

AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE SOTERIA PROJECT

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Executive Summary

What is the Soteria project?

In recognition of the prevalence of women in the criminal justice system with experiences of domestic abuse, West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) and Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS) sought funding, from Comic Relief, for the 'Soteria Project' which went live in December 2018/January 2019. The project aimed to upskill and enable justice stakeholders to better recognise not only the impact of domestic abuse on women, but on how this relates and affects their offending behaviour. Soteria also offer specialist key-workers to support women on a one to one basis throughout their criminal justice journey and work alongside other justice stakeholders, providing a holistic package of care to ensure a reduction in re-offending but also supporting her safety, well-being and development.

The Evaluation

ATD Research and Consultancy were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the Soteria Project in September 2020. To do this a total of 21 interviews were conducted. This was comprised of 9 stakeholders, 6 Soteria workers (including heads of service) and 6 women. In addition, 1 woman had contributed written feedback due to currently being hospitalised. A theory of change workshop also took place and quantitative data were considered.

Findings

Soteria provided support to a cohort of women experiencing abuse who were distinct to others in 'mainstream services'. Soteria clients: presented with a high level of chaos and lack of engagement, a lack of trust in professionals and a lack of awareness and acknowledgment of abuse. For this reason, having a dedicated service, with an understanding of domestic abuse and its interplay with the justice system, with workers who could engage in active outreach and the persistence required was valued by women and stakeholders alike. Stakeholders who were interviewed for the evaluation, across a range of agencies, discussed the benefit of having Soteria workers who could co-work cases and often give more time to women than other professionals who held extremely high case-loads. Engagement improved across services, women recognised, sometimes for the first time, that they had experienced abuse, and were able to have their needs met more appropriately. In turn, women reported their contact with the justice system as an opportunity for help, not just punishment and discussed outcomes such as improved confidence, leaving abusive relationships and finding their voice.

Moving forwards

Soteria has made great strides since its inception, it is a project valued by many and, for this reason, should continue in order to embed its legacy in broader systemic change. Moving forwards the project could focus on a broader engagement from justice partners beyond police and probation, raising further awareness on the links between domestic violence and offending and engaging women from specific marginalised groups.

1. The Soteria Project

In recognition of the prevalence of women in the criminal justice system with experiences of domestic abuse, West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) and Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS) sought funding, from Comic Relief, for the 'Soteria Project' which went live in December 2018/January 2019. Soteria is the Greek Goddess of redemption, and in mythology is known as the Spirit of safety and salvation, deliverance, and preservation from harm.

The Prison Reform Trust (2017) states that where women offend, women's experience of abuse is often causal in this and yet their experiences of the justice system can compound victimisation and lead them to become more vulnerable to future abuse. In the absence of acknowledgement from critical stakeholders in the justice system, about the specific vulnerabilities of women suffering from domestic abuse, women may find themselves given inappropriate sentences e.g. a custodial sentence, where they are separated from networks of support and their families, or inadequate community support which do not address abuse and suspended sentences where they remain in unsafe domestic settings.

At the time of commencing the pilot, there were 96 women identified in the justice system in West Mercia who reported experiences of domestic abuse (this is likely to be an underestimate). Through their mainstream services, WMWA and SDAS had worked with 54 women who had committed offences in a 12 month period – suggesting the need for a dedicated effort to ensure that women in the justice system could access specialist domestic abuse support.

The project aims were noted as follows:

- Reduce numbers of women from West Mercia in custody
- Improve support for women in custody in preparation for release
- Reduce the number of women who re-offend
- Where women do re-offend, a better understanding around their criminogenic needs (this is a need that directly relates to their offending behaviour).

These were to be achieved by building secure partnerships between criminal justice and specialist domestic abuse agencies in West Mercia to work on:

- An improved understanding by all agencies in the system of the impact of domestic abuse to ensure more informed approaches to pre-sentence reports, prosecution and sentencing
- Providing community based alternatives to custody – to work on self-esteem and empowerment for those who have experienced domestic abuse, focusing on balance, respect and choice in healthy relationships
- Soteria to assist in promoting compliance with non-custodial statutory community orders for women experiencing domestic abuse and at risk of custody, including those at risk of breaching a community order
- Support women in prison and provide specific support packages for those from West Mercia who can have a direct link with WMWA or SDAS on release

The Soteria project was therefore borne out of a desire to do better by women at both a systemic and individual level. The project aimed to upskill and enable stakeholders (probation officers, community rehabilitation companies, police, judges and magistrates) to better recognise not only the impact of domestic abuse on women, but on how this relates and affects their offending behaviour; the part it plays. In addition, once it has been acknowledged that a woman who has offended, has experienced domestic abuse, Soteria offer specialist



key-workers to support women throughout their criminal justice journey and work alongside other justice stakeholders, providing a holistic package of care to ensure a reduction in re-offending but also supporting her safety, well-being and development. Through negotiation with the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) and National Probation Service (NPS), work and engagement completed with Soteria is also able to contribute to a woman's hours of regulated activity (RAR) on community orders. This speaks to the credibility of the project and the working relationship with Probation.

On the ground, Soteria is a joint partnership initiative run by WMWA in Herefordshire and Worcestershire and SDAS in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. There have been a total of four staff working on the project since its inception, all of whom were interviewed for the project. Both SDAS and WMWA had one worker each doing 28 hours, from the inception of the project. SDAS's original Soteria worker went on maternity leave and was replaced - like for like. WMWA's worker (who was an IDVA and had been working as an IDVA in the remainder of her full-time hours) returned to being a full-time IDVA (in a senior IDVA position) at WMWA in January 2020. A new Soteria worker was appointed to cover 22 hours of the post, with the original worker keeping 6 hours to maintain some continuity until October 2020, when this ceased. All staff had already worked within the broader service for several years before applying for the Soteria role so had a thorough understanding and experience of supporting victims of domestic abuse.

2. The Independent Evaluation

2.1 Task

ATD Research and Consultancy were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the Soteria Project in September 2020. ATD are experts in evaluating pilot projects within the health and justice system and specialise in qualitative interviews with perpetrators and survivors of a range of offences including sexual and domestic violence.

