

Voices' **Annual Impact Report**



31st August 2024

Registered Charity 1159445

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS OF TRUSTEES

Voices stands out because its commitment to long-term recovery is deeply rooted in lived experience, and that makes all the difference. This thread runs throughout the design of the holistic support it offers to survivors. And beyond that it is virtually unique in elevating survivors' voices to actively influence policy, research, and service design both within Voices and on a national level.

To illustrate that commitment, we introduce you to the hard work, joys and successes of Voices over the past year. In this report you will find both an honest assessment of what we are trying to achieve and detail on what sets Voices' work apart. We are also delighted to signpost our ambitions for Voices, with new strategic priorities going forward, built around our existing core services.

We want to express our gratitude to everyone who helps make the work of Voices possible. Firstly we want to thank our donors (and hopefully future donors) for their giving and generosity. Secondly, we are indebted to our lived experience group and our fantastic staff and volunteers, who design and provide survivors with multi-disciplinary services to meet their wide-ranging needs.

We want to warmly welcome our new CEO Emily Denne, whose leadership is already cementing the foundations built by Ursula Lindenberg, Voices' courageous founder who stepped down this year. Emily is determined to grow and develop Voices, truly understanding that it occupies a unique and vital position within the domestic abuse sector, set apart from other organisations not just by the breadth of its services, but by the depth of its understanding.

Alongside charities across the country, we recognise the current national challenges in grants and trusts fundraising that are putting pressure on our organisation.

Notwithstanding, through the efforts of all, we look forward to a rewarding year for everyone and we are pleased to share the impact of Voices' achievements this year with you.

Helen and Joanna
Voices Co-Chairs of Trustees



LETTER FROM THE CEO

As I write this, it has been six months since I started in role - and whilst it has been an incredibly busy period, I continue to feel honoured to work for a charity like Voices.

Our ethos of survivor-led, trauma-informed and bespoke support results in lives being transformed - and I am so grateful to be a small part of that.

These first months have focused on the development of policy and process, to agreeing how we will continue to use our phenomenal trauma recovery approach for our clients.

This has been essential in order to allow us to continue grow and develop with a strong base and strategy, I am confident that Voices will go from strength to strength over the coming years.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Ursula, as Founder-CEO - I am in no doubt about the size of the shoes I step into!

Thank you also to our amazing team, volunteers and Trustees for all that you do every day. My greatest thanks go to our Lived Experience Group whose support, humour and patience know no bounds - and whose insights are helping to change the whole VAWG sector.

I'd like to end though with a quote from a client - which for me, sums up what makes Voices special:

"The group blew my mind. To meet so many women, from all walks of life, and find that they understood and could relate to me was transformative. I just kept thinking: I'm not alone. I'm not alone. I'm really seriously not alone. These people get this.....it was a huge deal for me. As was discovering an absolute kindred spirit of a friend, and establishing deep roots together as buddies. The group brought me true nurture and nourishment, insights and solidarity, friendship and new life.."

Emily Denne

CEO Voices



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Charity name: Voices

Charity number: 1159445

Our Board: Trustees who served during the year and up to the date of this report were:

Emma Sambrook (Chair)
Joanna Hole (Co-Chair)
Helen Wehner (Co-Chair)
Sara Goneos
Francesca Carpenter
Peter Brandt
Farha Rasul
Benazir Jatoi Ogunlende
Samantha Stone appointed
Brigid Musselwhite
Lisa Whelpdale
Janet Ratcliffe Robertson
Joanne Silver

CEO: Ursula Lindenberg until 29/02/2024
Emily Denne from 16/04/2024

Registered Office: PO BOX 5184
Bath, BA1 0RZ

Bankers: HSBC UK
41 Southgate Street
Bath, BA1 1TN

Bath Building Society
15 Queen Square
Bath, BA1 2HN

**Independent
Examiners:** Godfrey Wilson Limited
Chartered accountants and statutory auditors
5th Floor Mariner House
62 Prince Street
Bristol, BS1 4QD



Our History:

Voices was founded in 2014, by four survivors of Domestic Abuse, who recognised that beyond crisis services, there was little in place to support them. No one seemed to be focused on their recovery or that of their children. Something needed to change - and they made this happen by creating Voices.

One of the founding members, Ursula Lindenberg, would go on to become the Charity's first CEO. Leading the charity as it developed into a centre of excellence for Domestic Abuse recovery support, led by the voices of those with lived experience.

In 2022, the charity achieved a long-held dream, opening its trauma recovery centre, 'The Villa', which provides a safe space for clients to come together and access Voices' specialist support.

Ten years on and Voices continues to work to simultaneously provide long-term trauma-informed recovery-focused support for victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse, and to amplify their voices to effect change locally and nationally. In 2024, our Founder-CEO stood down, with our new CEO, Emily Denne, taking the helm in April. As we look towards our next decade, we are excited to see how the charity will continue to grow and develop.



VOICES - OUR PURPOSE:

We will help prevent and support recovery from Domestic Abuse because we will:

- Listen to, believe, and learn from victims and survivors, amplifying their voices to help effect sector change.
- Acknowledge that while anyone can be a victim of Domestic Abuse and anyone can be a perpetrator, it remains a gendered crime. We will call out Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and seek urgent action to address Domestic Abuse.
- Provide early help and long-term, tailored recovery support to victims and survivors of abuse.
- Provide training and awareness sessions to educate, inform, and grow awareness of Domestic Abuse among professional partners, educational settings, businesses, and the public.
- Stop the cycle of abuse through the provision of specialist programmes, focused on healthy relationships.
- Recognise the intersectionality of abuse, providing holistic support to victim/survivors.
- Continue to empower survivors through peer support, groups, and building on community strengths.

OUR PEOPLE:

	FULL TIME	PART TIME	VOLUNTEERS
Trustees	-	-	6
Services	-	4	2
Operational	1	2	1
Lived Experience Forum	-	-	8
Contracted staff	-	2	-

Voices' charity makeup as of 31/08/2024

Voices is led by a small and dedicated team of staff, who come from a wide variety of specialist backgrounds. People are at the very heart of everything we do; from our clients and volunteers, to our staff and trustees.

TRAUMA INFORMED:

Voices is proud to be a trauma informed organisation, upholding the trauma informed principles of:

- Safety
- Choice
- Trust
- Collaboration
- Empowerment

This year, our Trustees pledged their commitment to ensuring this works at every level, including within the Board.

Describing Voices:

Trustees, Members, staff, stakeholders, and survivors were asked to describe Voices in one word:



**“I feel lucky: they’ve been the only place to ‘get it!’”
(Client, talking about Voices, 2024)**

TRUSTEES' REPORT



"With the support from Voices, I managed to get a non-molestation order against my abuser and am now free from abuse and a lot happier within myself" (Voices' Client)

*Voices is no ordinary Domestic Abuse Service - indeed, clients frequently describe us as **unique**.*

What makes us special is our commitment to:

- *Lived experience at the heart of our work,*
- *The bespoke nature of our support,*
- *Our recovery focus.*

Together, these elements work to empower the survivor.

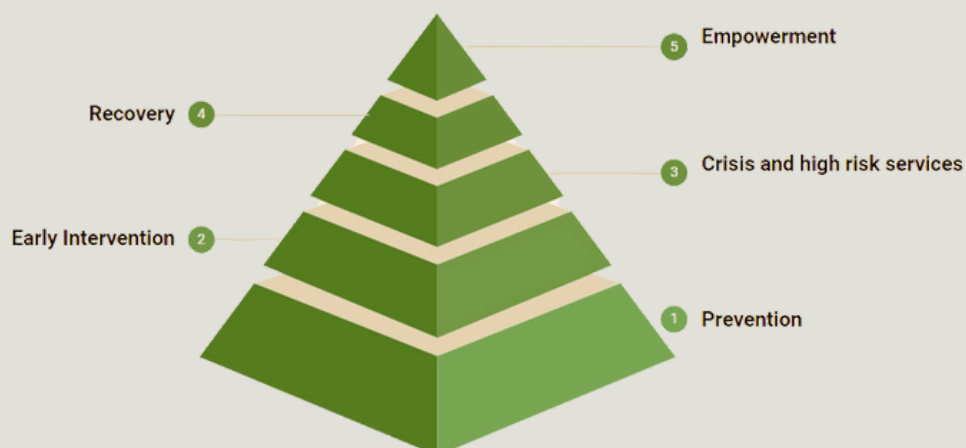
Voices fill a vital gap in statutory provision. If we envisage support services as part of a pyramid, with prevention as a foundation and empowerment creating the peak;

We know that government funding tends to focus on crisis and high-risk services. Our work supports prevention, early intervention, recovery, and empowerment, leading to lasting change for survivors' families and communities..

