

Bracknell Forest Council

Evaluation of the Bracknell Forest Council Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Service (DAPS)



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Executive summary

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations from reason's evaluation of Bracknell Forest Council's Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Service (DAPS).

Key findings

The evaluation provides encouraging evidence for the programme's effectiveness and impact. On the whole, perpetrators and partners felt that the programme had improved their outcomes. It had supported most perpetrators to address their pro-abusive beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, although the extent to which it had done so depended on their engagement with the programme.

Perpetrators' engagement with the programme depended on their willingness to engage and their commitment to change their attitudes and behaviour, and the extent of their partner's support. Unmet substance misuse needs also affected programme engagement. Social services staff could promote engagement through encouraging consistent attendance.

Staff valued the additional specialist support that the programme provided, but were cautious about attributing specific impacts to the programme due to other support received. Overall, perpetrators and partners commended the additional support they received over and above that provided by the programme, although identified some unmet support needs including tailored support for young people experiencing domestic abuse in homes where a parent has returned after leaving custody, substance misuse, parenting skills, mental health, and a targeted service for female perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Key strengths of the programme's delivery were its one-to-one model; having a male deliverer who met perpetrators beforehand; the 'anytime' phone contact and making appointments by phone and by text. The programme's delivery could be improved by having dedicated accommodation, and by engaging with perpetrators earlier. Its open, non-judgemental and non-pressurised approach was commended, although greater collaboration with partner agencies was needed. While the programme's content was enhanced by the 'positive thinking' elements and regular/ongoing progress reviews, it could be improved through including mental health awareness.

Conclusions

The programme is meeting its objectives, and is impacting positively on perpetrators, partners/ex-partners and staff. The findings can be used to shape the programme, but must be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample and absence of 'hard' data.

Recommendations

- The programme should continue and be extended. A full impact evaluation would provide a more extensive evidence base for further development of the programme.

- Social workers can promote engagement through their usual family contact, but Bracknell should explore other ways of raising engagement.
- The programme should retain its one-to-one delivery, its 'anytime' contact, its male deliverer, the phone/text appointment system, the 'positive thinking' elements, and the regular/ongoing progress reviews.
- The programme would benefit from dedicated delivery accommodation.
- If the programme is extended, existing male social workers could be trained up to support delivery.
- Perpetrators should be referred onto the programme before situations reach 'crisis' point.
- Bracknell should strengthen links with partner agencies and explore the need for targeted support for female domestic abuse perpetrators.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and methodology

In October 2012, Bracknell Forest Council asked **reason** to support them in evaluating their Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Service (DAPS¹). The evaluation provides evidence for the programme's impact on service users and their families. It also addresses the need to ascertain the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes more widely, as identified by previous research (for example, Westmarland *et al.*, 2010²).

reason initially met with the key strategic and operational managers involved in the programme to discuss the key drivers and themes for the evaluation, the stakeholders to be consulted, and how the findings would be used. We then created three interview schedules for use with perpetrators, partners/ex-partners, and social services staff. The interview questions addressed each of the evaluation's aims, as set out in section 1.2. They also addressed wider aspects of the programme's effectiveness, including multi-agency working and future improvement.

Bracknell identified five perpetrators, five partners/ex-partners and five social services staff to participate in telephone interviews. Of the partners and perpetrators, two pairs were from the same family, and the rest were unrelated. Bracknell then supported us in gaining participants' consent and arranging the telephone interviews, which took place between February and March 2013. Upon completion of the telephone interviews, we analysed the data and produced a short emerging findings paper in May 2013.

We produced the current evaluation report in response to Bracknell's request for a fuller discussion of the findings, combined with a set of conclusions and recommendations for the programme's future. This report is structured thematically in line with the key topics covered in the interview schedules, as with the emerging findings paper, but is based on a more detailed analysis of the interview data.

The reader should bear in mind that this report conveys the perceptions of perpetrators, partners/ex-partners and social services staff on the programme rather than the opinion or 'verdict' of reason. In addition, the report is based on interviews with 15 key stakeholders. It therefore 'speaks' for a sub-section rather than all of the perpetrators, partners/ex-partners and staff who have been involved with the programme.