The research objectives were agreed to be:

- Explore, capture and understand the impact of Soteria on women in the criminal justice system
- Understand the impact of Soteria across a range of stakeholders and the influence on their response to supporting women
- Consider lessons learnt: did the project/model do what was intended? Did it achieve the anticipated outcomes? What facilitated this? Where were the barriers?
- Make recommendations to ensure continued, effective support for women in the criminal justice system

2.2 Method

In order to achieve these aims the following methodology was devised to take place between September and December 2020:

- Undertake a theory of change workshop
- Interview stakeholders who have worked with Soteria
- Interview Soteria staff
- Interview women who have been on the project and gather case-studies
- Consider quantitative data that the project has collated (e.g. numbers referred and engaged).

Soteria workers were sent information and consent forms to share with stakeholders and women they felt were suitable for interview. With their permission, they were then contacted by the researcher to organise a time to speak. All interviews were conducted over the phone due to COVID-19. They were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to enable thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to take place. This method ensures data is driven from the 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' and is exploratory rather than governed by pre-imposed hypotheses or expectations.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted. This was comprised of 9 stakeholders, 6 Soteria workers (including heads of service) and 6 women. In addition, 1 woman had contributed written feedback due to currently being hospitalised. The women that contributed ranged in age from 21 - 50 years old. Three had worked with the SDAS Soteria workers and four had worked with WMWA's Soteria worker. Stakeholders from a range of agencies were interviewed. This included health, third sector and justice agencies. It also included senior management as well as front-line staff.

3. Findings

3.1 Quantitative Data

At the point of this report, data collated thus far was sent over.

| Outcome indicators | Data collection | Total Project to date |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| Number of women in the CJS who have experienced DVA who received a Soteria intervention (engagement in preparation of pre-sentence report) | Oasis - number of women who have engaged | 96 |
| Number of CJS professionals who have received awareness raising/training in understanding the impact of DVA | Signed records of attendance at sessions | 145 |
| Number of CJS professionals completing a pre-sentence report who contact Soteria for advice | Records kept by Soteria staff | 1 |
| Number of women in custody who engage with Soteria in planning for release | Oasis - number of women who have engaged | 13 |
| % of those who secure release as planned | Oasis - added as other outcome to exit form | 73% |
| % of those above who report that Soteria intervention has had a positive impact upon their resettlement post release | Google forms to be completed by either client or worker | 76% |
| Number of women who engage with Soteria who are helped to secure safe and suitable accommodation on release | Oasis - accommodation outcomes on exit form | 17 |
| Number of women at risk of re-offending, who engage with the project | Oasis - reason for referral | 57 |
| Percentage of those above who have not reoffended in 12 month period | CJS partners | 100% |
| Number of women who have issues with substance misuse/poor mental health, who engage with support services upon release and complete a programme of support | Oasis - Adult support services, cases in service report | 65 |
| % of women who engage with Soteria, who access further support from mainstream DVA service | Oasis - Internal and external referrals | 63% |
| Number of magistrates who have attended an awareness and information session with Magistrates in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin | Signed records of attendance at sessions | 32 |
| Number of those who engage with the service, involved in bi-annual review of the project | Case studies | 22 |
| Number of survivors who support the project through volunteering | Case studies | 4 |

3.2 Qualitative Data

The following themes are derived from the entirety of the qualitative data-set, rather than separating findings by group (stakeholders, Soteria workers or women). This is to avoid tautologous discussion because, on analysis of the data, there was great synergy rather than divergences between the over-arching themes and messages.

3.2.1 Partnership Working

A vital component for the success of the project was a willingness from partner agencies to work with Soteria; to make referrals to the service but also an openness to learn and receive training on how to better support women in the justice system who have experienced abuse.

'I am most proud of the numbers of women that we supported...I think the one-to-one work really has been the thing that I'm most proud of. It's quite difficult to get an in and carve your way through as a practitioner, from the outside where there hasn't been someone with that expertise working with women in those kind of circumstances before. To build up that reputation and to be appreciated in a way which clearly, from the Probation officer perspective they are, that's the difference that's been made. That's made a difference to those women's lives' (WMWA CEO)

On inception of the project, Soteria workers spent time promoting the service to partner agencies, creating awareness of its existence and the ability to make referrals for women to access 1-1 support. As well as offering direct support to women, a key aim of Soteria was to provide training and consultation to those working with women experiencing abuse in the criminal justice system.

'Where the project sort of started to aim, was to educate the professionals in the Criminal Justice system about how domestic abuse affects criminal behaviour. And I think there's a really big need for that because a lot of people still look at the female as the problem and the crime they've committed as the problem but actually what needs to be looked at is why that's happened and the effect that trauma can have on these women that lead them to committing a crime. And that's not widely thought about within the Criminal Justice system' (Soteria Worker)

Stakeholders commented on the importance of a direct relationship between justice and domestic abuse partners. Prior to the Soteria project, stakeholders could, of course, contact WMWA or SDAS for advice and support or to make referrals for women but it was felt that having an identified, specific person, with an understanding of justice and domestic abuse really added value. Soteria workers also reported a positive response from agencies when informed about the project, which strengthens the argument for its inception.

'Probation as soon as they found out about what we do they've been sending a lot of referrals through or calling to ask advice about certain things or whether somebody would be appropriate to refer in or what could they do with this, with a client that's experiencing this so I think as soon as people were aware of it I think that the response has been really, really great' (Soteria Worker)

'There is that clear and direct line into our organisation which is really good' (Soteria Worker)

Partner agencies could co-work cases alongside the woman's dedicated Soteria worker, forming a cohesive team around that individual to ensure all her needs were being met, without duplicating efforts. This was also beneficial for the professionals involved in keeping abreast of relevant updates and problem solving situations jointly.

'In Hampshire we would use National Centre for Domestic Violence for all of our non-mols. And it was just a case of you ping over an email and they take the reins and they just go and you don't really hear anything more of it. But where you've got a victim that's so high risk, to herself and from others, it's just really, really helpful to safeguard her as best we can and I think the best way of doing that was working with Soteria in this case. Of being able to just be able to contact each other all the time and say this is the update, this is what's currently happening, any idea about this and could you do this and, yeah, it was very, very helpful'
(Police Stakeholder)

Stakeholders provided examples of where this co-working had resulted in positive outcomes for women on the project, for example in securing housing for a woman with a dog (who would otherwise have been homeless) and in securing a non-molestation order against a high-risk perpetrator despite the victim being in hospital after a suicide attempt.

