

**Providing Court Based Support:
An evaluation of the Refuge Southwark
Advocacy Project**

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The Refuge Southwark Advocacy Project (RSAP)

The RSAP, funded by Southwark Council, was focused on the provision of court based support to women going through the CJS, an area not covered by existing agencies in the borough, where there is no SDVC. As a pilot for Refuge, it was part of the wider development of national advocacy services planned by the organisation. In addition to Southwark Council funding for one advocate, funding was secured for black and minority ethnic (BME) advocacy as a way of developing routes to safety for very excluded women, and the National Advocacy Manager, funded by Refuge, was also an additional resource for the RSAP. Funded for a year, the project started to take referrals in November 2006.

The RSAP was staffed by a full-time court based advocate and a six month part-time BME advocate, who were both supported by the National Advocacy Manager, all of whom had hugely experienced backgrounds, including work in the violence against women sector.

Southwark

Southwark is a highly diverse borough, with almost half of its 253,800 population being from a range of BME backgrounds. Reported domestic violence offences for April 2006-March 2007 numbered 4,377, accounting for 20% of violent crime, with the majority of victims being female and aged under 45 years.

Evaluation findings

The RSAP was implemented from November 2006 to the end of March 2008 and the evaluation was conducted from May 2007 to March 2008.

A total of 295 women were supported by the RSAP, 65% of whom were referred to the service and 35% were directly contacted by the advocates in court. The ethnic background of women supported by RSAP was varied, with the majority being from a range of BME backgrounds, and the largest group aged under 44 years, which is in line with the reported domestic violence figures for the borough.

As would be expected, women had experienced a range of abuse, with physical and emotional abuse being the most common. Over half of the 295 women had no children. Where information on criminal outcomes was available, it showed that imprisonment was the most common outcome (details of prison sentences were not available) followed by community orders; the majority had pleaded guilty.

Services offered by the RSAP

Through the provision of court based advocacy, and by working in collaboration with key agencies to co-ordinate and improve responses to domestic violence, the RSAP aimed to increase the safety of women and children and reduce further risk. Cases of domestic violence in Southwark, in the absence of a SDVC, were channelled through different courts in an extremely complicated process. The RSAP office was located in Camberwell Green court which had better facilities, even though very few first hearings of Southwark domestic violence cases were held there.

Wherever possible, the advocates followed a case through the various phases, keeping women informed throughout this process. The following were the key services offered to women: being kept informed about case; general telephone support; being accompanied to court; risk assessment and safety plan; requesting special measures; pre-trial visit to court; victim impact statements; criminal restraining orders; referral to other agencies. The advocates were extremely proactive in their attempts to reach all women going through the courts and offer them support.

Clarifying the process of referrals with key agencies, especially the police, took place in the initial stages and although it took some time to iron out, towards the end of the evaluation period, the process of referrals was very positive, with the police referring around 85% of cases (3-4 cases daily); the Witness Care Unit and the Witness Service also passed on domestic violence cases. Inevitably, the brief timescales between referrals and cases appearing in court, left the advocates limited time to work with women, suggesting the work was extremely pressurised.

The advocates were the only court based independent professionals to sit on the MARAC where they played an invaluable role in providing information about what was happening in court, leading to enhanced multi-agency responses. The most important aspect of the service offered by RSAP advocates, and identified most positively by women, was the rapid feedback of information about the progress of their cases; having the court process explained to them was also valued by women. The level of expertise liaison carried out by the advocates with the police, CPS and other court staff was not being done by any other service in the borough.

Proactive work with the CJS

The proactive work undertaken by the advocates within the CJS was the biggest departure from existing work in Southwark, not only in making initial contacts with women but also the level of advocacy carried out on behalf of women with other key agencies in the CJS. Securing special measures for women was actively taken up by the advocates, who received training from the prosecutors to do special measures statements. In time, advocates also started to do the victim impact statements, important for many women who had raised this as a gap in their feedback about the police.

Since RSAP work was focused on criminal court work, work around civil issues remained a gap, though unavoidable because of the funding, and raised issues in practice - a contradiction between bail conditions and terms set out by the civil courts for child contact because of the lack of communication between criminal and civil courts; women's safety being compromised when they had to see the perpetrator in civil court proceedings despite being protected in the criminal courts.