¹ Interviewees referred to the DAPS as 'the programme'. We use the same reference throughout this paper to facilitate continuity.

² Westmarland, N., Kelly, L., and Chalder-Mills, J. (2010) *What Counts as Success?* London: Respect.

1.2 Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation investigated the extent to which the programme:

- Challenges, stops and prevents further abuse
- Holds perpetrators accountable for their abuse
- Helps perpetrators understand why they abuse, and encourages them to take responsibility for their abuse
- Encourages perpetrators to address the attitudes and beliefs which underpin their abusive behaviour
- Teaches perpetrators non-controlling behaviour strategies to prevent further abuse
- Informs perpetrators how to access services from appropriate related generic agencies such as housing, social care and education
- Provides telephone support for perpetrators when appropriate
- Is linked to successful referrals for partners/ex-partners to Berkshire Women's Aid; how effective the referral process and subsequent support provided has been, and how could it be improved in future
- Has engaged perpetrators, and how engagement can be maximised
- Has led to children of perpetrators being removed from Child Protection Plans; the extent to which this is directly related to the perpetrators' and families' involvement with the programme, and/or to other factors
- Is linked to incidences of abuse recorded by the police against men on the perpetrator programme, and how the programme could be adapted to reduce these incidences.

2. Perpetrator engagement: referral and retention

Most perpetrators were referred onto the programme following police intervention in serious domestic abuse incidents. Some linked the abuse to traumatic life experiences such as prison, active service in war zones, childhood abuse, and serious illness. Social services led some referrals as a condition of child protection plans. Problem drinking had escalated referrals in most cases.

Prior to referral, most perpetrators and partners knew little about the programme. Once they had been referred, however, they felt that the induction prepared them well for what was to come.

The perpetrators interviewed were either at different stages of engagement with the programme or had recently completed it. Most stated that the programme had met their expectations in terms of its content and focus. The programme had exceeded expectations for two perpetrators because of the positive support it had provided. As one stated,

It was more than what I expected, to be honest. It is not just about dealing with your issues.

Perpetrators appreciated the opportunity to meet with delivery staff before they became involved with the programme to discuss what the programme involved and what they could expect to gain from it, should they engage sufficiently.

Programme retention varied, according to the staff interviewed. Some perpetrators had engaged very well with the programme, whereas others had attended sporadically or had dropped out.

Ultimately, staff felt that engagement with the programme was determined by perpetrator's commitment to engaging and to changing their attitudes and behaviour. Their partner's support to engage with the programme and change their attitudes and behaviour, along with unmet substance misuse issues, also influenced perpetrator's engagement with the programme. These factors are discussed in more detail under the relevant sections of this report.

DAPS staff raised social services colleagues' awareness of the programme through delivering a presentation and training. On the whole, the staff interviewed felt well informed about the programme, although some felt that accompanying printed material such as leaflets would also be useful.

3. Impact on perpetrators: beliefs and attitudes

Referral onto the programme had been a turning point for several perpetrators, leading them to acknowledge the need to 'move forward' and realise that they had to change. Perpetrators and partners reported that the programme had encouraged perpetrators to address the attitudes and behaviours that underpinned their abusive behaviour. As one perpetrator said:

I didn't realise that what I was saying to her was verbal abuse. That was quite a new thing for me. I thought that I was just expressing how I felt.

The programme had helped perpetrators to understand why they abuse. Through looking back at abusive incidents, they were now more able to 'see how they are when they are angry' and to identify 'triggers' for abusive behaviour, such as alcohol. Perpetrators also understood the impact of the abuse on their partners and families more fully. Two partners reflected that:

He has started to understand things.

He understands how domestic abuse happens and how it affects us.

On a practical level, most partners and perpetrators felt that the programme had helped perpetrators to think more 'positively' and to 'think things through' before they react. Some quotes which reflect this include:

The part on positive thinking teaches you to think rather than just lash out.

(Perpetrator)

He now thinks things through rather than just thinking 'This is it – it's cut and dried'.

(Partner)

[Deliverer] made me see that I need to think before I speak.