'She'd reached out to the Crisis Team and tried to end her life. So it now becomes a difficult one then because I couldn't get a statement from her and normally you often need a compelling witness statement to give to the Court. So I linked in with the police who provided me all the MG11 statements that she had previously given to Police. Without [Soteria worker], we wouldn't have been able to have done it. Because her notes included feelings, and how she really, you knew, if you didn't know the victim before, you knew from the notes. Luckily [Soteria worker] had done that and she'd done it from the start so I compiled the statement and then the officer, then took it over to the hospital because obviously we weren't allowed in the hospital. She actually took it over to her and read it with the victim who signed and then it was sent back to me and then I put it into Court and it was granted the next day'
(Stakeholder)

Those interviewed also highlighted how Soteria had struck the balance appropriately between being supportive rather than overwhelming, recognising that a woman could potentially have involvement from DAROs, an IDVA, Police, Probation and Soteria. Examples were provided which indicated a client centred approach as to who was best placed to lead on care and support; affording consideration to who the woman felt most comfortable talking to and understanding that this could flex and wane over time given fluctuating circumstances.

In addition to co-working cases, the offer of training and educating partner agencies is what also makes Soteria unique and is indicative of its desire to leave a legacy and ensure that women are adequately and appropriately supported by the whole system. Part of this is ensuring that not only are criminal justice services equipped to support women who have experienced domestic abuse, but also that mainstream generic services (e.g the rest of WMWA or SDAS, mental health services, substance misuse services), are equipped to work with the uniqueness of this cohort too. There was recognition that this cohort of women were not being supported or engaging with mainstream domestic abuse services, and therefore mainstream services have received specific training to better engage these clients.

'I think now our service, even if they were made aware of it, wasn't probably equipped to support them because of the whole structure of how we work, three contacts and we move on to somebody else because they're clearly not ready. Not in a negative way, we just have always traditionally worked that this is a service that's there for you when you're ready to access it. It's not compulsory. You've got to want to do it. We want to be here for you at the right time. Well actually, a lot of these people in this chaotic criminal justice world, three attempts at contact is nothing. We might see you once now and I might not hear from you for a few weeks because of whatever's happening in your world out there. That doesn't mean you don't need me now. It just means you're not in a position to access me now. So our traditional ways of working needed to change to make us more accessible to those people. We're not perfect in that yet but we're only two years down the line. We've just done a piece of work

with our mainstream colleagues in the mainstream team to say you'll need to work differently with this client group' (SDAS Service Manager)

3.2.2. The uniqueness of the cohort

Throughout the interviews for the evaluation, stakeholders were asked in what way Soteria clients felt different to those without criminal justice backgrounds and why a specific domestic abuse service was required for this group. There were several key areas raised; chaos and engagement, lack of trust in professionals and a lack of acknowledgement of abuse.

Firstly, some of the clients referred to the project were said to present with a greater array of needs on top of the abuse (e.g. homelessness, substance misuse, mental health problems), a greater intensity of needs and a history of poor engagement with services. This group were also highly likely to have a lack of trust in professionals, unwilling to disclose, engage or work consistently with services.

'They're normally in a very chaotic place and actually they're so used to having mandatory things put on them that they must do that actually we have to work with them slightly differently and make them realise that we're not a mandatory service before they sort of build a rapport with us. And you also have to make sure that you're able to be - almost more flexible in a role just as a domestic abuse support worker, you have to be very flexible and adapt to women's needs at different times but with this female group you have to almost be able to jump a little more often and straightaway because if you leave a referral waiting for too long we'll lose them. If you don't respond quick enough to a situation the likelihood is that they then will not engage with you and actually we don't want to lose these women that are coming in' (Soteria Worker)

Not all referrals were living in 'chaos' however, as some women on the project had previously been totally compliant with no history of criminal behaviour, somewhat 'under the radar' until they came to the attention of the justice service.

'I've never done anything wrong in my life and I got involved with the wrong person and it's ruined my life in so many ways' (Soteria Client)

'I don't know what the words are - I've never really been in this situation that I'm dealing with so please forgive me, and then suddenly I'm - it's like a really bad episode of Eastenders where you're on bail and having to go and make statements and yeah, and it's just like oh my God. And I take full responsibility. I lost it and there is no excuse but equally I'd been pushed and antagonised and provoked and pushed some more. Just a bit more and I just eventually snapped' (Soteria Client)

Women described being particularly 'fearful' of disclosure of abuse and the repercussions of this. This related to fear of further harm from the perpetrator themselves, the family of the perpetrator or concerns over the impact on the family unit.

'I remember like going to my doctors and because he was there, even though he was outside, I went for a smear test and I actually broke down crying. And I couldn't tell her that he'd been hitting me. Even though I've known her for like 17 years. So that was the other thing that they said to me in Court was like well you've not told anyone. And I just sat there and I'm thinking yeah, because I was scared' (Soteria Client)

'I think I was too ashamed to actually go into a shelter or to even ring someone. And I didn't want to call the Police because I was thinking oh, what are the kids gonna think about their Dad?' (Soteria Client)

For both sets of clients under the Soteria umbrella, chaotic or compliant, another theme was discussed. Many of the women referred to Soteria had not previously acknowledged nor spoken out about their abuse.

'When you're in the middle of it you don't see anything because all you doing is you're trying to survive' (Soteria Client)

This was exemplified when Soteria staff delivered a group-work programme to women on community orders at probation. There was a lot of resistance from the group on the suggestion they had experienced domestic abuse or coercive control, highlighting the impact and challenges associated with acknowledging a 'victim status'.

'The women in this camp that are in the criminal justice system, do not want to be vulnerable. You tell me I'm a victim of domestic abuse, that means I'm vulnerable. Nobody wants to feel vulnerable or a victim but actually the women in the criminal justice system need to have a tougher outer layer. And I think that's probably what I saw is that there's no way that's me because that would make me vulnerable. I'm not prepared to go there' (SDAS Service Manager)

Soteria were able to work with probation and women themselves to re-design a responsive group-work programme which yielded more positive feedback.

'I mean it was quite intense. Very intense to start with. And a lot of us were in tears and I approached [Soteria worker] just to say, look I think that was a bit intense. I think it was because we had to do it all in one day the first time. And they split it up after that one because it was just too intense to get everything into one day. they went away and relooked at it and come back and it was totally different. It was brilliant. We actually noticed that there was a lot more suffering in that way, in that group, than we actually knew about' (Soteria Client)

'Sometimes it's hard for people to want to admit that they're - it's the victim word I think played a big part for me I would say. And I think the other thing is it's owning up to that reality that this person who you really love is capable of doing that to you' (Soteria Client)

With this in mind, it is little wonder why there are challenges in professionals in the justice system acknowledging the impact of victimisation on offending behaviour, when women themselves find this difficult to articulate or discuss.