BME advocacy

Given the greater difficulties for BME women in negotiating the CJS, resulting from a lack of sensitivity on the part of professionals and agencies, cultural issues and language barriers, the need to have specialist advocates has been highlighted as a 'pressing issue'. Overall, the short period of intervention with BME women raised many valuable issues, not least the importance of developing full-time dedicated advocacy support to BME women within the CJS. Some of the issues that arose included: the importance of being clear about the remit of the BME advocate;

considering how the dedicated BME post ‘fits’ with the generic team; recognising the extent of the development work that is required around equality and diversity issues across the whole range of professionals, as well as BME communities/community groups. In supporting women through court cases, many of whom did not understand the court process, the need for greater support for BME women (given pressures of family and community) was highlighted. Prosecutors fed back that they were getting more results with BME women when they were supported by the RSAP service.

Multi-agency work

Development work with statutory and voluntary agencies was crucial to establishing the presence of the RSAP; and building clarity about the nature of the service and the role of the advocates among external agencies through formal meetings and presentations was especially needed to counteract any confusion, particularly among court personnel. Tapping into existing structures, as well as setting up new ones focused on their work, were found to be useful for the RSAP; the importance of ongoing work to build relationships with the court listings office, Witness Care Unit, the Witness Service and the CPS was highlighted. The need to formalise partnership work through the development of joint protocols was also identified.

CPS

The importance of convincing the CPS that the advocates could be of benefit to them was key to bringing about change and developing closer working relationships. Although the response in court was mixed, the important role of the advocates in assisting with the preparation of cases was recognised. Being located in close proximity in court was seen to assist in the flow of information between advocates and prosecutors. The advocates’ role in supporting women was especially valued by the CPS and it was believed that the number of women giving evidence had increased and the number of withdrawals decreased. The presence of the advocates in court was also seen to have made a ‘definite difference’ to how domestic violence cases progressed in court.

Police

Issues regarding joint work were addressed with the police from the start through joint meetings focused on the logistics of referrals and information exchange. Gaining senior level support, building links with individual officers, and undertaking training for conducting victim impact statements were ways that the RSAP built up positive working relationships with the police.

Other statutory agencies

Although some work remained to be done, statutory agencies were positive about the work of the RSAP advocates, seeing it as complementary, despite some overlap in their roles; and the involvement of the advocates at MARAC meetings was viewed as especially crucial. Partnership work highlighted the importance of early liaison and clarity around roles, as well as the need to develop protocols. Although some critical issues were raised, court based advocacy being provided by RSAP, the advocates’ style and approach to the work, and the positive impact it was having on women present within the CJS was widely praised.

Voluntary organisations

Although some issues at management level were highlighted by the funded partner agencies, operational level relationships between them had developed positively because of the discrete role of the advocates in offering court based support, which also acted as a resource for other case workers.

Defining the remit - commissioning

The process of commissioning and funding had created confusion and competition among existing services providing domestic violence support; the absence of clarity on the part of the funders about what independent advocacy should be created several constraints in setting up RSAP, as defining effective court based advocacy and the resources needed for this had to fit within the stipulated parameters. To avoid competition and confusion, the issues encountered and lessons from RSAP suggest that it is important to: clearly define the role of an independent domestic violence advocate when commissioning a service; adequately address civil as well as CJS support issues; and have an open and transparent commissioning process.

Impact of the RSAP

Institutional change

Institutional change takes time but it was evident from the work of the RSAP that this had started to happen in various ways. It included: professionals asking questions and having their awareness raised; the presence of an advocate resulting in some change in the court process; police officers becoming more likely to complete actions; changes in the way the CPS worked with domestic violence cases; ensuring victims were given information about the outcome of cases; more victim impact statements being done and special measures being granted, especially screens for victims; conversations taking place between prosecutors and advocates over issues such as unconditional bail; the presence of women in court often resulting in guilty pleas; and other support services using the advocates as a 'court resource' for information about court matters.

The achievements of the RSAP cannot be underestimated as the level of work the team had to develop and deliver in a very short timescale was considerable. Inevitably, advocates encountered court and other professionals who were set in their practices, and had to work sensitively to slowly begin the process of change.

Arrests and prosecutions

A breakdown of the arrests between April 06-March07 and April 07-March 08 shows a steady increase in the percentage of arrests made for domestic violence incidents (as part of the police positive arrest policy). It was evident that, despite fluctuations, there was an upward trend in the rate of arrests, so that it was 54% in the month that the RSAP started and 63% for the same month a year later.

