

Essex against domestic violence

Report on
recent work undertaken
and strategic goals
for 2008 – 2011

We aim to reduce the incidence of domestic violence through inter-agency partnership in which relevant agencies work consistently to provide a safer community for the people of Essex.

A word from the Chair

Since the establishment in 2002 of a County Co-ordinating Group to tackle the issue of domestic violence, work on this front has enjoyed marked progress across Essex. Under the title of Essex Against Domestic Violence, the Co-ordinating Group first launched a programme of multi-agency awareness-raising for senior management, with a view to enhancing understanding of domestic violence and to start managers thinking about how they could build up programmes for tackling it within and between their agencies. Since then some agencies have introduced impressive programmes for helping the victims of domestic violence. In other agencies programmes for such victims are now more sensitive and sophisticated. These developments have also helped to generate some encouraging instances of positive inter-agency cooperation.

There can be no room for complacency, however. There are still agencies that have to establish effective initiatives for tackling domestic violence. There is also room for more county-wide cooperation to help to reduce the duplication of time and effort, that currently occurs, and to help people, who struggle against domestic violence on their own or with too few staff, to feel more supported and more effective. But we should not be downcast. Progress has been made and EADV is increasingly involved in supporting more ambitious and far-reaching projects.

In this, our third strategy, covering the period 2008–2011, we start by looking back at some of the activities in which we have recently been involved, before outlining the goals and activities we aim to pursue over the next three years.

Dr June Freeman

The common vision

The parties to this strategy aim to establish a just, accessible and effective system of help for victims of domestic violence through early identification, appropriate referrals and high levels of support during the processes of investigation, the courts and 'moving on'.

In the long term we aim to ensure, through a range of educational initiatives, that future generations become neither perpetrators nor victims of domestic violence.

Myth – *It's just a quarrel. All couples have them.*

Fact – *Domestic violence commonly includes forcing a woman to have sex, pulling clumps of her hair out, punching her, even attempting to strangle her. Mental abuse includes depriving a woman of money for food and clothes, keeping her a virtual prisoner, depriving her of sleep and constantly telling her she is ugly, stupid and useless. Unsurprisingly, many women live in constant fear. The perpetrator develops routines of violence which commonly escalate, getting worse and more frequent over time, though there may be 'honeymoon' periods between violent outbursts.*

An Essex refuge website

Recent progress

One of the most important developments has been the appointment of a County Coordinator. This has enabled EADV to work with and support initiatives in agencies as disparate as the Essex Criminal Justice Board, Essex County Council Crime and Disorder Reduction Unit, Refuge Essex and the local Domestic Violence Forums.

Without a County Coordinator a number of initiatives would probably not have taken off. Among the most important of these are:

- ◆ The launch of the first county Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC) covering Basildon, Brentwood & Thurrock. These courts are designed to speed up the legal procedures in domestic violence cases, thereby reducing the stress suffered by the victims. It is also hoped they will aid the development of an increasing number of Criminal Justice Staff who possess a specialist knowledge about the conduct of domestic violence cases.
- ◆ The appointment of three Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) who, among other things, will provide support, advice and information for victims who face the difficult task of appearing as witnesses for the Crown against their perpetrators in the SDVCs.
- ◆ The introduction of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) in the SDVC area. Through sharing information these conferences seek to help individual agencies design effective safety plans for the victims of particularly high risk perpetrators, thereby reducing the danger of repeated attacks on them.
- ◆ The establishment of a bi-monthly newsletter providing information about new government initiatives and local practice. This aims to save time for busy staff trying to deal with domestic violence in different parts of the county.
- ◆ A three year research project, '*Talking to my Mum*', conducted by the University of Warwick in partnership with Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge concluded with the publication of a manual to help abused women talk to their children about living with domestic violence and so rebuild and strengthen their relationship with each other. With the County Coordinator's help EADV has followed this by holding two dissemination days, in which they have explained the research findings and helped to train people in the use of the manual.
- ◆ Having a County Coordinator has helped to ensure regular local radio and newspaper coverage thereby keeping the issue of domestic violence in Essex in the public eye.
- ◆ Members of the Court Service worked with EADV to organise a training course for Women's Aid workers to help them enlarge their understanding of the way the law operates in domestic violence cases and the way the courts work. Take-up was high and the Coordinator organised three separate training sessions. Gaps in understanding were revealed and addressed.