'...a lot of these women are in that cycle of abuse and in that cycle of criminal behaviour and potentially because in the focus of their minds is their criminal offence and Probation and their commitments there, abuse is kind of pushed to the back of it' (Soteria Worker)

'...most clients generally do not identify that they have been in a relationship - or they know that certain elements of their relationship are domestic abuse and that's contribute to their offence but actually the less obvious signs of abuse, they absolutely have no idea about. They'll describe things to me but then we do the really kind of first level domestic abuse support which typically you wouldn't probably expect to see with somebody that's high risk. Because you would think they would understand what was going on with their situation (Soteria Worker)

In light of this, Soteria staff had to be particularly skilled at building trust and rapport with an otherwise hard to reach cohort, a cohort who did not typically trust professionals, in order to broach the abusive relationship element.

3.2.3 Qualities of Soteria Workers

The women on the project particularly remarked on the personable qualities of those employed on the Soteria project. As noted above, women may have historically felt 'let down', 'betrayed' or 'failed' by professionals. One woman had called the mental health crisis team and had not been supported, another relayed how she had discussed her abuse with a counsellor for him to then state he knew her perpetrator. This, in addition to years of domestic abuse, created a natural wariness from women to others. Yet, Soteria was seemingly able to overcome some of these concerns for women they reached out to, evidenced by being able to engage women who, for years, had not answered the phone to other professionals.

'She had been in and out of the service for a while but just we could not pin her down to engage with us. And we knew that at some point she would but that point, it was in and out, in and out. Like each time we all worked so hard just to get that two minute call with her. She was at MARAC and we tried everything. And it was the Soteria project that brought her into service and we would never have got her in. It would not have happened' (Stakeholder)

'I love working directly with the women, actually building that rapport and relationship with a lady that has not ever sought support before and getting engagement out of them when actually some of the services before say, well we have never been able to get her to engage. And actually when I get her to engage that's really, really rewarding because you think actually all it takes is somebody to give some time and not disappear and be there for them. And it shows that actually that's what they've needed for a long time' (Soteria Worker)

Being able to build trusting relationships with Soteria had a knock-on effect for engagement with other professionals too.

'The feedback I had about her at the beginning was that she really didn't engage. She was really hard to reach and now she works so well with not only me but the Police, her housing support worker, the DARO team, anybody that wants to support her she's really open and willing for that to happen. So I think that is a, she's one of the biggest successes for Soteria (Soteria Worker)

From the women's perspective, Soteria workers possessed particular qualities (not just competencies) that helped them feel able to open up about their experiences. This permitted a freedom in 'speaking their truth', which was described as a liberating, cathartic experience and enabled them to get the help and support they had needed for years.

Shame and guilt were pervasive themes in the interviews with Soteria clients. The women that were interviewed for the evaluation, were able to describe the shame they felt at being convicted of an offence. This was on top of the shame and guilt they described carrying at 'allowing themselves' to be involved with an abusive partner.

'I felt like I'd let my kids down because I brought this person into the house who I thought was a really nice person who I shared a lot of my stuff with. But I realised he didn't share everything with me. And then suddenly when he showed this side to me it's like I didn't know what to do. And I felt scared so I think speaking to Soteria they shared like some, gave me some like written things that I could kind of read over when I was by myself. And then when I was with [probation worker] as well she made me see that I need to take responsibility for my actions but also to kind of consider that there's certain things that I don't need to take the blame for and hold guilt for' (Soteria Client)

Often women had not talked about what they had been going through, for fear of judgement. This meant they suffered in silence and often, the committal of an offence, was a symptom of not being able to tolerate such adversity any longer. It was therefore of paramount importance that women felt safe when working with Soteria. Safe, not only from their perpetrators, but in

a safe space, where they could talk openly and freely, often for the first time, and be heard and validated. Some women described that they had lost family and friends through their experiences and one woman described her Soteria worker and her probation officer as her substitute family, the only people she had ever allowed to see her cry for fear of appearing weak.

'18 months ago I was being attacked from all sides. When I got to [Soteria] and [Probation] they weren't attacking me. They sat and they listened to me. They allowed me to tell my story. They allowed me to realise that I'm not a bad person. They allowed me to realise that I can have a life' (Soteria Client)

'I need someone I can go back to and - 'cos I haven't got a - it's like having a partner is that person that supports you. If I don't have that, I said to them, I said to them that's how I see you guys because, what it was, because my sister became - they took my children as well but after 7 months my sister - they actually took my children. But I can't - so my sister was the only family member that I was in communication with so - because she's looking after my boys I can't keep on calling her can I? So I lost that family member that I could have gone to for help. So, in a way, so having [Soteria worker] and [Probation worker] were my kind of place to go, if you know what I mean?' (Soteria Client)

Women highlighted the non-judgemental stance they felt from Soteria workers, which, again, meant they were able to speak freely and openly without stigma or shame. This was especially important in light of having criminal convictions.

'I don't have to hide who I am. I don't have to hide the fact that I've been to prison. It's like I can sit with you guys and you talk to me like I'm a human being. I don't have to hide it from anyone' (Soteria Client)

The relational qualities of the Soteria worker were therefore paramount in not just initiating but also maintaining engagement with Soteria clients. Having an open relationship with their worker also meant that Soteria could support women across a broad spectrum of needs, that no topic was off limits.

'I do like her and I think she has helped me a lot. And, as I say, she's easy to talk to as well. She asks me about, it's not just right, what's going on with the criminal side of things? Or what's going on with the domestic abuse side of things? She asks me about the whole thing. Like my whole life instead of just one or two things' (Soteria Client)

'...with Court obviously she's given me some advice and made me feel a bit less nervous about things so I do definitely think it has changed and I'm more open about speaking about it now whereas before I wasn't. So - 'cos I think she makes you feel like at ease so I feel like I can speak to her about anything' (Soteria Client)

In turn, Soteria clients described a level of mutual respect between them and their Soteria worker, they were able to hear and receive information that they may not have responded to from other professionals.

'I don't think anyone likes hearing stuff that they don't want to but when it comes from [Soteria Worker] I can kind of take it I suppose. 'Cos it' the way she says it. She doesn't just say negative things. Obviously she'll explain the situation to me' (Soteria Client)

This was extremely important as some women described a sense of isolation and often that their Soteria or probation worker were their only source of support.