(Perpetrator)

However, one of the perpetrators interviewed made comments which implied that pro-abusive beliefs and attitudes remained dominant. For example:

She provokes me – it is like play-acting...there have been lots of accusations. She goads me. Sometimes you deserve a slap for what you've done – it has happened.

Staff gave mixed reports of the programme's impact on perpetrators' beliefs and attitudes. While they felt that it had led to some change in this direction for some participants, the extent to which it did so depended on how well perpetrators attended and engaged with the sessions, as the following quotes illustrate:

You find that for some people, the programme can have a large impact and you can see their domestic abuse issues largely reduced but for others you see that there are still some issues. It just depends how much they choose to engage with the programme.

He likes having [deliverer] to talk to, but doesn't recognise that he is abusing. The programme isn't working that well for him because he hasn't engaged with it.

4. Impact on perpetrators: changing behaviour

All of the perpetrators and partners interviewed stated that the programme had helped to prevent further abusive behaviour. The programme had supported perpetrators to learn practical 'coping strategies' which helped them to control their anger. Such tactics included 'taking time out', and calmly talking things through rather than shouting. This had prevented arguments from escalating into incidences of abuse. For example:

If he could feel something starting, he could walk away from it and take some time out to think about it.

(Partner)

It gave me some ideas on how to calm things down a bit and stop a situation from escalating.

(Perpetrator)

Before engaging with the programme, perpetrators had tended to rely on alcohol and/or drugs to cope with their problems. As well as learning to apply the positive strategies outlined above, partners reported that the programme had helped perpetrators to cut down or even stop drinking and using drugs. Quotes from two partners which illustrated this were:

He has had a drinking problem but doesn't turn to drink any more to deal with his problems.

[The programme] has made loads of difference. He's calmed down drinking, he's come off the drugs.

The programme had also encouraged perpetrators to become more aware of others' feelings and how they would like to be treated and spoken to. Their listening skills had improved, and they were now more willing to try to understand other's perspectives. Partners and perpetrators reflected on these points as follows:

It shows you not how to command respect, but how to develop respect. It has taught me more of an education rather than just to tell you what to do and you do it asap.

(Perpetrator)

Before, he used to swear a lot in general conversations and when we argued. He now knows how to talk to and approach different people and situations, what is and is not appropriate.

(Partner)

He is more willing to listen and understand. Before, if I had a problem it would blow up into a massive argument.

(Partner)

However, staff reported that several participating families had experienced continued incidences of abuse which had required police intervention. They pointed out that some were still subject to child protection plans or had children in care, although some cases had been closed following engagement with the programme.

As with beliefs and attitudes, the perpetrators' propensity to change their behaviour was linked to their level of engagement. This finding should be interpreted with caution as it is unclear whether perpetrators who had a greater propensity to change were more likely to engage with the programme.

When asked to rate the programme's effectiveness, perpetrators and partners gave the programme between eight and 11 out of ten. All perpetrators and partners stated that they would recommend the programme to others on the basis of its positive impact, as the following quotes from perpetrators and partners illustrate:

Be positive and stick with it.

(Perpetrator)

Go for it! Be open with them. It pays off and it's worth it.

(Partner)

The course is really good. It has helped [partner] and I hope it helps loads of others, too.

(Partner)

Were it not for the programme, virtually all perpetrators and partners felt that their situation would have worsened. Where perpetrators had been in prison, many felt that a return to custody would be imminent had they not engaged with the programme. The continuing abuse in some families would probably have led to children being taken into care, according to some partners and perpetrators. One perpetrator had actually been at the point of suicide prior to engaging. He credited the support he had received from the programme and from the emergency services with helping to save his life.

However, opinion was divided among staff as to whether the programme had prevented families' situations from worsening. Some felt that their situations were unchanged because they remained subject to child protection plans or had children in care. Outcomes would have worsened for some families if it weren't for the programme, according to some of the other staff interviewed, who felt that the programme may have prevented care proceedings from materialising.

5. Impact on partners and family

According to partners, the programme had a range of positive impacts on them and their families. Several partners reported that they no longer feared perpetrators and felt happier, safer, more secure and more equal in their relationships. As one partner commented:

I think it's made me feel safer and more at ease. Before, I wasn't an equal partner. I'm more equal now and more secure about myself. He pays me compliments now and is being more of an adult.