Definition of domestic violence

The government's current definition of domestic violence is:

Any incidence of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

EADV has an unqualified commitment to supporting any victim of domestic violence. However, we believe it is important to draw attention to the hugely disproportionate incidence of victims of domestic violence among different groups in our society and also to the different levels of difficulty certain groups face when seeking help. Overly general definitions of domestic violence encourage simplistic conceptions of what needs to be prioritised in programmes aiming to tackle domestic violence.

EADV therefore notes that:

- ◆ The bulk of domestic violence cases display a pattern of behaviour characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person, usually a man, over another, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate relationship. This misuse of predominantly male power and control is manifested in various ways, including but not restricted to, physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and the imposition of social isolation, and is most commonly a combination of them all.
- ◆ Very few definitions of domestic violence make any reference to children. However, there is now a substantial body of evidence which shows that domestic violence adversely affects children. This has to be recognised and addressed in programmes which seek to tackle domestic violence.
- ◆ There is evidence that domestic violence often occurs alongside child and animal abuse within families. Child abuse can therefore be an indicator of domestic violence in the family and vice versa. We need to be conscious of this.
- ◆ Conservative cultural values in some black and minority ethnic (BME) groups can subject women to forced marriage, murder in the name of so-called 'honour' and female genital mutilation. The victims of these forms of domestic violence deserve all our support and we need to seek ways of helping them.
- ◆ Victims with physical, mental and learning disabilities can have special difficulties in seeking help. We need to be sensitive to this.
- ◆ When domestic violence occurs in same sex relationships the victims deserve the same access to help as other victims. We need to ensure they get the help they need.

It is only by acting together that we can support abused women and children and send out the message that domestic violence will not be tolerated in our society.

Nicola Harwin, CEO, Women's Aid

Strategic goals for 2008–2011 and proposed action



To increase the number of successful prosecutions of perpetrators of domestic violence

To this end EADV will:

- ◆ Monitor the Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC) with a view to helping them operate with maximum efficiency and consider the development of such courts throughout Essex.
- ◆ Monitor the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Service for supporting high risk victims through the courts and seek to secure long term funding to establish an IDVA service throughout Essex.
- ◆ Monitor the new Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and seek to establish these conferences throughout Essex.
- ◆ Support the Essex Probation Service in its delivery of the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) and its parallel support service for victims supplied by the Women's Safety Workers.
- ◆ Seek to introduce a community based voluntary perpetrator programme and a parallel support scheme for victims.

46% of women murdered in 2001–2 were murdered by current or former partners. By comparison, 5% of men murdered were killed by a current or former partner. Flood-Page et al, 2003

Women are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving a partner. Lees 2000

I don't want to see my dad again because he scares me and my little brother. Child in an Essex refuge 2006



Support initiatives to provide consistent training in domestic violence work across the county

To this end EADV will:

- ◆ Work with Women's Aid, Essex Safeguarding Children's Board, the CDRPs, Criminal Justice agencies and other local organisations to extend the provision of high quality domestic violence training, at both an introductory and advanced level.

Over 15,000 domestic incidents were reported to the Essex Police last year. This amounts to 40 calls a day. Essex Police 2007



3

Work to enhance public awareness of the incidence of domestic violence and the suffering it causes

To this end EADV will:

- ◆ Continue to work with the CDRPs on countywide awareness/ media campaigns.
- ◆ Continue to establish contacts with the local media.
- ◆ Continue to disseminate information through a county newsletter about new local and national domestic violence initiatives.

