loving mother, and I now know that I always have been. I trust my instincts, I can spot a perpetrator from a mile off. I have tried to put into motion everything that VOICES have taught me, I see a real difference in myself."

"I never thought I would be able to leave my husband as he had always said I wouldn't be able to manage on my own, and that I was lucky to have him. He made me doubt my capabilities and made being on my own a very scary and impossible possibility. However, with the help of VOICES I was able to see this wasn't the case. They have signposted me to the right organisations and the right help when I have needed it. They have made any financial challenge feel far less daunting, and it has felt so reassuring to have a safety net throughout this difficult process."

"My 2 children and I have been living in our new home for 7 months. It is now fully furnished and I have been able to decorate the house and make it feel like our own. We are settled and enjoying our new space. There are no more atmospheres in the house and we have a fun time and enjoy each other's company far more than we ever have. We are allowed to be ourselves. I now have support from Universal Credit, my salary and some maintenance via CMS. The financial strain has eased and we are beginning to rebuild our lives. There are still many stresses and strains, including court hearings to come yet again and difficulties when having to deal with my ex-husband, but we are in a much better place than we were. I hope with time my life will be less stressful and I can heal from the trauma I have gone through."

"VOICES is the one place where I feel safe to be my most authentic self."



Impact Report 2020/2021

Challenging Domestic Abuse,
Changing Lives

