



Introduction to Beacon

“I’m a person. I don’t fit in to one of your categories”

The problem

Each year, two million people in England and Wales experience domestic abuse, and SafeLives research finds that at the time they start school at least one child in every classroom will have lived with domestic abuse since they were born. We know that 85% of victims seek help five times on average before they get effective support, however less than 1% of perpetrators receive any support to change or challenge their behaviour.

Every survivor of domestic abuse, and their family, deserves the right response, at the right time, to make them safe, sooner.

Our aim

SafeLives is working in partnership to pilot Beacon sites to improve the response to domestic abuse. The Beacon sites trial interventions that create systematic change, introducing a whole family approach, working alongside existing services to improve the response, and challenging perpetrator behaviour.

Beacon sites provide a package of support for victims, perpetrators and their families and offer a tailored response.

We are currently working in two pilot sites: Norfolk and West Sussex.

What is a Beacon site?

We recognise that nationally, services are often only able to respond to part of the picture around domestic abuse. Working alongside SafeLives Pioneers - survivors and experts by experience - and sector leading domestic abuse services, we have carried out extensive research to identify inconsistencies that exist nationally in the response to domestic abuse. Together we have analysed research and data and consulted a range of specialist services and hundreds of people who have lived experience of domestic abuse. We have used this research to develop innovative new interventions to improve outcomes for individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse, while holding perpetrators to account and challenging them to change.

The Beacon sites are progressive areas who have committed resources and are building on their foundations of a strong risk-led approach. They are improving their response to domestic abuse so more victims, survivors and families can get the right support at the right time to make them safe and well.

Essentially, the Beacon sites and interventions place the authentic voice of survivors and families at the heart of their response. They are piloting and testing these new interventions to address inconsistencies in national provision and effectively use evidence to improve the local response. Central to each Beacon site is a strong commitment to work in partnership with existing and potential services to enhance the response for individuals and whole families.

Beacon sites have a range of interventions they can draw on to support victims, survivors and their family – giving the right response to every individual based on their needs, while holding perpetrators to account.

Early intervention, helping people recognise the signs of abuse before it escalates

No one should have to reach crisis point before they get help. Early support and intervention can help someone experiencing domestic abuse recognise the signs before it escalates.

Equally, women who have been at high risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse need support to keep themselves and their children safe and well, and avoid repeat cycles of abuse.

The support of a trained professional can help more people to get safe and stay safe before their lives are at serious risk.

Survivors tell us:

“I am a strong woman and I never thought it would happen to me. I always thought I would leave a man who treated me badly. But it creeps up on you. They are very clever and manipulative.”

Survivor, Every Story Matters, SafeLives, 2018

“It started very minor and gradually increased in severity throughout the relationship. It got significantly worse after we had our first daughter but looking back it was always there.”

Survivor, Every Story Matters, SafeLives, 2018

Support for the complex needs many people have

Many people experiencing domestic abuse will have a wide range of other support needs, often as a result of the abuse they have experienced, or exacerbated by the abuse. Nationally, around four out of ten (42% England and Wales, 42% Scotland) victims of domestic abuse report mental health issues and one in ten (10% England and Wales, 9% Scotland) are misusing substances.¹

We need to look at the person as a whole, taking into account all of their needs. Victims with complex needs require flexibility and specialist support that meets their individual needs – preventing people from falling through the gaps in services and improving their long term safety and wellbeing.

Survivors tell us:

“We need to not feel overwhelmed by support from lots of different services.”

Emma, survivor consultant as part of the development of complex needs intervention

“I think we need a more therapeutic assessment as well as the risk stuff to make sure you understand our needs.”

Sayma, survivor consulted as part of development of complex needs intervention

“I think women drop out of services because the workers have too many clients and not enough time. This limits the quality of care the women with complex needs get.”

Jenny, survivor consulted as part of development of complex needs intervention

“I want a check in call to ask me how I am not just whether I have completed my actions.”

Zina, survivor consulted as part of development of complex needs intervention

¹ SafeLives, Idva Insights national dataset, 2018
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Support for people who are in a relationship or living with the perpetrator of abuse

Too often we ask ‘Why don’t you leave?’ when the reality is much more complicated and there may be many reasons why someone remains in an abusive relationship.

SafeLives Insights data reveals that 29% of victims are in an intimate relationship with the perpetrator at the point of accessing a service and a further 8% of perpetrators are family members (rather than intimate partners).² One in four (23%) victims will be living with the perpetrator of abuse.³

These factors should not be barriers to accessing help, but currently they are. Victims still living with the perpetrator will experience abuse for six years before they get effective help – that’s double the time that it takes for those who are not living with the perpetrator. Despite being more likely to experience physical abuse (85% vs 78%), victims who are cohabiting with the perpetrator are significantly less likely to report abuse to the police (59% vs 79%).⁴ Less than 1% of perpetrators receive any form of intervention to address their behaviour.⁵

We know that risk increases when an abusive relationship ends, meaning that working with victims and children who are still in their relationship or living with the perpetrator of abuse, and holding perpetrators to account, while offering opportunities to change, is vital to safety and wellbeing.