'When I come out of prison I literally had like my Mum and my sister and her husband and their children. Other than that no-one speaks to me. So the only person I had was [Soteria worker] and my Probation Officer that would speak to me' (Soteria Client)

3.2.4 Contact with the criminal justice system as an opportunity for help

Despite the inherent negativity attached to a criminal conviction, women involved in the Soteria project actually framed their contact with the criminal justice system as somewhat of a 'blessing in disguise'. When followed by appropriate support, contact with the justice system acts as a critical junction to access help. Those engaged with Soteria reported they finally felt understood and supported.

'It's only when I accessed internal mental health services within prison that that woman really helped me to see that actually I wasn't even in a fit state to safeguard myself let alone my kids. Because I think it was only when my solicitor came to see me he says, you need to actually speak up and say what's happened. You need to actually speak up and tell what's actually been happening. And then that's one of the first times I actually finally admitted. I said well I went through a 17 year marriage of being abused nearly every day. Going to prison, that was the first place in my life that I felt safe. For me prison has been a place where I've suddenly got the right advice from the right people to say I've actually been treated in a very bad way' (Soteria Client)

'One of the Governors at the prison, he goes Miss, this doesn't seem like the right place for a person like you. He goes, I've read your notes and stuff and you haven't said anything but I think you might have been a victim of domestic violence. And I think the first time he kind of said it, I was like no, I don't want to be a victim. I don't want to be a victim. And then I used to go to my cell and just sit there and cry' (Soteria Client)

The women that were interviewed described how they had been suffering in silence before and that their abuse being identified and subsequently accessing specialist support was a relief. They may never have come into contact with abuse services had it not been for their arrest or conviction.

'We're picking up clients that wouldn't necessarily come into service' (Stakeholder)

The fact Soteria is one project within WMWA and SDAS also meant that women could benefit from other services such as refuge, IDVAs, group programmes such as the Freedom Programme and mutual aid.

'It's a very cohesive package of support. And obviously, 'cos we're such a big organisation, we have a lot of different areas. If I have a Soteria client that I think would benefit from housing support or I feel they would benefit from, their risk is actually increasing, then I can then refer to another area within the organisation. So it's a good base of support for the women that meets the criteria that can then, if they have any additional needs that crop up, we're really well equipped to refer for that' (Soteria Worker)

3.2.5 Positive Outcomes for Women

When asked how the justice system responded to women with abusive backgrounds, there seemed to be an acknowledgement across interviewees that things had improved, but there was still a distance to travel.

'CPS, solicitors, barristers and judges would benefit with more in-depth training when it comes to domestic abuse and the complexity surrounding victims and why people do what they do. Unless you've been in a controlling and abusive relationship, you could never understand why someone would return over and over again. Victims behaviour is not understood when it comes to the criminal justice system' (Soteria Client)

On the whole however, women on the project disclosed a fairly positive experience with judges, probation and police; but this may not be representative of those who are not involved with Soteria. Stakeholders felt that the response to women was not consistent across West Mercia and was often dependent on the presiding Judge or local probation staff. For example, police and probation were said to work well together in Hereford but this was said, in part, to be facilitated by being located next door to each other.

'I have been in Court quite a lot and obviously my solicitor says, she has been through domestic violence and to be fair I do think the Judge has been like more understanding because of that a lot of times. I mean I have got away with quite a lot but I do think they can be more lenient as such, but then you can get others who just don't give a shit basically' (Soteria Client)

Stakeholders and Soteria staff were able to identify occasions where Soteria had influenced sentencing outcomes for women.

'It's really good to know that people are keen to have our input. And it actually does have a standing; the things that we are doing actually are being considered when they have their Police interviews or they consider what the sentencing is or the next steps are going to be' (Soteria Worker)

'At the beginning of the project where this lady was being charged in a different County. So elsewhere in the country that we weren't able to attend to but she was living up here so I arranged a letter for her. She had quite a colourful criminal history and had had many a suspended sentence and community order before and by looking at her record it seemed as though she would probably end up with a custodial sentence if I didn't do something. And so I wrote letters and made sure that I spoke to everybody possible in the Court system, even though it was down in Buckinghamshire or something like that, to try and get her a community order and then get them to understand that actually she's been charged with something but she's suffered something a lot worse. And a community order is where we need to go. And she did get a community order rather than a custodial so that was another really good result on that front' (Soteria Worker)

In addition to justice outcomes for women, there were also personal triumphs. Firstly recognising abuse, leaving abusive relationships and therefore seeking appropriate help was a successful outcome.

'Without the support of everyone involved and all talking to each other and sharing information, I probably would not have been able to get away from him' (Soteria Client)

'Obviously huge differences. I think the main one being acceptance and acknowledging and understanding that she was a victim. And the conversation - I've had hours and hours of conversations with her either over the 'phone or in person - and I remember, it really stuck out to me, she just didn't see herself as a domestic violence victim. And she said until she started working with Women's Aid and the conversations that she would have with them, she said it just dawned on her and she said she couldn't believe that actually she was in that position and she was a domestic violence victim. And so the acknowledgement of that, I think for her, was really hard but a really pivotal turning point because at that point she can then accept help and go on courses and have all these conversations around her confidence and the way she looked at herself' (Stakeholder)

'The growth from her is just astounding. The fact that before we started working together she didn't really understand what was going on in her relationship. She was very trapped. She was experiencing really awful levels of abuse and was too scared to even discuss pursuing Police

action. But actually now she's pursued Police action against her perpetrator which was a huge thing for her to do that we supported her with. She's put a non-molestation order in against him that was granted and he's been sentenced to six months in prison. So, from her being so frightened at the beginning and so unsure about engaging and having spoken to me about having a poor experiences in the past with professionals to now actually going through the process of giving Police action, pursuing Police action, and readily engaging in support is a huge' (Soteria worker)

One repeated theme was that women and stakeholders said working with Soteria had helped them understand why women sometimes stayed in abusive relationships. For the women themselves, this renewed understanding supported a sense of confidence that they would not go back to an abusive situation. One woman also described how she now had a greater ability to implore healthy boundaries in her professional and personal life.