One partner acknowledged the importance of her children witnessing positive behaviour, and felt that the programme had facilitated this:

... it's important for them to see us as positive role models and to see how to have a positive relationship.

Perpetrators had learned to communicate better with their partners, which had fostered mutual trust and respect:

I now feel that it is easier to talk to him if there are issues. I can now approach him if something has happened or I have done something wrong. Before, I would hide things from him because I was scared of his reaction.

(Partner)

Most perpetrators and partners felt that their relationships with their children had improved as a result of the positive change in perpetrator's attitude and behaviour, encouraged by the programme. The home atmosphere had become 'happier', 'calmer' and more pleasant as a result of the programme.

Some partners and perpetrators recognised that experiencing abuse had instilled fear and anxiety in their children. Several perpetrators had not realised how badly the abuse had affected their children before starting on the programme, as the following quote conveys:

I didn't realise that the arguing I had with my wife which they overheard could have such an effect on them. That is another thing the programme has made me aware of and I have tried to curb that.

(Perpetrator)

Partners felt that the reduction or cessation of abuse encouraged by the programme had helped children to feel less afraid and anxious, and had promoted more positive family relationships. For example:

We have four children and I do feel that it has made a difference to them. They are a lot happier now. They didn't want him to be around before but now they want him here.

It has made a huge difference. My daughter is no longer worried about us having huge arguments or that he will kick me out ... they are happier now I can speak to him.

In general, staff reported that communication within families had improved. Staff were more cautious when discussing the programme's impact on partners and families, but some examples emerged of how it had helped to foster more positive family relationships, such as:

The kids report that Dad doesn't shout any more.

Most staff conveyed that partners had benefitted from perpetrators' engagement with the programme, but highlighted that the issues and behaviours (e.g. control; aggression; substance misuse) which led to referral were typically deep-rooted. As a result, they required intensive long-term intervention over and above what the programme could provide. They added that perpetrators must commit fully to the programme for it to be able to achieve maximum impact.

Partners must also support perpetrators to change their behaviour in order for them to benefit from the programme, as one member of staff pointed out. She gave an example of where a woman had chosen to stay with a perpetrator (who had participated in the programme) despite the ongoing abuse in the relationship. This had led to their children being taken into care:

I think she recognised and understood the impact that the domestic abuse was having on the family but she chose to ignore it and stay with him ... the children were removed from the parent's care because he failed to complete his domestic abuse course and made no changes to his behaviour.

The programme had worked for some families but not for others who had engaged less well, according to staff, who subsequently rated the programme's effectiveness between five and nine out of ten. However, all would recommend to colleagues on the basis of its observed effectiveness for some families.

6. Impact on staff

Four of the staff interviewed were social workers working directly with families who were current or former programme participants. The other member of staff interviewed was the Child Protection Conference Chair, who worked with the social workers to devise and review Child Protection Plans. None of the staff interviewed delivered the programme.

Prior to the programme's existence, few targeted services were available for perpetrators of domestic abuse. Staff felt that the programme provided a welcome addition to the services currently available to families experiencing domestic abuse, as the following comments reflect:

The programme is a very useful tool to have, partly because we don't have to provide it.

It is useful for us to know that there is a service there we can refer clients to.

The programme helped to decrease the burden on social services staff and provided valuable specialist expertise. They felt that the programme worked well alongside the family support services already provided, as highlighted by these quotes:

[Deliverer] is very good at attending meetings and working with us to support families.

It is good to have [deliverer] around ... because he works within the same service.

Where programme workers accompanied staff to home visits, there was some feeling this had promoted their confidence and safety:

[Deliverer] attends joint visits with us which is good for confidence and safety.

Two staff felt that the programme had encouraged perpetrators to interact and communicate with service professionals more positively. Perpetrators had been less defensive and more cooperative, as this member of staff outlined:

They engage differently with staff...[perpetrators] can feel that they are the bad guy ... this programme makes them feel like someone is on their side.