What does this mean in practice?

Many of our clients tell us that they did not realise that they were in an abusive relationship until it was 'too late'. By the time they identified the behaviour as abusive, the situation had become dangerous.

Our clients reflect on what a difference might have been made had they understood: healthy relationships, love bombing, red flags, informed consent, and coercion and control. They have told us that much more work needs to be done to prevent abuse and support early intervention: this is therefore a clear focus for Voices in the coming strategic period.



For victims of Domestic Abuse who access crisis and high-risk services, the focus tends to be on ‘safety’, usually relating to the risk posed by the perpetrator. Voices know that this does not mean the victim is safe. Instead, other risks may present, such as:

- Loss of accommodation
- Conflict over child contact
- Financial difficulties
- Family Court - which can often prolong post-separation abuse
- Stalking and harassment behaviours
- The impact of trauma on children, which may cause emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Victims can be left trying to manage this array of challenges, at a time when they are also experiencing significant psychological impacts from the abuse, with trauma impacting every part of a victim’s life:

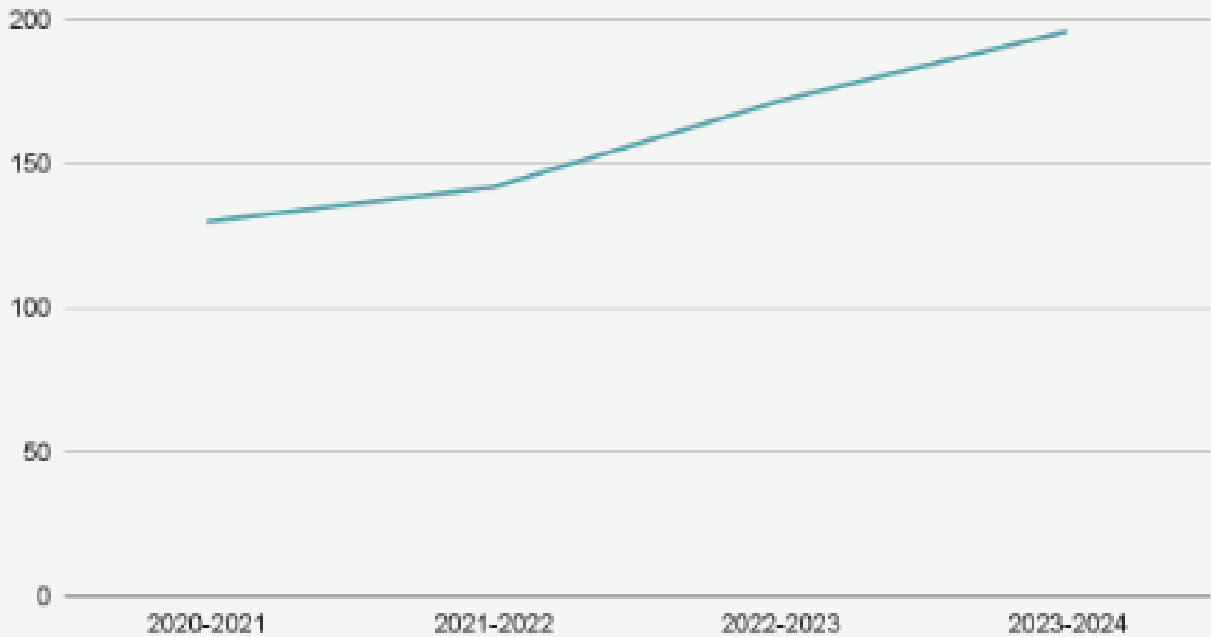


Many Domestic Abuse services stop supporting victims when they feel the most vulnerable - our long-term approach to supporting them through each stage of recovery is therefore revolutionary.

Voices was the light at the end of a very dark tunnel for me and my son. They came into our lives at the point when I felt most broken and helped me to see that there was a way forward. Through the support of Voices, I was able to see a future filled with hope, freedom and happiness for my little boy. Without their support, I think we would still be very lost. I was fortunate to access 1:1 and group support, both of which helped immensely, not only in finding my self-confidence and rebuilding our life, but also in developing a circle of friends who 'get it' and have survived too.

Having had many experiences where I wasn't believed, coming into Voices was the first time I felt heard which was so powerful. We now have an amazing life ahead of us and this was all started at a time when I didn't know where to turn and with Voices answering my call." (Ella, 2024).

Referrals to Voices



REFERRALS

Over the last year, Voices received 196 referrals, which marks a 14% increase on the last year. Consistent with previous years, we continue to see an increase in our referral rates year-on-year.

Following a recent change in our recording processes and referral management systems, we anticipate further increases to referral numbers in the coming year.

It is worthy of note that Voices also recognise that the referral numbers do not fully reflect our actual work - for example, it does not include people we are supporting who were referred in previous periods, those who contact us for advice and signposting, or the wider impact on the family. Our work includes supporting clients to access support for their children and others impacted by the abuse.

REFERRALS INTO VOICES

Self-referrals made up over 65% of our annual intake in the last year. The second most common source of referrals was from Bath based multi-agency service, Southside, who operate the commissioned Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service.

Other services referring into Voice are:

- GP's
- NHS
- Police
- Schools
- Universities
- Bath Mind
- Julian House
- Independent health care agencies

OUR BENEFICIARIES



A snapshot picture:

Voices seeks to offer an inclusive service, recognising that anyone can be a victim of Domestic Abuse and anyone can be a perpetrator.

Risks and needs:

Time Frame:
September 2023 - August 2024

Inclusivity:

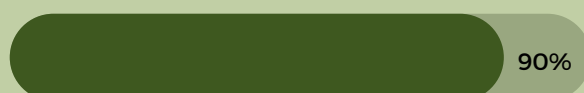


Clients who considered themselves to have a disability



Multiple disabilities

Mental and emotional wellbeing:



Clients who identified mental and emotional wellbeing needs

Client needs:



Safety concerns

68%



Housing concerns

45%



Criminal or civil court needs

52%

"When you have come from a situation where you are told and believe that it's all your fault; that nobody else would understand; and that you are all alone, to find a group of incredibly strong women who are able to understand your experiences from a place of great depth, it can truly change your world".

(Voices' client)

OUR BENEFICIARIES:

Voices offer an all-inclusive service for adults who have been impacted by Domestic Abuse, noting that anyone can be a victim of Domestic Abuse, and anyone can be a perpetrator. However, we acknowledge that it does remain a gendered crime where women are more likely to be the victim and men are more likely to be perpetrators.

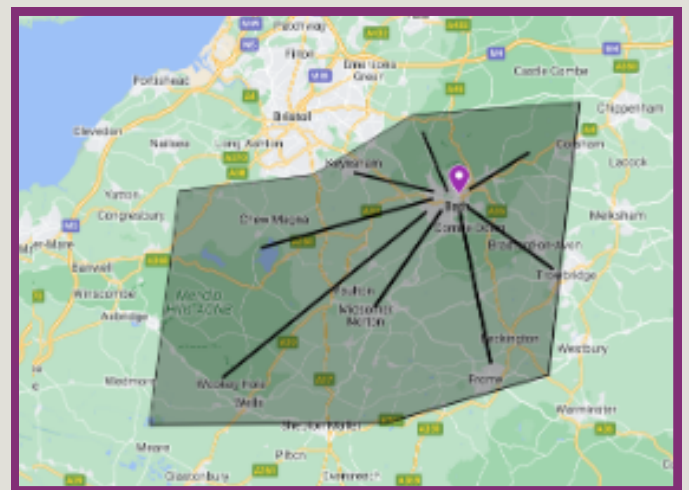
Research tells us that approximately one in five adults will experience Domestic Abuse in their lifetimes, with this equating to one in four women and one in six-seven men. For this last year 95% of our clients identified as CIS women. This does highlight that we have further work to do to ensure that men feel safe and able to access our services.