'I'll be honest with you if they didn't put a restriction on me - they actually when I got bail, one of my conditions was that I'm not allowed to contact my husband. So imagine it's really, it was only the fact that my heart was being ripped out and that was the other thing, I felt really guilty. And I kept on saying to [Soteria worker] like he's done all this to me. He's done all this to my kids and yet why do I care about him? And what I hadn't realised is that what my mind knew my heart hadn't caught up yet. And I needed that time to myself. And now suddenly I now know what it feels like to just be able to get up in the morning and peacefully get up without being scared' (Soteria Client)

As a result of walking away from abusive relationships, women described a new sense of self-esteem, confidence and freedom. This was often borne out in the fact they could 'eat what they wanted', 'take the long route to work', 'talk to whoever I want' and have autonomy over their appearance.

'I'm getting myself back. I'm getting me back to how I was. And I'm learning to see things differently. Obviously I'm in another relationship now and I used to look at him negatively as well. And now that's changed. They've just been amazing. They really have. They've helped me so much' (Soteria Client)

'Every single day I curl my hair. And the reason I do that is because he never let me. Do you know how stupid that makes me feel?' (Soteria Client)

I had an appointment with probation one of the days. And I was out on my bike. She was like, what are you doing? And I went, I'm on my bike and it was just weird. I was talking to her and it was just like such a sense of freedom and just being able to do what I want when I want to do it and I've never, I've not had that in so long' (Soteria Client)

4. Theory of Change

As part of the evaluation, a collaborative Theory of Change workshop was held on the 11th December 2020. It was attended by the chief executive of West Mercia Women's Aid, Service Manager of Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service, two front-line Soteria workers and two women who had been supported by the project.

A Theory of Change should give a 'two minute' story of a service or provision and should be considered as a tool to help describe the need a service is trying to address, the changes it strives to make and how this is achieved. A Theory of Change is an opportunity for a service to take stock and consider how it achieves its aims and present it in a digestible format. It works by first identifying the overall aim of a service and then working backwards asking, at each level, how is this achieved? This creates a series of building blocks that maps the change that a service user, and in this case, the wider system, will hopefully experience through engaging with Soteria.

The group started with the overarching aim of Soteria, asking the question, at the end of it all, what is Soteria really trying to achieve? It was agreed that the intended impact of the service was to 'improve individual and systemic outcomes for women in the CJS who experience DA'. This stemmed from the acknowledgement that Soteria strives to affect change for women through case-work but also by upskilling and training criminal justice professionals to ensure better, more understanding, effective and appropriate responses to women.

This led to the next phase of the Theory of Change, which considered how the overall goal was achieved through long term outcomes, intermediate and short term outcomes. Short term outcomes included women having a named Soteria worker to walk alongside them, they speak out, sometimes for the first time, about their experiences, which allows them to be identified as abusive. At this short term stage, professionals also access training from Soteria to sew the seeds of understanding and identifying domestic abuse and how that relates to offending behaviour for women. In the intermediate outcomes, this includes women actually engaging with their worker, building a trusting relationship with them, this permits women to accept and recognise their experiences as abusive, and to access support around this as well as other generic support for their needs. Professionals, at this stage, start to develop their initial learning into practice outcomes, and understand the trauma-informed approach that is required to work with women with a history of abuse. At the long term outcome stage, we see the fuller benefits of Soteria, with practice changing e.g. more appropriate, informed sentences for women, and women seeing the benefits of support in their own self-development. Embedding change is important here so that systems, services and professionals can continue to operate effectively in the absence of Soteria's consultation and training. They are autonomous.

Theory of Change also permits consideration of the more tangible activities that a service offers that supports the development of these goals. For Soteria there are a myriad of services on offer; 1-1 key-working, support navigating other appointments and services, building packages of care and brokering support from other agencies, information sharing, training of professionals. The qualitative interviews and the involvement of service users at the workshop allowed for the components of the Theory of Change to be triangulated, sense-checked and evidenced.

Theory of Change also encourages services to think about the enablers and how this influences the ability to ensure that the overarching aim is achieved (e.g. funding, referrals, Soteria being utilised by partners and women).

The Theory of Change is pictured below:

SOTERIA THEORY OF CHANGE

Intended Impact

Improving individual and systemic outcomes for women in the CJS who experience DA

Longer Term Outcomes:

- Other agencies are informed and empowered to work in a trauma-informed way with women who have experienced abuse
- Women continue to be supported effectively, having their needs met and understood in the absence of Soteria
- Those working in the justice system understand how domestic abuse affects women's lives and subsequent behaviour (including offending behaviour.) This includes understanding of the cycles of behaviour, and seeing the person not the offence
- Better understanding leads to more appropriate sentences for women
- CJS professionals (e.g. police, probation, prison, solicitors) are better equipped to identify women's needs and take these needs into account
- Long term partnership working arrangements between domestic abuse and criminal justice are maintained and embedded
- An effective co-ordinated, community response to women in CJS with experience of DA

- Women articulate their needs and boundaries to keep them feeling safe and comfortable in their day to day life
- Women feeling empowered and on their way to self-actualisation
- Women engage in training and employment opportunities
- Women feel safer, happier, less fearful
- Women are less likely to be re-traumatised by the CJS process
- Women experience a better quality of life
- Women relinquish the sense of guilt and shame they report at the start of the justice process
- Women continue their recovery and healing from abusive experiences

Intermediate Outcomes:

- Women accept they have experienced abuse
- Women are no longer in abusive situations
- Women find their voice and speak their truth
- Women accept support around abuse – and are better able to access mainstream domestic abuse services (e.g. refuge, group work recovery programmes, outreach)
- Women access and engage with other appropriate support independently (e.g. mental health support)
- Women access help and support without judgement
- Women understand how DA affects behaviour and lives – they feel that they have a better understanding of their own behaviour
- Women understand their rights and entitlements
- Women feel less overwhelmed, more able to manage

- Through training, there is an improved initial response from professionals to women in the justice system who report domestic abuse – first responders (e.g. arresting officer)
- Professionals have a better understanding of the level and impact of trauma involved in cases (e.g. the impact of having a perpetrator next door in custody suite) and therefore how women respond
- Professionals understand the need for a trauma-informed response – that women need to be treated with care and compassion
- WMWA and SDAS are automatically regarded as credible, recognisable, go-to partners for specialist DA support for women in the CJS



SOTERIA THEORY OF CHANGE

Short term outcomes:

- Women speak out to share their stories and experiences (opening up rather than being silent)
- Women have a named Soteria worker to support them
- Women engage with their Soteria worker
- Women recognise and identify their experiences as abuse
- Agencies are aware of Soteria, sign up for training and make referrals to the project
- CJS professionals attend training and, as a result, better understand the impact of DA, how to identify it and the link with offending