7. Other support services for perpetrators and families

Perpetrators and their families accessed a range of other services alongside the DAPS programme. These included counselling or ‘talking therapies’, substance misuse support, mental health services and Berkshire Women’s Aid.

Many partners and perpetrators praised the quality and level of support they had received from these other services, and felt that they complemented the DAPS well. However, a minority of interviewees felt that the support the programme provided to perpetrators was better than that offered to partners by other organisations. One comment made by a perpetrator to this effect was:

She used to go and chat to them but this support was nowhere near as good as the support I got from this programme.

The referral process for other services also compared less favourably relative to the DAPS, according to one partner, who said:

I am just starting to see a counsellor at the community mental health team for my own issues. There has been loads of support for my husband but not so much for me.

Programme staff had signposted perpetrators to other support services where relevant. Some of the staff interviewed highlighted the importance of considering the impact of the additional support from these services when drawing conclusions about the overall impact of the programme, as the following quote outlines:

It’s hard to know which part of the multi-agency network of support has had the most effect. I think this programme helps but there are other things which provide support or motivation to change.

Gaps in service provision

Interviewees highlighted that existing support does not currently meet the following support needs:

- **Tailored support for young people in families experiencing domestic abuse, particularly when a parent returns to the home environment after leaving custody**

One member of staff identified this as a particular area where there was a gap in service provision.

- **Substance misuse**

Several staff conveyed that successful treatment for substance misuse issues would improve attendance and engagement with the programme.

- **Parenting skills**

A member of staff outlined that an effective parenting programme aimed at fathers had been available but required wider roll-out to meet current levels of need.

- **Mental health**

This was mentioned by one partner and one perpetrator, who felt that unmet mental health needs were not addressed quickly enough.

- **A targeted service for female perpetrators of domestic abuse.**

One perpetrator explained that the abuse in their relationship was mutual: his ex-partner had physically and verbally assaulted him. He emphasised the lack of equivalent services for female perpetrators:

I wish that there was something for women who abuse. There needs to be something for them.

8. The programme: what works?

Virtually all of the perpetrators, partners/ex-partners and staff interviewed agreed that the programme should continue due to its perceived impact and effectiveness. They emphasised that there was an acute and currently unmet need in the area for effective domestic abuse perpetrator programmes. Wider roll-out of the programme could at least in part address this, which is evident from the following quotes:

I have been trying to find this support for ages. It was not offered to me before ... it's been amazing, it has really changed my life for the better. There is a lack of services like this which places people in a difficult position. It has just helped me so much. Thank you.

(Perpetrator)

It has turned my life around ... I didn't realise they were there and now I do. I just hope that the government keeps on funding these things because there is a lot of people out there who I think still need it.

(Perpetrator)

I think it's just really good and hope they can carry on with what they are doing as I think a lot of people could benefit from it.

(Partner)

Interviewees felt that the following aspects of the programme contributed to its overall effectiveness:

- **One-to-one rather than group delivery**

The programme's one-to-one delivery model had encouraged perpetrators to overcome their initial reluctance to engage with the programme. As one perpetrator put it:

I didn't want to go to the meetings at first. I was glad it was one-to-one as I'm not interested in hearing about anyone else's problems.

A member of staff who was interviewed also felt that one-to-one delivery facilitated perpetrator engagement, and that it enabled the programme's sessions to be shaped in line with perpetrator's needs:

Previously, they [perpetrators] wouldn't go to group programmes they were referred to – they don't want to go to a group. One-to-one work seems much better suited to this issue and it means it can be better tailored to their individual needs.

- **Having a male deliverer to whom perpetrators can relate**

A member of staff who was interviewed felt that perpetrators related better to the male programme deliverer than they would have done to a female. They felt that this facilitated their engagement with and benefit from the programme:

Professionals are mainly females and perpetrators can be quite intimidating. They [perpetrators] therefore think that a man [running the programme] can have more impact.

- **Delivery staff's approachability and non-judgemental style**

Perpetrators and partners made positive comments about the deliverer's approachability and non-judgemental style. Some comments made which reflected this were:

[Deliverer] was a nice guy. He wasn't like some people who can be abrupt. He comes across like one of my best mates I have known for 20 years.