A high proportion of our clients have additionally experienced Sexual Violence, with our figures aligning with national statistics that tell us that approximately 50% of Sexual Violence can additionally be categorised as Domestic Abuse. Recognising this need, we were pleased to support SARSAS to offer a safe space to support women impacted by sexual violence in our trauma recovery centre. In addition, just over 60% of our clients reported experiencing stalking and harassment.

Given the fact that isolation is a known tactic of Domestic Abuse perpetrators, it is perhaps unsurprising that almost three-quarters of our clients additionally note that they lacked support networks when they first accessed our services. Voices therefore strongly support the building of peer networks and we offer the only Domestic Abuse group-work recovery provision for a wide area, covering approximately 870km², with a population of c.375,000 people.

As a result, whilst we are based in Bath, and primarily our services are available to those based in Bath and North East Somerset (BANES), we are seeing increasing referrals from across the local area, including: Bristol, Wiltshire, Frome, and wider Somerset. Notably, 10% of our clients came from Bristol in this last year.

A high proportion of service users also report mental health symptoms and emotional wellbeing difficulties. In line with research that indicates between 51-75% of women who experience Domestic Abuse will go on to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex-PTSD, many of our clients present with PTSD symptoms. This last year has seen almost 50% of Voices' clients (49.61%) recorded as having a disability, with mental health being the most common form. Over 90% of our clients identified mental and emotional wellbeing needs.



“Voices have been a huge help and I know they will be an integral part of my healing, they have been extremely accommodating, kind and compassionate” (Voices’ Client)

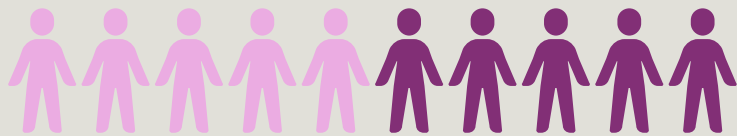
This difficulty has become more pronounced over the last year, where growing waiting lists and the challenges of a 'postcode lottery' have greatly impacted people's ability to access specialist services. Voices therefore utilises its trauma-informed approach to support individuals to build their resilience, understand the impact of trauma, and learn to self-manage symptoms. We find that clients are now open for extended periods, accessing more forms of support in our service and that we are 'holding' cases owing to the pressure on other services. Together with the ever-increasing referral numbers, this has placed additional strain on the charity.



44% of clients identified as having concerns around their safety



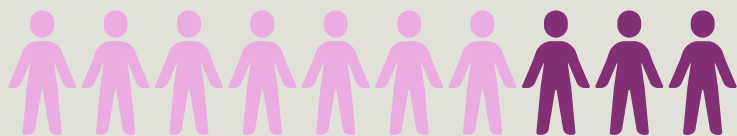
52% had criminal or civil court needs



45% had housing difficulties




48% had needs around education training and employment



68% described concerns around their safety

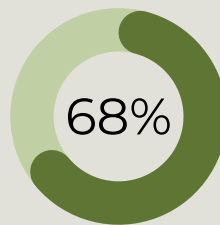
"I still feel alone as I do not talk to anyone about what happened but being with voices has really helped me manage better and given me a voice to talk about things that I do not share with others. Abuse survivors can feel very isolated as it's shameful to talk about and some do not understand and we are fearful of being judged". (Voices Client).





Support for the wider family:

Voices recognise that Domestic Abuse has long-term implications on the entire family. 75 clients supported in the year had children, with a total of 140 children between them.



68% of our clients reported having concerns about how Domestic Abuse had impacted their children.

Voices ensures that our support includes:

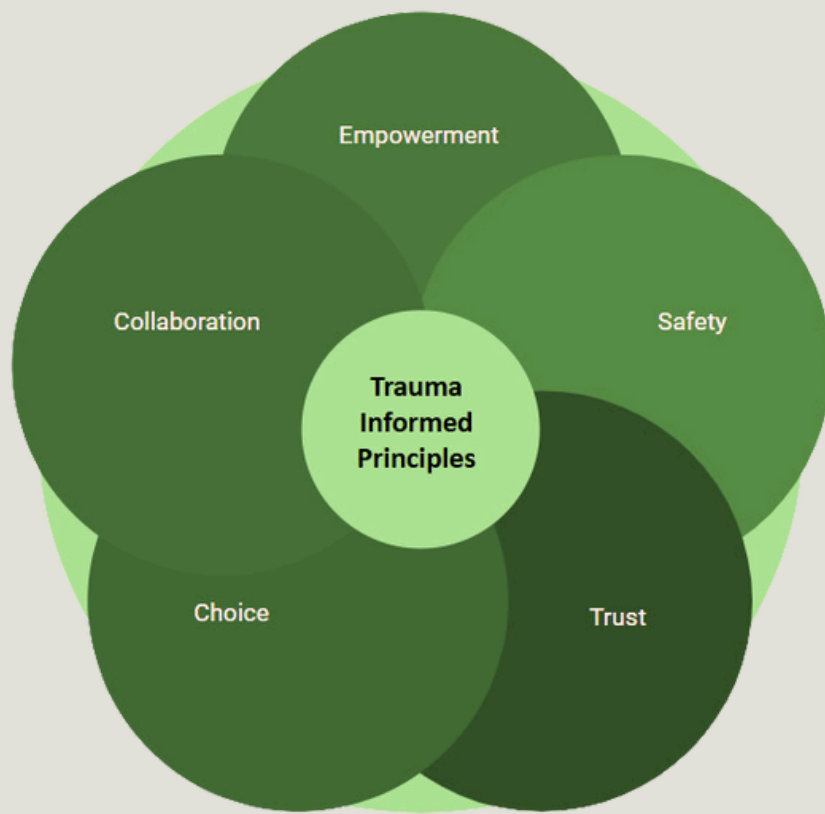
- Sessions looking at the impact on children.
- Signposting and referrals to specialist support for children.
- Accessing funds to ensure children and young people can engage with therapeutic support.
- Legal advice and support around child contact.

We are very proud of this wider impact of our work.



Voices support parents attending Freedom by offering a free creche facility.

“You have changed my life and my children’s lives too” (Voices’ client).



OUR MODEL AND ETHOS:

Voices offers long-term recovery services for victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse utilising a trauma-informed approach. This means we abide by the core principles of trauma-informed practice.

We are fortunate to deliver most of our services directly from our trauma-informed recovery centre based in Bath, known as 'The Villa'.

The Villa was designed with victims and survivors to create a warm, welcoming space where clients feel safe. Importantly the building was developed to not look like a traditional office, but instead a place of comfort, where relationships are built.

Voices' ethos is that **recovery is prevention** and our clients are supported to access multiple services over an extended period, to minimise the risk of them returning to or being vulnerable to a new abusive relationship.