A picture of the numbers of cases being successfully prosecuted, as a percentage of the total arrests, was built by comparing the figures for police arrests against the CPS figures for cases being pursued through the CJS and their outcomes. It is likely that the positive arrest policy by the police, the employment of the specialist CPS advocate and the RSAP advocates all contributed to some positive changes in the percentage of cases being prosecuted and successful outcomes.

Data was obtained from the CPS for the period June 2006 to May 2007 and this was analysed to assess the possible impact made by the RSAP advocacy service. Although the first six months of the RSAP had a lower total number of cases being prosecuted than the previous six months, there was a change in the percentage of cases that were successful (3%), a decrease in unsuccessful cases (3%) and over a 5% increase in the number of guilty pleas. This is further reflected in the second six months, so that not only is there an increase in the total number of cases being prosecuted between the six months before and 12 months after, but a 5.3% increase in successful cases, 5% decrease in unsuccessful cases and a 10% increase in the number of guilty pleas.

In Southwark, the CPS saw a significant correlation between support being given to victims by the advocates and the number of cases going through. The police and CPS statistics, as well as their comments on the process, show that the RSAP advocates had some positive impact on the outcome of cases, as well as the process of joint work within the courts, especially with the CPS and the police.

Feedback from women

Feedback was gained from a range of 38 women using the RSAP services (55% completed face to face and 42% by telephone). All women, except one, had previous contact with a range of services. Most women did not know about RSAP and over 80% first had contact when they were contacted by the advocates. At the time of contact, the majority of women were living at home without the abuser, and a minority were either living in a refuge or in a homeless hostel.

Women made many positive comments about the service they had received from RSAP. *Being kept informed about case* was one of the main services offered by RSAP that was highly valued by women and is in line with what existing literature reveals. All women had found the range of services offered 'very helpful' or 'helpful'. Although contact with the RSAP had not made any difference to the level of safety for half of the women, 44% said they felt 'safer'.

Women's most frequently stated expectations of the support from RSAP were to: get information about their case and to know about the court process, without any pressure; have support, advice and guidance throughout the case; ensure safety and protection for themselves and their children; and have help separating from abusive partner.

39% of women were 'satisfied', 25% 'fairly satisfied', and 36% 'not satisfied' with the outcomes of their cases. The majority of women made further comments about this, which included: happy with perpetrator being found guilty but unhappy about the length or nature of the sentence given; unhappy about the outcome but also resigned to it as perpetrator thought to get away with everything, which the system allows; and feeling let down by the process/system and not having information about the case.

Women also provided additional comments, which included the following issues: need for the CJS to give the same punishment to perpetrators for similar offences; longer and tougher sentences needed to send a message to perpetrators that their behaviour is unacceptable; the CJS seen to reinforce the perpetrators control, especially when the police were seen not to have done their job properly; importance

of being believed for women; lack of information and follow up from the police and women wanting the police to keep them informed to feel they counted; importance of having the process explained and being supported through it; going to court made women feel more vulnerable when the outcome was not what was expected; women feeling safer when given support, when abuse is recorded and the outcome sends a message to the perpetrator that she can act positively.

Summary

By the end of the evaluation period, the role of the RSAP advocates had become crucial in filling a gap within the CJS processes for domestic violence victims. It was considered to complement the work of the Police and the CPS, and to complete the circle for the support necessary for witnesses/victims. Overall, despite the extremely small timescale to set up, great progress was made in the RSAP's implementation and delivery of services, and the take-up and feedback by women was extremely positive. Inevitably, as a pilot, lessons were continually learnt about the best way of delivering CJS advocacy in the absence of a SDVC, and of engaging the key agencies. Managing a growing workload with limited personnel and uncertainty over funding were key challenges for Refuge, RSAP advocates, and other agencies which had begun to greatly value the advocacy work.

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Introduction

Context

Domestic violence is now recognised as a serious social problem with wide ranging ramifications. Its annual cost to the criminal justice system, social services, health care, emergency housing, and legal services is estimated at £3.1 billion (Walby, 2004). In its attempts to address the issue and through its white paper *Safety and Justice*, national government has emphasised prevention, protection and justice, and support to victims (2003). Inevitably, at a local level, this emphasis has resulted in numerous and diverse interventions. In relation to criminal justice, most notable among these has been the development of Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), which are now central to the Home Office national domestic violence strategy. Much of the research shows that a co-ordinated community response which emphasises support and safety through effective multi-agency partnerships between criminal justice agencies and the voluntary sector are critical to effective responses to domestic violence victims (Robinson, 2006; Home Office, 2008).