Since abusers typically display different kinds of behaviour than they do in their private relationships, most people are not usually aware of domestic violence when it is happening in their community.

Women's Aid website 2007

Dad used to shout for no reason. He was horrible to my mum. He would push her around and think it was funny. But I never laughed at that and neither did mum.

Child in an Essex refuge 2006



4

Increase the range of support options for children witnessing domestic violence in their home

To this end EADV will:

- ◆ Continue to support the dissemination of and training in the use of 'Talking To My Mum' manuals.
- ◆ Support schools in delivering the education packs on domestic violence 'I just wanted to say . . .' produced by Castlepoint and Rochford Domestic Violence Panel.
- ◆ Encourage schools to train teachers on domestic violence issues.

When mum and dad used to fight I used to run upstairs and hide under the blanket and cover my ears.

Child in an Essex refuge 2006

5

Work with local partners / agencies in their drive to tackle domestic violence and reduce repeat victimisation

To this end EADV will:

- ◆ Continue to work with housing providers to help victims who wish to remain in their own homes.
- ◆ Continue to work with local authorities to support the development of outreach services in refuges.
- ◆ Continue to support other agencies/partnerships who support victims of sexual abuse who are victims of domestic violence.
- ◆ Support the introduction of DV homicide reviews.
- ◆ Seek to expand the strategic involvement of the health services in the campaign against domestic violence.
- ◆ Work with partners to standardise domestic violence protocols and guidance.

The refuge changed my life completely and I wouldn't be where I am today if this service wasn't available. Woman in an Essex refuge 2006

6

Continue the drive to produce better and more informative data about the incidence of domestic violence in Essex and the action taken to prevent it

To this end EADV will:

- ◆ Encourage the collection of more informative data on domestic violence incidents in Essex, through the gathering of both qualitative and quantitative data.
- ◆ Look for ways of helping relevant agencies, such as the police, CPS, Women's Aid, undertake more sophisticated analyses of the data collected with a view to improving our understanding of patterns of domestic violence in the county and, through this, improving the help we offer victims.

*The cost to the state per annum of domestic violence has been estimated at £3.1 billion per annum and to employers at £1.3 billion.
Walby & Allen, 2004*

EADV's strategy is designed to operate alongside and in conjunction with:

- ◆ The Home Office's National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan
- ◆ The Essex Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets on domestic violence
- ◆ The local Essex DV/DA forums and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)
- ◆ The Essex Criminal Justice Board
- ◆ The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSYP)
- ◆ The Essex Housing Officers Group
- ◆ The Essex Safeguarding Children's Board
- ◆ The Essex Strategic Health Authority
- ◆ Thurrock and Southend unitary authorities
- ◆ The Managers' group representing the refuges in Essex

1138 women were accommodated by the seven Essex refuges in 2006–7, a rise of 18%. This figure does not include the women the refuges had to send elsewhere because they were full. A further 1086 women received support from the refuges' growing Outreach services and 212 women were provided with Floating Support. The number of children who spent time in Essex refuges was 1171. Most were very young. Over three quarters were from newly born to nine years old.

Over a third of the women accommodated had mental health issues and almost one in ten had learning difficulties.

Data from Refuge Essex

Endorsement of the strategy

Our plan of action for 2008–11 is endorsed by:

Basildon Women's Aid
Braintree Women's Aid
Chelmsford Women's Aid
Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge
Harlow Women's Aid
Southend Women's Aid
Thurrock Women's Aid

Crown Prosecution Service
Essex County Council
Essex Police
Essex Probation Service
HM Court Service – Essex

As a man I feel that it's important to stand up against domestic violence – this isn't just an issue for women but everyone – we all have female friends and relatives who could be suffering in silence.

Bill Ward, Ambassador to Women's Aid



Essex County Council



HER MAJESTY'S
COURTS SERVICE
hmcs



Basildon Women's Aid



colchester
& tendring



women's refuge

Harlow

Womens a i d

Southend Woman's Aid



Thurrock Women's Aid