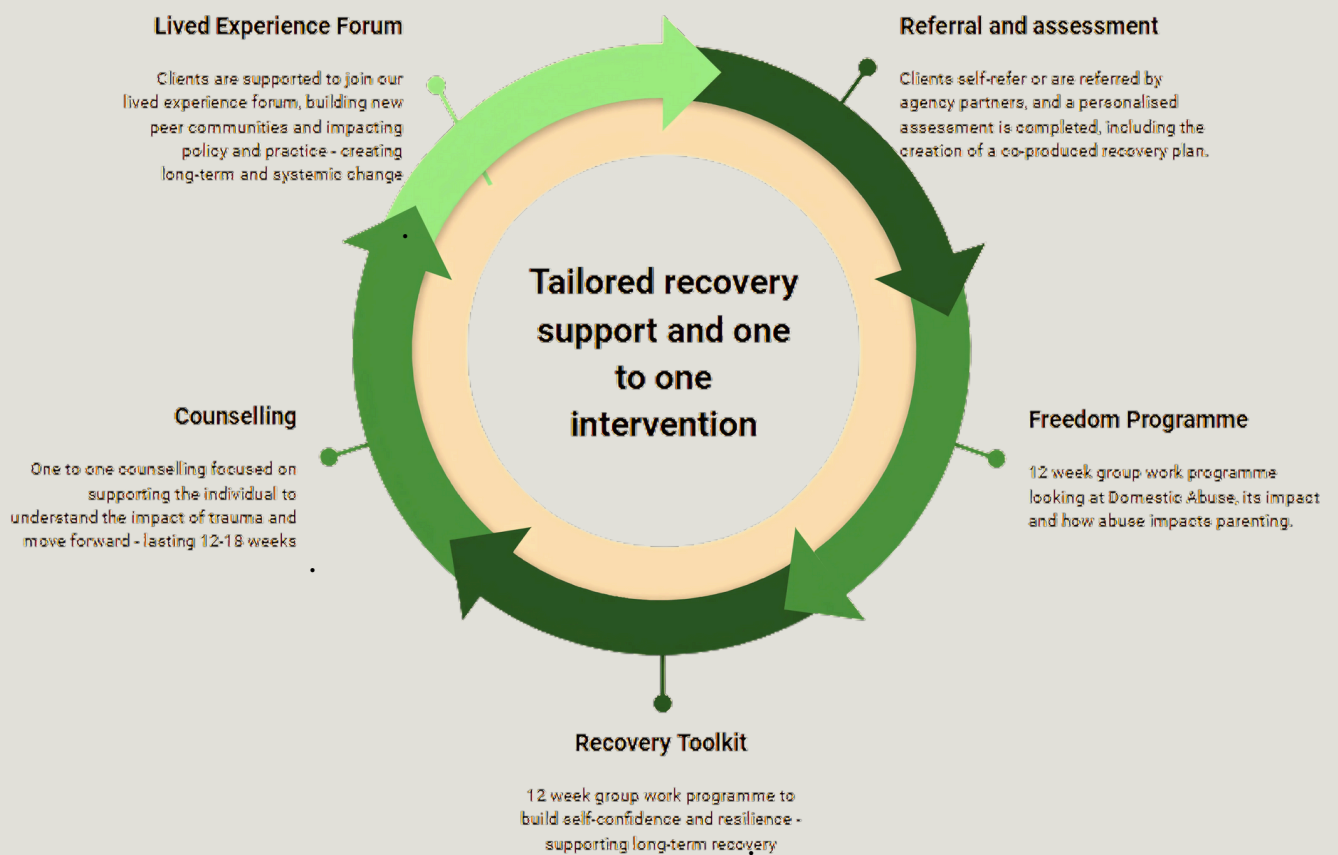
"There is a friendly and kind atmosphere in the building and you are always welcomed with a nice cup of coffee and a smile".

(Voices' client talking about The Villa)

THE VILLA



For this reason, our support tends to be long-term, tapering to allow for safe, planned closures in collaboration with the client. Recognising that everyone's experience of trauma is different, no two people's experiences of our services are the same. Nevertheless, a pathway through our services might look a little like this:



In this example, a client will have completed two group-work courses with us, engaged with counselling, and joined our lived experience forum, whilst having the ongoing support of a Recovery Practitioner on a one-to-one basis.

“Having multiple sources of support has given me the opportunity to not only understand what happened, but to understand how to prevent it happening again in the future. In addition, receiving 1:1 counselling alongside group work has meant that I had the opportunity to work in further depth and in a 1:1 setting on the things I was learning within the group”. (Voices’ client talking about the importance of multi-disciplinary support).

OUR SUPPORT SERVICES

We have been pleased to continue to offer our multi-disciplinary, trauma-informed, and holistic services which focus on supporting survivors to recover from Domestic Abuse over this last year. An important feature of our support is the focus on rebuilding communities and developing peer relationships, which is achieved through group work and our range of creative workshops.

Our workshops run throughout the year: this fabulous artwork was created during our therapeutic collaging workshop, allowing participants to explore and externalise complex emotions. Collaging offers individuals a sense of control and empowerment over feelings of anxiety.

Pat Craven's Freedom Programme:

The Freedom Programme is an accredited and evaluated twelve-week course, designed to support women affected by Domestic Abuse perpetrated by men. The programme examines the roles played by the attitudes and beliefs of the perpetrator and how this might impact victims and survivors. Its focus is on helping participants to better understand and make sense of what has happened to them, and move away from self-blame.

The programme additionally describes the impact of Domestic Abuse on children, and on parenting.



Collaging art workshop

During this year, we have run the Freedom Programme three times (term time only). The course is 'rolling' meaning people can join the course throughout the year and newer participants are offered additional support by long-standing group members.

We are delighted that Freedom is supported by a creche, enabling those with young children also to attend.

Rockpool's Recovery Toolkit:

Voices ran the accredited Recovery Toolkit course three times over the last year. This twelve-week course aims to assist and equip women with the knowledge needed to help them recover from the effects of abuse. This means that unlike Freedom, the group is only suitable for those no longer in an abusive relationship.

The programme is designed to support people's recovery from Domestic Abuse, helping them rebuild their confidence, self-esteem and resilience. Topics covered include:

- Understanding our thoughts and emotions
- Communication styles
- Healthy relationships
- The effects of abuse on children and parenting
- Boundaries and trust.

A client who completed Recovery Toolkit during this year reflected on the impact of the course, telling us:

“Coming to Recovery Toolkit has opened my eyes massively to my own strength and potential. I am feeling more confident in myself than I can ever remember. I will be taking forward so much knowledge and am excited to receive what I am worth and only what I accept going forward in life!”

One-to-one support:

Voices prides itself on offering person-centered, bespoke, and holistic support to clients, recognising that everyone's experience of Domestic Abuse will look different. Clients can access one-to-one support from a Recovery Practitioner, which might involve face-to-face contact, telephone support, or virtual meetings.

Our Recovery Practitioners work with each client to develop an individualised recovery plan identifying risks, needs, and goals. Whilst much of our support will focus on safety planning and helping clients better understand Domestic Abuse, we aim to be creative and consider the wider needs of each person.

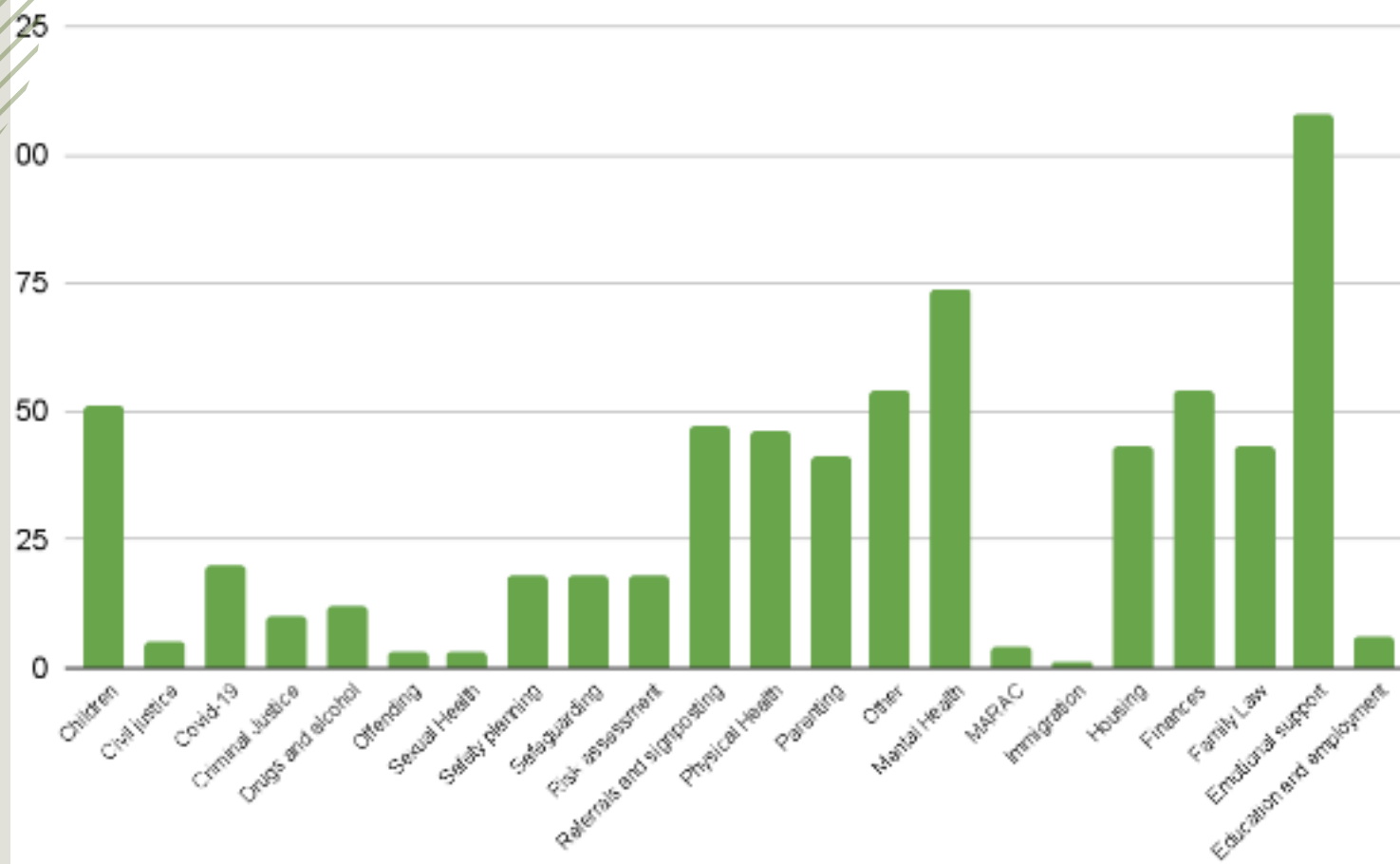
Examples of support areas include:

