

# Making a Difference

Older People's Community Engagement Project (OPP) | Impact Statement 2023



The 'Making a Difference, Older People's Community Engagement Project' was a result of recognition and concerns about the lack of understanding of older people's experiences of domestic abuse and sexual abuse - often overlooked by professionals and underrepresented among service providers.

## The intention of the project is to;

- contribute to a better understanding of the experiences and thoughts and beliefs of older victims/survivors
- develop a better understanding of what older people want from services;
- what the current barriers are locally; and
- how can we better communicate with, and improve responses to, older people impacted by Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (DASV).



In 2017, over 200,000 people aged 60 to 74 experienced domestic abuse. There are no reliable figures for people older than 74 as the data has not previously been gathered



## You Matter

33

The number people who took part

30

Professionals were consulted

47

Online survey responses

10

Group sessions



# OPP - Stage 1

The multi-agency Older People's Pilot was set up in Newquay in May 2022 with the aim of improving our response to older people impacted by Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence.

Stage 1 of the pilot (March-December) focused on engagement with older people to get a better understanding of what they have experienced, barriers to access and what they need and want from services.

*Safer Cornwall has commissioned this project supported in part by £5000 funding from the Safeguarding Innovation Fund.*

*Funding from the Safeguarding Innovation Fund has enabled a partnership between Age UK and The Women's Centre Cornwall to employ 4 Facilitators who are experts by experience.*



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"Older people do not see themselves covered by the publicity that is currently available - we should be involved in writing it- making it real"

## Headlines from 1-2-1's

**In total we spoke with 6 x men and 27 x women.**

22 older people out of 33 participants identified living as children with abuse - a range of all the different types. All 33 participants in our 1-2-1 conversations talked about a wide range of impacts on their mental and physical health and wellbeing

**Their voices are the most important as they provide real experiences and clarity over the breadth of issues that need to be addressed.**

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**Older people must have a voice in explaining what the impact of DASV has been on their lives, telling us about what has been helpful but also what was not.**

# Hearing from the Professionals

We contacted a range of experienced professionals about the strengths and weaknesses of the current services for older people when addressing DASV.

**We consulted with 30 professionals and ran 10 introductory presentations for a range of groups, including Age UK Service Spotlights, Memory Café Way Finders, Dementia and Older Persons Mental Health Service, Newquay and Bodmin Safe, 2 x Anchor Housing Residential Homes and attended various community events. The information gained through these conversations has contributed to the content and the recommendations contained in the full report.**

## Memory Cafe Case Study

A woman had been attending for about a month. She had recently moved to Cornwall and told the worker that she and her husband had sold their house as their daughter said she would move in with them. Helping to take care of her husband who was very elderly. She said this did not happen, and she barely got support from her daughter. After her husband died, her daughter moved closer next door so that she could help her more.

The woman then started to cry and say she didn't understand why her daughter was so mean to her. She revealed that her daughter would not let her bathe when she wanted to, controlled her life, and whom she saw, and what she did. The woman is extremely isolated and has few social engagements. Her only regular social engagement is at the Memory Café.

In 2019, only 0.1% of people supported by specialist, local Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (DASV) services were over the age of 60 years. 25% of people in Cornwall are over 65

The impact of DASV can be diverse and devastating for older survivors. Domestic abuse has the highest rate of repeat victimisation of all violent crimes.



*We would like to acknowledge all the victims/survivors and professionals who took part in the project to date. All those participating did so because they 'wanted to make a difference' so that services improve for older people currently facing DASV - but also to contribute to a safer, less violent life for all.*

# What you said

It is of note that the 33 people that we interviewed were contacted through our team reaching out through their personal networks.

None of the people interviewed were referred to us by any of the organisations that were contacted about the project. This includes DASV specialist and non-specialist organisations (universal and age-specific).

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“I didn't see the relationship as abusive at the time. I had no understanding of healthy relationships or how to be in one. I only recognised it was abusive after seeking out therapy for my anxiety and depression.”

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“I think it would have helped to make a difference to my situation if anyone had ever named it to me, rather than me blaming myself for his 'selfish' behaviour.”

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“Sometimes when you can't see the light anymore you just need a third voice”

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“I didn't realise that I was in an abusive relationship. I just thought all the manipulation and lies were an unhappy marriage. It took a violent incident for me to reach out - luckily, I found the Women's Centre. This proved brilliant as I felt believed and not judged”

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“No one advised me of Domestic Abuse Support organisations for men or for gay men. The first time I heard of Broken Rainbow was when I applied for a job with them. And that was after the abusive relationship, if I had been given a number to call I would have called it. It might have prevented me from attempting to kill myself”

# Your Survey

In late 2022, we compiled and conducted an Online Survey. We received 47 responses that were consistent with the findings from the participant interviews. In summary, we found:

- All participants had lived or lived in Cornwall, with 85% over the age of 60.
- **All participants had experienced abuse within a relationship, this abuse was varied and ranged from bullying & threatening behaviour to domestic abuse, coercive control & sexual violence.**
- 53% of people said that they first experienced abuse over 20 years ago - 31% of people said that the abuse was still happening.
- **95% of abusers were Male - 80% of abusers were either the participants' long-term partners or husbands.**
- 44% of people asked for support - 9 times out of 10 the support group got back to the person.
- **Only 50% of people felt that they got the support they needed. 72% of people were not referred to another organisation or support network.**
- People cited shame, fear that the abuse would get worse, guilt, fear of not being believed and lack of knowledge (regarding available support) as reasons for not reaching out.
- **93% of people identified as female, 29% of people have a disability with a further 30% stating that they have a long-term health condition.**



"As an older woman I feel the greatest barrier is shame. I need to know that I am believed, and I might then feel able to accept help. I need to trust the organisation that's contacting me"



# The Ideal Service

The following provides a snapshot of recommendations by participants 'What would you want to be included in an ideal service for older people experiencing DASV'.

- **Strategy to be co-produced with Experts by Experience.**
- **Work with trusted agencies of all protected characteristic groups - including them in the planning and delivery of the communication strategy. Which must speak to male victims-survivors as well as women victim-survivors**
- **Clear language and meaningful communication.**
- **Specialist Older People training for all (statutory, voluntary, community) to include recognising what Domestic Abuse is and responding effectively to meet older people's specific needs.**
- **Improved co-ordinated partnership working**
- **Safe women-only services and more Women's Centres or safe spaces for group work.**
- **Accessible, free and available therapy & counselling.**
- **To be survivor-led and based on an empowerment and rights model.**
- **Flexible support in terms of intensity, type and duration.**
- **Appropriate safe social housing and accommodation.**
- **Ensure all access needs (physical, financial and emotional) are identified and addressed.**



## What's next

- **Co-produce an overarching OP Charter to support older people affected by DASV**
- Develop and implement a specific older people's communications strategy.
- **Improve multi-agency practice and working together, especially implementing routine/sensitive inquiry**
- Develop and deliver specific OP DASV training
- **Develop a risk assessment for older people to be used by professionals that factors in older people's specific issues.**
- Ensure safe accommodation provision for older people that is relevant and responsive to their needs
- **Continue and extend community engagement**

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"I feel more small groups would be good. Sharing experiences was a good starting point for me with other women who understood"



The suggestions from OPP participants are incredibly comprehensive and contribute recommendations towards developing a responsive co-ordinated community response.