(Perpetrator)

[Deliverer] is really nice and approachable. He is a nice bloke. He is not intimidating.

(Partner)

- **Being able to talk openly about issues in a non-pressurised environment**

The programme was delivered in a calm environment which helped perpetrators to feel at ease. Perpetrators commented:

You walked out of there feeling like you had just had a massage! There was no pressure.

[Deliverer] said that if I ever felt uncomfortable I could stop the session straight away. So basically in general it was ok for me to do.

- **The 'anytime' telephone contact, through which perpetrators and partners could get support when they needed it**

Partners and perpetrators valued being able to contact delivery staff when they needed support, which was often outside of office hours. In some cases, just knowing that someone was there to talk or text was reassuring, even if they had not yet needed to make that contact.

I have [deliverer's] number and I can text him if I need him if I went down that path or slippery slope.

(Perpetrator)

I could call up [deliverer] and he would be there [...] Not only did he provide support to [my partner] but he provided support to me as well.

(Partner)

- **Being able to text as well as phone to make appointments**

The ability to text and phone to make appointments helped to make the programme more accessible to perpetrators.

- **The 'positive thinking' elements**

The programme's focus on teaching perpetrators how to think more positively was valued by partners and perpetrators. In particular, learning how to communicate more appropriately; how to be assertive without being aggressive; and how to deal more positively with difficult situations.

- **Regular, ongoing progress reviews**

Regularly reviewing a perpetrator's progress was valued by some of the perpetrators and staff interviewed. As a member of staff said:

They aren't just left, they have constant review of their progress while on the programme.

- **Having the opportunity to meet with delivery staff before starting on the programme**

This helped to build trust between perpetrators and delivery staff which facilitated their engagement with the programme. According to one perpetrator:

He came round my house, shook my hand and explained it all to me. And when he did work with me I just felt comfortable.

9. The future: making improvements

Most interviewees suggested aspects which would help to improve the programme. These were:

- **Having dedicated delivery accommodation which could be accessed at short notice**

Delivery staff had sometimes struggled to find a suitable room, according to one perpetrator. He suggested that this could be remedied by having a dedicated room for the programme which did not have to be booked in advance.

- **Engaging with perpetrators earlier**

Greater programme impact could be achieved through engaging with perpetrators earlier, before 'crisis' events led to their referral. This was conveyed particularly strongly by staff, as illustrated by the following comments:

If he had done the intervention earlier, he would have had a much better chance. I am not sure that there has been enough change.

Having earlier referrals may lead to more impact.

- **More collaboration with partner agencies such as the police and probation service**

Increasing links with partner services such as the police and probation service would strengthen the programme, according to most staff, one of which felt that including social services staff on some visits would be of further benefit.

Another member of staff highlighted a further role for social services staff in encouraging perpetrators to engage with the programme or re-engage where they had dropped out or were at risk of doing so:

Social workers need to consider what they will do if their client disengages and what their responsibility is in findings alternative support or encouraging them back on the programme.

- **Incorporating mental health awareness**

Based on her own experience, one partner felt that the programme would benefit from exploring the interplay between mental health issues and domestic abuse.

10. Conclusions

The report concludes that the programme is meeting its aims. The evaluation provides encouraging evidence for the programme's effectiveness and impact, and the findings can be used to inform the future shape and direction of the programme.

However, it is important to note that the evaluation is based on qualitative interview data with perpetrators, partners/ex-partners and staff. It did not consult with wider stakeholders (e.g. children and young people), nor did it incorporate any 'hard' data (e.g. relating to referral; engagement/drop-out; arrests; family engagement with other services). Consequently, the evaluation provides a partial though insightful picture of the programme's effectiveness and impact.

On the whole, the evaluation shows that the programme is impacting positively on perpetrators, partners/ex-partners and staff. Most perpetrators and partners reported that the abuse had stopped and had not recurred as a result of the programme. They linked this to the practical 'coping strategies' that it had helped to foster, and the fact that it had encouraged them to be more aware of others' feelings and opinions.