- Finances
- Housing and safe accommodation
- Accessing specialist support for children and young people
- Rebuilding communities and developing healthy relationships.

Recovering from abuse brings our clients into contact with multiple services, systems and other professionals. We work to support our clients to safely navigate these systems in order to achieve the outcomes they deserve. The chart overleaf demonstrates the many areas of a family's life that can be impacted by abuse - showing how our team has supported our clients over the year.

“I now have the courage to endure the (court etc) storm ahead. I didn't have the strength before and I couldn't have done it” (Voices' client).

Support type



COUNSELLING:

During this year we have continued to support clients through our specialist counselling provision. We are delighted to have now employed our first Therapeutic Lead (September 2024) and are therefore hopeful of seeing this area of our work further develop in the coming year.

“Having counselling through voices charity has completely changed my life and way of thinking. Having struggled each and everyday with mental health and trauma related to previous abuse, I found myself completely lost and feeling like I was past any help. The counselling has changed my way of thinking, helped me manage and deal with my past trauma and helped to prevent me from self sabotage. It had enabled me to begin to enjoy life and understand that I can definitely move forward with the knowledge of the appropriate tools and having put lots of trauma issues to rest. This service has changed everything for me for the better and I can never be thankful enough for help and support that I have had”.

(Voices' Client).

LEGAL SUPPORT

Voices are one of the only services providing clients with specialist support through family court, which has been widely recognised as a gap in provision for victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse. A report by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2023) identified that over 70% of victims going through Family Court did not receive specialist support.

We are proud therefore to offer a free law clinic for survivors in conjunction with the University of the West of England (UWE), whereby student solicitors and barristers provide brief legal interventions, advice and advocacy, overseen by their lecturers.

The impact of Legal Support:

"The only reason I've been able to finally face walking through the door to the Court room, is because of the exquisite support offered to me by Voices.

It took my patient, insightful and highly experienced case workers ten months to get me to the point where I felt resourced sufficiently to face my perpetrator in court.

Without their care and skillfully placed stepping stones I know, for sure, I wouldn't have been able to summon the courage to do what I have had to do.

Voices have been by my side, at every turn, as I engage with the Court processes - which is to say that they have been with me through what is undoubtedly the hardest part of my life path so far. No question has been too small, no worry has been too big, no moment of pure fear has ever wobbled them. They hold the ground beneath my feet, facilitating me to then stand strong and tall in the legal world, and advocate with all I've got on behalf of my children.

For me, Voices are the exact lifeline I have needed in order to endure the court world and all that it entails. They are my glue. They are my constant legal encyclopedia. They are my guides and my light as I walk the tunnel. For all of this, and more, I am profoundly grateful: it is only with their support that I have been able to level up and do what's necessary legally to protect my family." ('Clara'. 2024).

LIVED EXPERIENCE FOR CHANGE:

Our Lived Experience forum meets monthly in our premises and alongside this peer network being an important part of their recovery journey, they continue to generously input their knowledge and experience into policy and practice. This means that they have been instrumental in supporting our strategic consultation process, alongside working on both local and national projects. Examples from this year include:

- Meeting with Triangle, to ensure the Domestic Abuse empowerment star aligned with individuals' actual experience of Domestic Abuse. We understand the consultation was very well received by Triangle and led to a number of changes being made to the process. Triangle told us **"It was so wonderful to have the opportunity to hear the expertise of the group [...] and absolutely forensic level of analysis on the Star, I can't express how helpful it was. They were a lovely, generous and supportive group who really helped me understand their perspectives and the nuance and considerations around the areas we discussed [...] I am in awe of the work you do and I am so grateful that I can feed in the views of everyone"**.
- Ongoing work with University College London Research project for child mental health practitioners perspectives on providing support for families where there is intimate partner violence.

- Continuing to support the development and evaluation of the IRIS+ project, which sees Doctors and GP practices, who are usually the first point of contact for disclosure of Domestic Abuse, to be trained in a trauma-informed manner to identify and ask questions about Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, recognising the links between abuse and physical/mental health and have the means to signpost clients safely for support.
- Partnering with SafeLives in the development of the Legal Education Foundation-funded DA Training for Family Lawyers, by running consultations with survivors to inform the content of the training programme. This now forms a national training offer for family law professionals from 2023/24, available to book via SafeLives, and has produced significant outcomes such as an 800% increase in trainees' confidence in working safely with perpetrators to avoid collusion.
- The group were involved in NIHR Policy Research Unit for Children and Families project- focussing on outcome measures for child maltreatment/domestic abuse.
- Facilitating a Lived Experienced session with researchers at Oxford University to advise on how to engage in a trauma-informed approach to working with survivors and young people who are engaging with PPI work (Patient and Public Involvement) in the field of Domestic Abuse.

Voices strongly believe that this consultative practice, enabling those who have experienced abuse to impact policy and practice is sector-changing.

"When you have come from a situation where you are told and believe that it's all your fault; that nobody else would understand; and that you are all alone, to find a group of incredibly strong women who are able to understand your experiences from a place of great depth, it can truly change your world. (Voices' Lived Experience Member).

ANNA'S STORY

Many of our Lived Experience Group have been with Voices a long time. Here, 'Anna' tells us her story...

I guess my story starts a long time before I came into contact with Voices. Being a daughter of a mother in abusive relationships and growing up in an abusive environment, weird and unhealthy relationships were the norm.



When my children turned 6 weeks old, I booked my first counselling session because I wanted to be the best mum I could be and break the cycle of intergenerational abuse. I would go for counselling on and off for the next 16 years, always trying to uncover how I could be better and what I could do to make relationships better.

Making contact

This was up until I found myself coming out of a controlling coercive relationship at the end of those 16 years. A powerhouse of a woman at the time came into my life and explained to me emotional abuse and controlling coercion and even though I could follow what she was saying, I couldn't understand it well enough to explain it to my daughters. She spoke to them with me, and for me. I trusted and valued this powerhouse friend who got me to safety. She told me about the Freedom programme, and asked me to sign myself up and see if I can figure out why she asked me to go there.

.

Most importantly, she told me that after the experiences I just lived through, I needed to join the sisterhood and sit within feminine power for a while.