Activities:

- 1-1 support for women who are referred
- Soteria workers refer and support women to access other appropriate agencies
- Soteria workers provide training, advice and consultancy to professionals in the justice system about working with domestic abuse clients, the impact of domestic abuse, the link between experiencing domestic abuse and offending behaviour
- Soteria workers work with partner agencies to create joint packages of care for women
- Soteria workers co-ordinate and help women navigate across different agencies (e.g. family court, social care)
- Soteria models trauma informed care to other professionals; to encourage holistic thinking/working

Enablers:

- Adequate funding and resources for the project
- Soteria have strong working relationships with CJS colleagues that permit referrals and training opportunities
- Soteria workers are contacted at earliest opportunity
- Willingness from partners to embed training and translate these into changes in practice



5. Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Soteria to date

It is clear from the feedback gathered to date for this interim report that Soteria has made a welcome impact and difference to the lives of women engaged in the project as well as supporting stakeholders to better support their clients. Soteria can not only educate criminal justice services about the role of domestic abuse in offending, but they can also better prepare 'mainstream' domestic abuse services and others to work with women in the justice system. They can discuss their chaos, their need to build up trust first and the impact of realising they are a victim of domestic abuse. Compared to other women who pick up the phone to WMWA or SDAS and seek help, these women aren't seeking help, they don't even acknowledge they need it, they're drowning in a sea of other labels. Soteria can help them recognise their abuse in a safe and contained, non-judgemental space, support them directly and up-skill other professionals to do so too.

Soteria was always designed to make systemic changes; to leave a legacy when the pilot ended. However, routine and consistent good practice for domestic abuse victims in the criminal justice system is not yet fully embedded across agencies and transcending senior management to front-line staffing, and there is a danger that in terminating the project after the pilot, that the headway already gained may be lost or stall. In essence, valuable learning has taken place during the pilot period, equipping an even better, stronger provision moving forward.

'It's one of those situations where we just cannot afford for this to stop and we can see how this will now develop. I think that we've adapted our model and focussed on how we could engage practitioners and managers in the criminal justice system more effectively through our one-to-one work with clients and we would want to build on what is, I think, a really strong bedrock built on this great partnership working. I think we are in a place where we can really 'up the ante' in terms of training and awareness-raising and advocacy and support within the criminal justice agencies whilst simultaneously continuing to provide that essential frontline work' (WMWA CEO)

In January 2019, Soteria began as a bud and is now starting to bloom. It would seem premature, from these initial findings, to curtail Soteria as it has gathered significant traction and momentum since inception and feedback from stakeholders suggests there is further room to grow and develop to make even more of an impact. These ideas, recommendations and suggestions are detailed below.

5.2 Where next?

Whilst it is encouraging that women interviewed described their experience with the justice system as a positive one; it should not take a brush with the law to get appropriate support around domestic abuse. In addition, whilst Soteria seems to be working well with police and probation, there is now scope to develop better partner working with prisons (although it is understood this was affected by COVID), courts and police custody. This could provide opportunities for earlier intervention.

'I think if [Soteria worker] had actually come to custody and [Soteria worker] had actually held my hand and there was somebody sitting there and I could have then told them that I was really scared. Because it is the fact that he told me he's gonna kill me and the fact that he was there I knew he was in a cell near me I was too afraid' (Soteria Client)

'If I'd had her earlier I wouldn't have had to do a lot of that stuff alone' (Soteria Client)

Similarly it was suggested that stronger partnerships and referral pathways could be developed with substance misuse or mental health organisations, especially relevant for women on the cusp of criminal justice. Several women and stakeholders reported that they would like to see more 'early intervention' work for those in the pre-criminal space, rather than waiting for arrest or conviction.

There was a desire and ambition from Soteria for magistrates to receive training on the link between domestic abuse and women's offending in order to maximise the impact of the project and sentencing decisions. Whilst SDAS held a session for magistrates in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, to inform them about Soteria, wide-spread, official training for magistrates cannot take place without prior approval from Ministry of Justice level. Although this may not be within the gift of the Soteria project alone, this is an important finding and highlights a gap to be addressed. It is recommended that Soteria workers do strive to have a presence within courts wherever possible to still have an input at this stage of criminal justice proceedings.

Further, it may be appropriate that two separate roles within Soteria are developed; one that focuses on training for stakeholders and professionals and one that focuses on front-line work with women. This would also allow for more police and probation staff to be trained in line with a vision for a consistent and uniform approach across West Mercia. Training should also be continual rather than a one-off event. To this end, it was observed by Soteria staff that they had had less of an uptake on 'consultancy' and 'advice' than was initially expected. This may be because other professionals find it easier to refer a woman into the service than seek advice to support her themselves. Again, this is something that should be explored further to better understand the barriers and how it may be overcome.

The issue of housing was raised by a small number of stakeholders who flagged the difficulty, yet importance, of secure housing for this cohort. One idea put forward has been to adopt the 'housing first' model as seen in cities across the UK. This warrants further exploration and housing should be suitable for women, their pets and children - as this was raised as a significant barrier to leaving violent and abusive relationships. Soteria staff were asked if they felt there were any cohorts that were not benefitting from Soteria. It is recommended that data is analysed in relation to specific demographics (e.g. ethnicities) of women in prison from West Mercia to see if any specific work is required to support BAME communities or traveller communities if it is found that they are overrepresented in the cohort.

Soteria currently straddles both WMWA and SDAS and there is merit in this, not least as it ensures coverage across the region. There is scope to align their working even further for consistency across the County.