The programme had helped most perpetrators to understand why they abuse (including awareness of 'triggers'), and to take responsibility for their behaviour. Some had not realised that their behaviour constituted abuse before embarking on the programme.

Partners detected greater trust, safety and equality in their relationships following engagement with the programme. Children were reportedly less afraid and anxious. Virtually all partners and perpetrators believed that outcomes for the whole family would have worsened were it not for the programme.

Staff highlighted that some families had experienced abusive incidents which had required police involvement since starting on the programme. Some also remained subject to child protection plans or had children in care. They noted that the issues which perpetuated abusive attitudes and behaviour were deep-rooted and required intensive support.

Perpetrators' engagement with the programme varied depending on their willingness to engage and to change their attitudes and behaviour, according to staff. Engagement was also influenced by perpetrator's unmet substance misuse needs, and the extent to which partners supported them to attend the sessions and to change their attitudes and behaviour. Some staff suggested that social workers could help to maximise engagement through encouraging perpetrators to attend as part of their usual family contact. Bracknell could facilitate this through providing staff with some written information (e.g. leaflets).

The programme had helped perpetrators and partners to access complementary support services such as counselling, substance misuse support, mental health services and Berkshire Women's Aid. Staff acknowledged the difficulty in attributing any improved

outcomes specifically to the programme due to the range of other support services accessed by most participating families.

A minority of perpetrators and partners felt that the referral and subsequent support received by partners from other services was not as effective as that provided by the programme. Interviewees identified several gaps in services, including tailored support for young people experiencing domestic abuse (particularly when a parent returns home from custody), substance misuse, parenting skills, mental health and a targeted service for female perpetrators of domestic abuse.

11. Recommendations for Bracknell

The report concludes by presenting several recommendations for consideration which are set out below.

- Due to the encouraging evidence gathered through the course of this evaluation, Bracknell should consider continuing and possibly extending the programme to include self-referrals (provided any resulting spike in demand can be accommodated).
- Bracknell should consider commissioning a full impact evaluation which builds on the current evaluation, involves a wider sample of key stakeholders, and incorporates 'hard' and 'soft' data collection and analysis activities at different stages in the programme's life cycle. This would give a fuller picture of the programme's effectiveness, impact and aspects for improvement and would isolate the impact of the programme over and above other interventions being delivered concurrently.

Engagement

- Social workers could proactively help to foster programme (re)engagement as part of their usual interaction with families. Providing staff with written information (e.g. leaflets) could facilitate this.
- Bracknell should explore other ways in which programme engagement could be improved.

Programme delivery, approach and content

- As far as possible, Bracknell should retain the following programme features: one-to-one delivery model, its 'anytime' contact, its male deliverer, the phone/text appointment system, the 'positive thinking' elements, and the regular/ongoing progress reviews.
- Bracknell should consider having dedicated delivery accommodation which can be quickly and easily accessed.
- The current deliverer is a major asset to the programme, but will require support if the programme is to be extended. Bracknell could consider cascading training to existing male social workers with a view to up skilling them to deliver the programme.
- The programme would achieve greater impact if it were offered to participants earlier, before 'crisis' situations expedite referral.

Multi-agency working

- Bracknell should explore how the programme's links with partner agencies such as the police, probation/prison service, and mental health (including substance misuse) can be strengthened.
- Bracknell should explore the need for and availability of targeted services for female perpetrators of domestic abuse among its current client group and consider how the authority can address this if it emerges as an issue.

12. about reason

reason is the **Research, Evaluation and Analysis Support Network**, co-founded by **Research in Practice**, **Research in Practice *for Adults*** and the **National Foundation for Educational Research**. **reason** is for individuals and organisations in the children's and adults' sector including social care, education and health. Our overarching purpose is to improve services for people who use or rely on them. We believe that to do this we need to understand what is being done and the impact of it, and to spread that learning. More information about **reason** can be found on our website: www.reason-network.org.uk

All of our work is quality assured and carried out to the highest standards. It is our aim that we will enable you to be able to carry out aspects of your own research in the future by building capacity for research, evaluation and analysis.



**www.reason-network.org.uk
email: ask@reason-network.org.uk**

WDAB