Freedom Programme

I probably didn't know it at the time, but I think I was a bit of a man-hater - some might say, for good reason. On the Freedom Programme I learnt about what abuse is, where it is, how it happens and what healthy/unhealthy relationships look like. I was blown away that I'd had similar experiences to other women.

I felt validated. I understood.

All this time of going to counselling to see how I could be a better person, to have better relationships - and what I learnt from the Freedom Programme is that I am a beautiful person - I am just terrible at picking partners because I couldn't differentiate between unhealthy, familiar, abusive relationships and the healthy ones. I learnt a lot and realised that not all men are bad.

Recovery Toolkit

I felt so fortunate because at the end of the Freedom Programme I was able to join the Voices Toolkit Programme. Recovery from a lifetime of tumultuous experiences takes time, several weeks on a course was brilliant but I needed more education I guess. So, I now felt like I understood abuse and signs to look out for, but how do you move on from that?

I remember even at this time, still feeling lower than a snake's belly, dead inside, numb to the world with no way of knowing how to feel anything again. Well, the Toolkit helped me to move forward, to heal and re-energise, to value myself and set boundaries - to live again. I made new friends, friends that didn't recoil in disgust or tell me to man up - people who understood, shared their own stories and wisdom - we learned from each other.

Almost nine years later and I am still close friends with someone I met in the group and we communicate daily.

Lived experience group

I initially got involved with the lived experience group through being invited to engage in online consultations with researchers at various universities to input and feedback back on what would work (or not) when thinking about conducting research into aspects of domestic abuse.

I remember it felt good to be able to have conversations with professionals, be taken seriously, inform their understanding and shape the conversations and domestic violence landscape, within the area and beyond. As the LE group grew, we agreed group rules, applied for small pots of funding to branch out our ideas and think of ways we can actively contribute to voices, support others and break the silence of abuse.

My journey of recovery with Voices continues on and I continue to make new connections within the LE group. Being part of the Lived Experience group is important to me because I want to give back as much as I have gained from Voices and support Voices to support others.

I want to be an ambassador for others to know that abuse does not define us, that we can love and laugh again, be safe and accepted, where all voices are heard in the process. Voices is a special place and for me, it is people that makes places and everyone I meet in Voices is a Champion for someone else - I see this all the time within the walls of Voices.

I stay in the Lived Experience group because I feel nurtured, valued, respected and feel the group can make a difference for others.

Our ideas are taken seriously and acted upon, we all work together for the greater good of supporting survivors of abuse and ending violence against women.



“I felt listened to. I felt validated”

OUR IMPACT



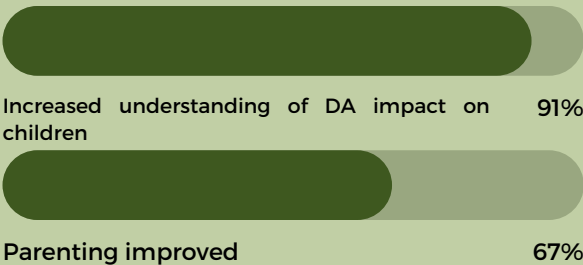
A snapshot picture:

Through our survivor-led approach, ongoing community engagement, and tailored support services, Voices is committed to creating a safer, more informed community, ultimately breaking the cycle of domestic abuse.

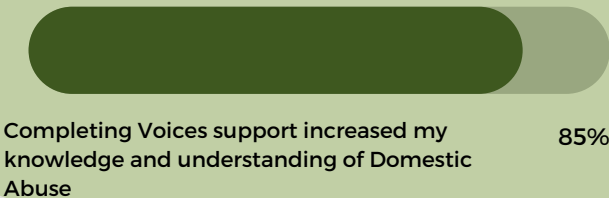
Our Impact

Time Frame: September 2023 - August 2024

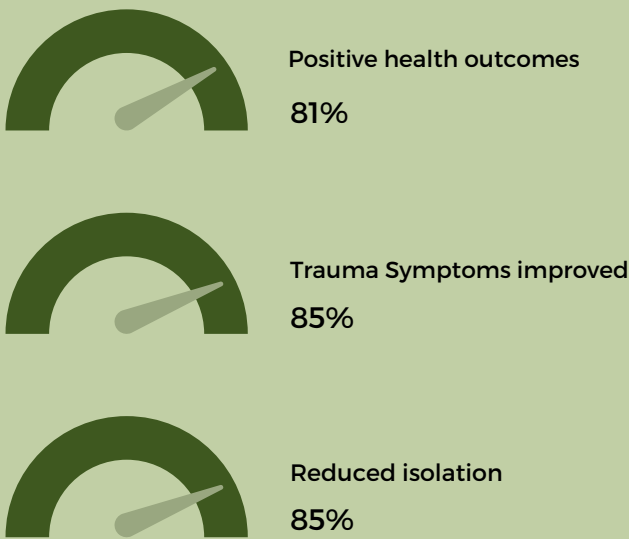
Children and parenting:



Increased understanding of DA:



Impact of Voices’ support:



“Voices have and continue to be life changing for me and my family. They are the only people I truly believe have my best interests at heart. They help me of a daily basis to become a strong, more independent and confident woman. Without voices I would be lost after the abuse I suffered”. (Voices’ Client).

At Voices, we continuously monitor and evaluate the impact of our services through a robust combination of qualitative and quantitative measures. Utilising widely recognized national tools—such as WEMWEBS, CORE-10, and POWER assessments—we assess our clients’ progress at the start, during, and upon completion of their support, effectively evidencing the distance traveled on their recovery journey.

We are proud to report that our impact over the past year has been profound:

- **Empowerment Through Knowledge:** 85% of clients felt more capable of recognizing abusive behavior as a result of our support, a crucial step toward reclaiming autonomy and fostering healthier relationships.
- **Enhanced Parenting Skills:** 91% gained a deeper understanding of the impact of abuse on children, with 67% noting improvements in their parenting skills, thereby breaking the cycle of abuse for future generations.
- **Positive Health Outcomes:** 81% of clients reported improved health and well-being, underscoring the effectiveness of our holistic approach to recovery.
- **Trauma Management:** 85% expressed an increased understanding of trauma and how to manage their symptoms, equipping them with essential tools for their healing process.

A significant strength of Voices is our group-work approach, which has proven transformative for many clients. Nearly 85% of those who completed group sessions reported feeling less isolated.

One client shared, “Group work brought me a degree of anonymity while allowing me to relate to others who have experienced similar situations. It not only provided invaluable insights but also helped me form lifelong friendships during dark times. The 1:1 support gave me the courage to engage with the group and reclaim my power, making every session a vital part of my healing process.”

Our support doesn’t just end with the individual; it creates a ripple effect throughout the community. 92% of clients indicated that the support they received from Voices has empowered them to help others experiencing Domestic Abuse, amplifying our impact beyond the immediate beneficiaries.



Even the quietest whispers, can create a symphony of change.

PARTNERSHIP WORK:

Voices is committed to working in partnership with organisations across Bath and North East Somerset (BANES).

As founding members of the Domestic Abuse Practitioners group and members of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, we actively contribute to local policy and practices.



Collaborative Efforts for Broader Change:

Here we shine a spotlight on one aspect of our partnership approach through our work with the Local Family Justice Board (LFJB). This work speaks to our commitment to improve criminal and family court processes for survivors of Domestic Abuse.

In partnership with the South-West Local Family Justice Board, we co-founded and currently chair the Domestic Abuse Sub-Group. This group raises awareness of Domestic Abuse—particularly coercive control—and its implications within the family court system.

A key initiative this year has been the development of a Court guide for survivors navigating the Family Court as litigants in person. Created collaboratively with legal experts, academics, and those with lived experience, this guide aims to provide essential resources for individuals affected by Domestic Abuse. We are excited to be seeking funding for a national rollout.

Looking ahead, we will also work to synthesize findings from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's 2023 report on the Family Court, helping to educate professionals on the challenges survivors face during court proceedings.

"Voices have changed my life completely. I have gone from being a victim feeling frightened of the world and nervous of everything to a strong and powerful woman with much more knowledge. My journey hasn't finished and I still have obstacles to overcome but voices have changed my life in so many ways that I will forever be thankful for everything." (Voices Client).