Appendix A – Case Studies

SDAS – CASE STUDY 1

33 year old female client, substance misuse, engaging with probation.

| Presenting Issues | Identified Concerns | Assessed Needs & Support Plan |
|--|--|---|
| Client frightened of further abuse, frightened of the risk of escalation and continuation of emotional and physical harm. | Risk of emotional and physical harm to client. | Help client understand the effect the domestic abuse has had on her, to help her understand what she has experienced and the tactics used against her. Explore with her how this has affected her life. Help client safety plan and risk assess situations she is in to help keep herself safe. |
| Client not able to engage with services such as substance misuse and probation due to control, emotional and physical impact from alleged perpetrator (AP) | Risk of re-offence and risk of breaching order leading to custodial sentence. Risk of reusing substances, unable to commit and engage with script and support around substance misuse. Risk of emotional and physical harm to client when she engages with services, AP uses the threat of going back to jail and reusing substances against her feeling he has control of this. | Support client to engage with services. Create a safe environment, no contact with AP for her risk to decrease. Therefore enabling the client to have a positive outcome and engagement with these services. |
| Client's mental health impacted by previous and current relationship. | Client has mental health issues, this has been impacted by previous relationships from the past and this current relationship. Will have very down episodes in her mental health, struggles to engage with services due to AP controlling her. | Client assisted to look at self-care to increase self-esteem and aim towards her having a more positive future. Client to explore previous relationships to link to mental health declines to see if there is a pattern with this. |

Overview

Client was referred into service by probation following professional intervention through the Soteria Project, abuse was escalating, probation were concerned due to the risk posed to Client and AP being outside all appointments becoming agitated in waiting room and questioning Client if appointment was too long. Client started to disengage with probation and was at risk of being breached on her order, with a likely outcome being a custodial sentence due to previous breaches. Soteria worker was brought into probation appointments where client disclosed the abuse and explained that she wanted to leave but was unable to leave without her dog. Previously when in custody her dog had been burnt by AP and his family, they would regularly harm the dog when the client was at home too. Likewise the client was anxious due to not being able to cook for herself and lacking confidence with her independence in life skills.

Resulting Support Actions

- Client supported to consider safety within her own property, keeping herself safe from further physical abuse and emotional abuse. Client has been supported with safety planning and safety awareness discussions when returning back to home area to see family.
- Client felt that she had been listened to and acknowledged as a victim of domestic abuse, has also been supported with this with other agencies, probation and substance mis-use teams.
- Client's confidence has grown in herself, her independence and ability to support herself.

Outcomes achieved

Client is safe to engage with services such as substance misuse teams, probation. No longer on a breached order and has attended all appointments since being involved with both projects. Client is in safe accommodation, therefore being able to focus on her own well-being and other needs. Client is being supported to be more confident in her independence and household skills, cooking for herself, engaging with relevant services, email and letter correspondence with services. Client has stable finances, not being spent by ex-partner and his family. Able to think logically with her money towards what she needs to spend her money on to look towards the future, e.g household items for new property. Client is interested and proactive with engaging with volunteering opportunities to support others. She is interested in supporting projects for women who are in similar situations to what she has been in. Client better able to understand the impact of domestic abuse on herself, her mental well-being and on her dog. Client has identified that there has been more than one abusive relationship in her life. She realises that it has not been her fault and that is not how she should be treated in a relationship.

Shared Lives impact - joint working alongside Soteria Project

Without the professional relationship brokered between Soteria and Shared Lives, the client would not have found safe accommodation that supported her needs with cooking skills and living independently. This 1:1 continual support would not have been able to be achieved in a refuge accommodation setting with staff. Likewise the client had previously not engaged with housing services which had asked her to leave her dog, yet Shared Lives accommodated this. This has also helped the client see the benefit of the placement with how settled and content her dog now is. The workers at Shared Lives have been non-judgemental, understanding, proactive and supportive to both the professional, host worker and to the client. The worker has also managed the relationship between host and client really well, addressing any issues in a respectful manner and sorting them out promptly. This multiagency working has been very beneficial to both the Soteria Project but also probation, who have noticed an instant change in not only the client's appearance and way they are presenting themselves but mainly with their engagement and positive attitude with engaging with probation. They have been passionate about the reason behind the service, they have been brilliant to work alongside. Especially in relation to the Through Soteria and Shared Lives working together, this client has had her additional needs met and she can engage in her order and external support more effectively.

Appendix A – Case Studies

SDAS – CASE STUDY 2

27 year old female client, arrested on suspicion to supply.

| Presenting Issues | Identified Concerns | Assessed Needs & Support Plan |
|---|--|---|
| Client frightened of further abuse, frightened of the risk of escalation and continuation of emotional and physical harm. | Risk of emotional and physical harm to client. | Help client understand the effect the domestic abuse has had on her, to help her understand what she has experienced and the tactics used against her. Explore with her how this has affected her life. Help client safety plan and risk assess situations she is in to help keep herself safe. |
| Client struggling to engage with many services involved since being arrested for the offence. | Client feeling overwhelmed, risk of disengaging. | Streamlining services involved to those that meet clients needs and priorities. Using core groups effectively, multiagency working to ensure client is not being overwhelmed with support being offered. |
| Clients impending bail review of offence. | Looking at evidence client has to remove herself some the suspicion. Evidence of AP* being solely responsible for the crime. | Supporting client to engage with police in a positive manner. Evidence collection, explaining and support with police process. |

Overview

Client was referred into the project by social services following being arrested for suspicion to supply alongside AP. The abuse and police callouts regarding DV were escalating. Reports to housing of unsocial behaviour and drug dealing suspicions were also increasing. Report to 101 was made by a neighbour resulting in a police raid. As the client was the sole tenant of property, she was arrested as well and her phone was taken off her. The AP became physical again towards the client with police being called out. Social services were now involved who explained concerns for two children in clients care and to the client. Client then decided to end the relationship. Soteria worker was brought into social services core group, tasked with supporting client with DV and police case against client. Client disclosed the abuse and explained AP was continuing to harass her at home. Soteria supported the client with evidence collection on AP, victim statement of AP having possession of drugs in her house without her knowledge. Charges were dropped against client. AP received a community order and suspended sentence form the drugs charges and a restraining order is now in place. He also received a community order and ordered to pay back costs to damages to property following client being supported to report and go to court with DV charges of assault against client. Six months on, the client completed support and is engaging with social services for parenting support of children. The children are due to be reduced to a Children in Need plan in December. AP has not broken the restraining order, and the client has set up third party for AP to have supervised contact with children in a safe environment. Client is bidding on properties to move to a new property.

Resulting Support Actions

- Client supported through CJS and through reporting and court process on charges against AP.
- Client supported to consider safety within her own property, keeping herself safe from further physical abuse and emotional abuse. Client has been supported with safety planning and safety awareness discussions.
- Client felt that she had been listened to and acknowledged as a victim of domestic abuse, felt listened to by all agencies and the plan made was less overwhelming for her and was based around hers and her children's needs.
- Supporting client with evidence collection and reporting to the police. She was concerned that she would only be seen as a perpetrator as AP had used her house to store drugs without her knowing, supporting her to see that will be seen as a victim of a crime and AP should be investigated for this.