Survivors tell us:

“I was looking for ways to help him, not get rid of him.”

Unpublished survivor consultation, SafeLives, 2017 (Beacon workshop)

“He’s part of this but nobody ever talks to him.”

Unpublished survivor consultation, SafeLives, 2017 (Beacon workshop)

Support for children and young people through specialist, age appropriate services

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on children. Our research shows that in England and Wales, two in five children (41%) in families where there is domestic abuse have been living with that abuse since they were born. Half of these children will experience difficulty sleeping and a third believe that the abuse was their fault. All have an increased likelihood of engaging in risk taking behaviours themselves.⁶

These children need a specialist, age appropriate response to help them recover from abuse and live safe and happy lives.

Young people need support to recognise what a healthy relationship looks like, especially when they’ve already experienced or witnessed abuse in the home. With support tailored to young people’s needs, we can break the patterns of abuse for good.

Survivors tell us:

“I think it’s important to build a relationship with the young person, because if not there’s no way they’d be able to open up and tell you the real issues, the real problem.”

Nisha, young person interviewed as part of our Spotlight on domestic abuse and young people

“They lost a huge part of their childhood due to the fear I faced. They encountered scary situations that children should never have to face.”

² SafeLives, Idva Insights national dataset, 2018

³ SafeLives, Idva Insights national dataset, 2018

⁴ SafeLives, Idva Insights national dataset, 2017

⁵ SafeLives, Feasibility Study (unpublished), 2014

⁶ SafeLives, Children and Young People Insights national dataset, 2017

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Survivor, Every Story Matters, SafeLives, 2018

“My children have all been affected by the domestic abuse. Two of my children have had eating issues but not had any help with them. One child became very violence and mimicked the behaviour his dad showed towards me. They have all suffered with anxiety/panic attacks and one has threatened suicide.”

Survivor, Every Story Matters, SafeLives, 2018

Support for survivors to recover from the harm, heal and build resilience

Once safe, survivors may still have ongoing needs and require support to continue their recovery from the impact of abuse.

It is widely known that domestic abuse can have a long lasting impact – both physically and psychologically. Just under half of domestic abuse victims identified in hospital screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder.⁷

It is not enough to merely make people safe from immediate danger. We need to create clear pathways of support to help them move on from the trauma of domestic abuse, and build confidence and resilience so they can thrive and live a life free from fear.

Survivors tell us:

“I can see the life that I want out there but I can’t get to it. I keep getting dragged back.”

Annie, survivor consultant

“Survivors and victims of domestic abuse are a hard to reach group and recovery is a choice that you don’t realise is even possible as you come out of an abusive relationship. It’s not enough to understand what has happened to you – you also have to learn and be guided and supported to rebuild your life and yourself. Literally take your life back and build something else. Having had our futures distorted and taken away from us by our abuser we don’t know what our futures could look like, we don’t know what we want, we don’t feel we have a right to want or dream or desire.”

Survivor, Step down and recovery survivor survey, SafeLives, 2017

“Once I was safe from my abuser it was relatively hard to build my families confidence and trust. Although I was functioning I couldn’t really think clearly which meant I wasn’t always making the right decisions. I would have benefited from a plan of what I should be aiming for and how to go about restoring confidence and building resilience into our lives.”

Survivor, Step down and recovery survivor survey

“There is nothing really there for people like me who suffer 4 or 5 years after leaving. An event has triggered me and I now need counselling. After 4 years left all I have been offered is GP which means anti-depressants which is not what I want.”

Survivor, Step down and recovery survivor survey, SafeLives, 2017

⁷ SafeLives, Cry for Health, 2016

Holding partners that abuse to account for their actions

We need to stop asking “Why doesn’t she leave?” and start asking “ Why doesn’t he stop?”

Each year, more than 100,000 people in the UK are at high and imminent risk of being killed or seriously harmed as a result of domestic abuse. Services rightly focus on meeting the needs of victims but too often perpetrators are not held to account. Less than 1% of perpetrators receive any specialist intervention to change or be challenged.^[1]

We know that 1 in 4 are repeat offenders^[2] and some have as many as six different victims.^[3] There is only one person responsible for abuse – the perpetrator. To deliver long term sustainable change and reduce the number of victims, we must tackle the root cause of the problem.

We believe we must challenge perpetrators to change so more victims, survivors and families can be safe, sooner.

We are currently trialling the Drive Partnership, made up of Respect, SafeLives and Social Finance. The pilot is developing, testing and evaluation a model to disrupt perpetrator behaviour. It is being delivered in Essex, South Wales and West Sussex and is now also being extended to Croydon, Cardiff, West Midlands, and West Mercia

[1] SafeLives Feasibility Study (unpublished), 2014

[2] SafeLives, Marac national dataset 2015, 12 months to March 2015

[3] Robinson et al, Prevalence and characteristics of serial domestic abuse perpetrators, 2015