A series of parallel diagonal lines in a light green color, located in the bottom right corner of the page.

CHARLOTTE'S STORY

I escaped from Yorkshire to Bath in Summer 2021 after leaving a toxic environment to put it mildly. With a safe home and new beginnings, I thought it would be easy to fit back in to "normal" life. This couldn't have been further from the truth.

Voices feels like a big family...

Only once you are out of your situation, does it then start processing in your body and all sorts of symptoms from for example PTSD surface. Life feels worthless and in a kind of weird way, you wished you'd be back in the past as you were used to that. It's what you knew. I cannot describe in words how alien it is to have a kind word said to you without consequences. Or even what it's like for someone to ask you how your day was. The guilt and shame was too much.

I was very isolated and had only told the police about my "life". Voices have been incredible for my recovery these past 3 years.



I have completed Voices' Freedom program, Recovery Toolkit, one-to-one counselling and now I am involved in the lived experience work. All of this has been lifesaving for me. So much knowledge shared, tears and laughter too. I will never forget the people I met in the groups and still talk to some.

No one likes to talk about abuse that happens behind closed doors, even family members. Voices not only gives you the opportunity to meet wonderful people who've been through similar situations but more importantly, it gives you that feeling of empowerment to carry on. That you're not alone. That you can do it despite the bad days you still have. And that you are not to blame.

Voices feels like it is a big family. Kindness, compassionate and knowledgeable. Just a few words on what Voices is.

I am forever grateful for everything Voices have done for me. I will continue to work with Voices and they have empowered me to help others in our situations when I am able.

VOICES STRATEGY 2025-2030

In these uncertain times for charities nationwide, we are optimistic to continue to raise awareness and support our valuable clients. We aim to do more outreach work and create other places of safety to meet with clients within the community.

By providing more remote support and outreach with home/community visits where there are mobility needs or other challenges to travel, we can bridge a further gap in services. We aim to reach more marginalised groups who cannot otherwise access our premises and form more partnerships in doing so.



Lived Experience at the Heart:

Voices was founded by four survivors of Domestic Abuse, and a decade on we continue to listen to, believe in, and be guided by the voices of those with lived experience. Voices will work actively to break the silence and amplify the voices of those with lived experience.



Recovery Focus:

Voices is dedicated to supporting long-term recovery from Domestic Abuse through the provision of trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary services, which are tailored to meet the needs of the individual. This will include group work, one to one support, therapeutic services and legal support.



Education and prevention:

Voices will offer a range of services to help prevent Domestic Abuse, break the cycle of abuse, and empower people to seek early intervention services. We will provide specialist training and healthy relationships sessions to professionals, educational establishments, corporate partners, and the public.

VOICES

This poem was written by one of our clients.

It talks to the impact of Domestic Abuse and the recovery support provided by Voices.

It is shared here with our thanks .



*When you experience Domestic Abuse
It can make you feel like you're no use
When all your confidence has left and gone
It makes you feel like they have won.*

*You feel crushed and no longer yourself
You feel you can't speak to anyone else
No one seems to understand what you've been through
But deep within, you want to feel new.*

*You do not want to remain so crushed
Feeling like your life has turned to mush
Allow your voice to begin to appear
Then the way forward can start to be clear.*

*You do not have to remain squashed and put down
Stand tall, speak out and wear your crown
Your new found voice can guide the way
Leading you to a much better day.*

*It's thanks to Voices you can see
All that you deserve and all that you're meant to be
You can get over the abuse you've been dealt
With thanks to Voices support and help.*



FINANCIAL REPORT:

The last financial year has been a challenging one for Voices, and we ended the financial year with a slight deficit of £26,485. However, our overarching financial picture for this year remains positive. With an income this year of £302,254 plus £5,350 for gifts in kind, we secured a total income of £307,604, compared to £277,869 in 2022-2023.

INCOME AND FUNDRAISING

Voices is a non-commissioned charity, and our predominant funding sources are grants, trusts and foundations, including: Garfield Weston, Lloyds Bank Foundation, The Tudor Trust and the National Lottery.

We are fortunate to additionally receive support from the local Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the local ICB.

Voices is working to diversify its income streams. This year, our non-grant related income was £44,250 and we are actively developing new fundraising activities.

RISKS

Voices recognises that the current national challenges in grants and trusts fundraising are putting pressure on our organisation, alongside charities across the country. For Voices, this challenge is more pronounced as a number of our multi-year grants are due to finish in the coming financial year. For this reason, we are considering a range of ways to diversify our income.

Further risks are noted as a result of the ever-increasing demand on the service, which typically outstrips capacity. This is compounded by the following factors:

- Closure of partnership services or restrictions on their offer.
- Cost of living crisis.

- Demands on the NHS and mental health services, leading to extended waiting lists.

As a result, Voices continues to review our services and referral processes to consider how we can extend our provision of services, without compromising our trauma-informed approach or quality of support.

Reserves policy:

Voices has reviewed its reserves policy during this financial year. This sets out our the Trustees' long-term ambition to have reserves that meet the following criteria:

- To sustain the charity's core services, for a period of three months without detriment to its beneficiaries. Voices will seek to ensure that all beneficiaries are supported to access external services and other support organisations in the event of our closure, to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation. Voices have costed the operational costs of running our services for three months, as £77,186.
- To support the charity in providing a skeleton service for a further three months to enable emergency funding to be sought and secure the charity's future. This equates to a total of £36,557. This involves the CEO, Head of Services, and one further staff member being kept in role, but working from home. This would focus on providing a safe transition out of service to our most vulnerable clients and the opportunity to look for further funding. In the event this is not possible, the CEO will be able to ensure the safe closure of the charity.

In line with best practice, Voices will ensure that a minimum of three months of operating costs are held in reserves between both designated and unrestricted funds. For Voices, this currently sits at £77,186.

Voices ended this financial year with reserves of £218,612 (unrestricted reserves of £161,662). Whilst this is a positive position, Voices recognises that the challenges facing the charitable sector are likely to require our using reserves to sustain our core services in the coming year(s).

Governance and public benefit:

Voices is a CIO and was registered on the 2nd December 2014. A constitution is in place to ensure appropriate governance and management, and our charitable objects are set out here:

- To promote and protect the good health of those who are or who have been affected by Domestic Abuse in particular but not exclusively by:
 - a. Providing advice, support, interventions and recovery programmes.
 - b. Assisting them to engage with service providers enabling the service providers to adapt services to better meet the needs of those persons.
 - c. Activities to relieve their mental or emotional distress and which promote their wellbeing such as support groups and networks,
 - d. Relieving the needs of people who are or who have been affected by Domestic Abuse and assisting their integration into society.

- To advance the education of the public in all issues relating to the subject of Domestic Abuse, including conducting or supporting research into the factors that may contribute to such abuse and the most appropriate ways to mitigate them and the publishing of the useful results of such research.

This report has focused on what Voices has achieved over the last year, and the outcomes of our work in the reporting period. However, in addition, during this year, a full strategic consultation has occurred, enabling Voices and the Trustee Board to fully review our vision, values, and purpose and develop a new five-year strategy. In considering this strategic direction, the Trustees have considered their responsibilities and referred to the guidance contained within the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. We are therefore confident that our new strategy continues to align with our charity objects and delivers public benefit.

Structure, governance and management:

Voices has two senior leadership roles: the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Head of Service. The staffing structure for the charity is outlined overleaf.

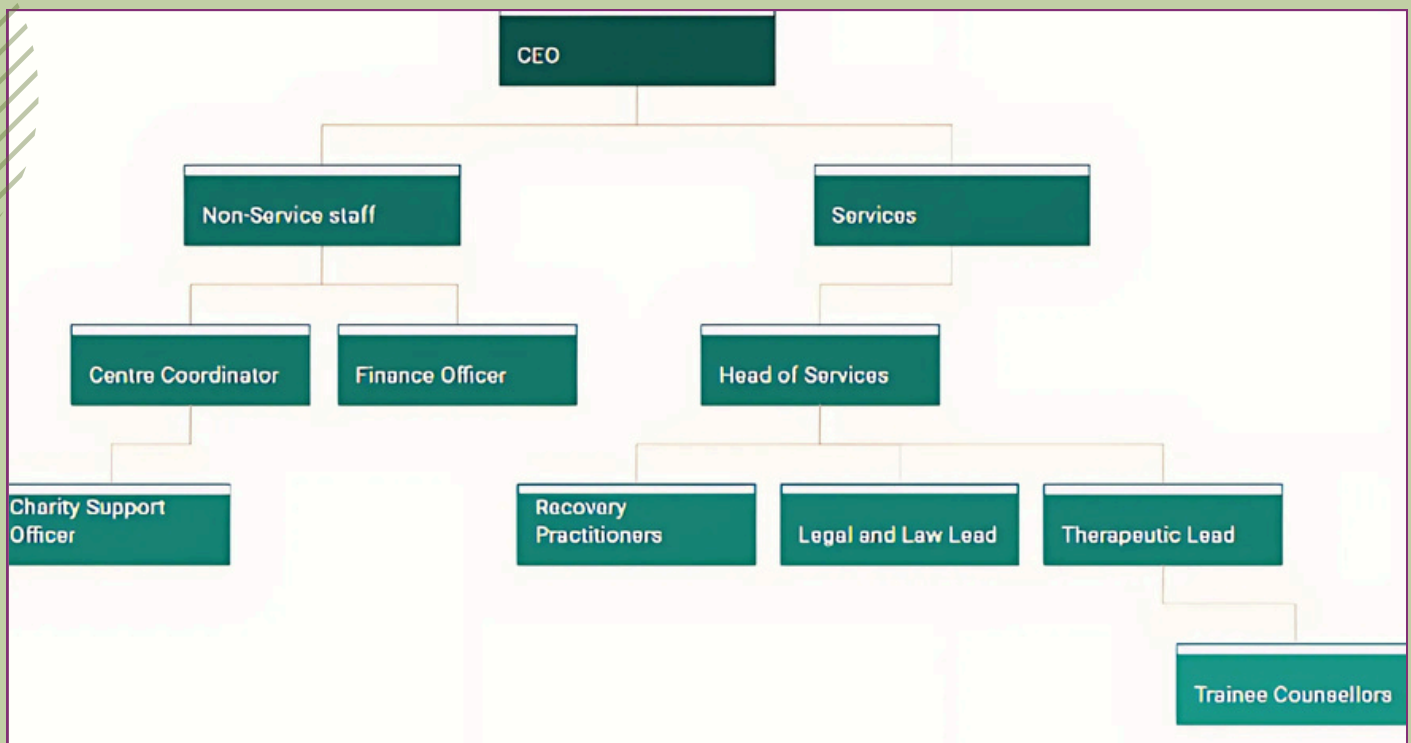


CSquared's brilliant spinathon raised an amazing £1325.05 for Voices in August

The Charity is overseen by an experienced Board of Trustees, with two Co-Chairs. The Board includes Trustees with Lived Experience and two Trustees directly oversee Safeguarding and Finance.

A full Board meeting takes place each quarter, and three sub-committees are in effect:

- **The People Committee:** this committee, chaired by our Safeguarding Trustee focuses on all the people involved in Voices, including: clients, members, volunteers, and staff. The focus is on ensuring that Voices:
 - Has an experienced and committed staff body
 - Recruit staff appropriately
 - Manages safeguarding matters in line with legislation and best practice
 - Is proactive in managing its responsibilities in being a Trauma-Informed organisation
 - Supports staff wellbeing.
- **Governance Committee:** is chaired by one of our experienced Trustees and focuses on ensuring Voices is appropriately led, with thought to our leadership, constitution, recruitment and induction of Trustees. During this year, they have been focusing on developing a cohesive, well-informed board and setting up arrangements for a period of mutual assessment once the new Chair of Trustees has been appointed
- **Finance committee:** Chaired by our Finance lead, the finance sub-group is focused on ensuring Voices is financially sustainable and overseeing our budgetary management.



APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES:

Trustees are appointed by the decision of the members during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) or by the Board 'at any time' (Clause 13 (4) and (5) of the CIO constitution). In normal circumstances, Trustees who have completed their term of office, stand down at the AGM.

Potential new Trustees are sought through open and transparent advertising processes, including the use of local networks and social media. No Trustee is appointed without an interview process and the opportunity to attend a Board meeting before being confirmed in role. During the appointment process, appropriate checks will be made, including any potential conflicts of interest, DBS vetting and Disqualified Directors Register.

Voices is aware of its commitment to diversity and inclusion, and is working to ensure the Board embraces diversity, including in regard to

experience, background and knowledge. In addition, we work to ensure that the Board includes members with lived experience.

New Trustees are supported in their induction period through meetings with the Chair, the potential for 'buddying' and a comprehensive induction pack. In addition, each new Trustee meets one-to-one with our CEO.

Looking forward:

This coming year (September 2024 - August 2025) marks the start of our new strategic direction.

Detailed overleaf are our priorities for this period, linked to our values.

It's given me the hope back that I can heal and move on. I don't have to be a victim and let what has happened dominate my life. It's giving me a safe place to be vulnerable and heal where there is no judgement but compassion and support.

I don't feel like I'm crazy anymore as voices get it they understand just what the abuse does to people and I no longer feel so alone." (Voices' Client).

OUR VALUES

PRIORITIES

MEASURING SUCCESS

Trauma Informed

- Introduction of Trauma Informed Practice Training.
- Focussing on Voices as a centre of excellence.
- Launch Breathe Free - a new psychoeducational group work course.
- In house clinical Lead role introduced.

- Evaluation questionnaires demonstrating impact of training and professionals trained across the locality.
- Increased tailored clients support on a case by case basis.
- Psychoeducational course run twice in 2024-2025, demonstrating increased understanding of trauma and ability to manage own symptoms.
- Improved outcome monitoring.

Victim voice at the heart

- Introduction of Survivor Engagement Advisor.
- Review constitution.
- Review membership model.

- Expansion and development of the lived experience forum.
- Increased membership.

Holistic

- Use of our centre for groups, activities and multi-agency partner work.
- Multi-disciplinary services continue and develop.
- Bespoke recovery pathways.

- Client feedback and increased peer relationships.
- Collaboration with partner agencies.
- Impact measurement.

Passionate

- Staff wellbeing prioritised.
- New outcome and impact measurement tools introduced.

- Staff feedback.
- New impact tools introduced - that demonstrate the specialist provision being offered by Voices.

Activists

- Diversifying our income and growing our name.
- New website development.
- Introduction of new Domestic Abuse training for professionals.
- Launch of newsletter.

- Delivery of training courses.
- New website and logo developed and operational.
- Expanded Lived Experience consultation.

2023 - 2024 Highlights

***We've had another fabulous year!
Here are just a small fraction of our highlights...***



***Kirsten
attended the Circle
Fund conference in
London with Lloyds
Bank***

***Ursula's
fond
farewell***



***The support of
Bath Students
Union, RAG***



***Nayana Jaidev
joining us as Charity
Support Officer!***



***Our
wonderful
art
workshops***



***We had a great day
selling crafts and gifts
at the Bath Christmas
Market***





THANK YOU

Voices would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who helps makes our charity what it is.

Thank you to our clients, lived experience group, Members, Trustees, volunteers and our team.

But a particular thank you to everyone who has helped to fund us over the last year: we simply could not do it without you.

Voices



01225 984189



info@voicescharity.org



www.voicescharity.org

Statement of responsibilities of the Trustees

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102: The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The law applicable to charities in England and Wales requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the net income or expenditure, of the charity for the year. In preparing those financial statements the trustees are required to:

- *select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;*
- *observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;*
- *make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;*
- *state whether applicable accounting standards and statements of recommended practice have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and*
- *prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.*

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and which enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charity's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Independent examiners

Godfrey Wilson Limited were reappointed as independent examiners to the charity during the year and have expressed their willingness to continue in that capacity.

Approved by the trustees on 20 May 2025 and signed on their behalf by

*Emma Sambrook
Chair*

*Peter Brandt
Finance Sub Committee Trustee*