While much attention has been paid to improving the criminal justice response to domestic violence, research highlights a disconnection between the civil and criminal courts when dealing with cases of domestic violence which necessarily cross both domains (see Cook et al, 2004). Where any interface between the two takes place – passing information about criminal issues to civil judges or information about civil proceedings to magistrates or judges in criminal courts - this is often dependent on advocates supporting women (Robinson, 2005). Indeed, advocacy is critical to this exchange of information between the two domains.

Advocacy

Following evaluations of the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme-Violence Against Women Initiative interventions, independent advocacy is being seen as an effective and cost efficient way of reducing repeat victimisation and attrition rates for domestic violence, by fostering a feeling of confidence and safety for victims within the criminal justice system (Hester and Westmarland, 2005). Evaluations of pilot domestic violence advocacy services in Cardiff have also demonstrated that independent advocacy increases the number of cases proceeding to court, decreases the number of recurring domestic violence cases and increases awareness of children at risk of harm (Robinson, 2005). Thus, an effective independent advocacy service which works in collaboration with key agencies to co-ordinate and improve responses to domestic violence, can increase the safety of women and children and reduce the risk of serious injury or death. A recent first multi-site evaluation in the UK to assess the impact of independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) on victim safety shows that abuse had ceased in 70% of cases following intervention of an IDVA (for 45% it had ceased permanently)¹(Hestia-Henry Smith 2008:2).

However, despite attempts to arrive at greater clarity, the term and remit of ‘advocacy’ is wide ranging and not universally accepted (Hester and Westmarland 2005:41). Generally, advocacy within domestic violence work includes ‘both help

¹ The Refuge Southwark Advocacy Project has been a part of this national evaluation.

with accessing agencies and the criminal system and a wider range of support' (2005:41). The aim of independent advocacy, as increasingly defined, is seen to provide a service to victims at medium to high risk of harm which intervenes at a point of crisis to ensure the safety of victims. Advocates, as trained specialists, work with women to provide advice and support through safety planning, accessing legal and non-legal services and resources and proactively engage in multi-agency work, including participating in MARACs. Attempting to streamline advocacy work that is underpinned by safety, CAADA has been conducting training for independent advocates and working to incorporate 'exactly what an advocate should know, be and do' into the National Occupational Standards and Service Standards. (Barran, 2007:10).

Background to the Refuge Southwark Advocacy Project (RSAP)

The RSAP was developed when Southwark Council made time limited funding available for the development of independent advocacy in the borough and gave funding to three agencies². Drawing on established best practice, also promoted by the Home Office and the independently accredited standards developed by CAADA, the role of the RSAP was defined by Refuge to be in line with the organisation's thinking about advocacy work as part of a co-ordinated community response to domestic violence. Given existing services in Southwark and the identified gaps, the advocacy work of Refuge was focused on the provision of court based support to women going through the criminal justice system (CJS), an area not covered by existing agencies but, as part of providing a holistic range of services to women and children, seen to involve close working with other agencies. As Refuge had made a strategic commitment to the development of independent advocacy and written it into its business plan, the RSAP, in providing support through court based advocates, was anticipated to be a pilot for the wider development of national advocacy services by the organisation. However, although the Southwark funding was timely it was insufficient and for these reasons, additional funding was secured for black and minority ethnic (BME) advocacy as a way of developing routes to safety for very excluded women, and the National Advocacy Manager, funded by Refuge, was also an additional resource for the RSAP. The development of independent advocacy was also seen by Refuge as a useful stimulus to review existing practice and highlight any gaps. Funded for a year, the project started to take referrals in November 2006.

Function of the RSAP

Through a court-based advocate, the RSAP was aimed at supporting the victim through criminal proceedings, increasing the victim's safety through a risk assessment and an individual support and safety plan. It was intended that the advocacy service would provide prompt (contacted within 12 hours) short to medium term intensive support to high risk victims whose cases were going through the courts. The advocacy service also aimed to facilitate and strengthen multi-agency working to ensure prompt and appropriate support and safety interventions to women in the short and long term.

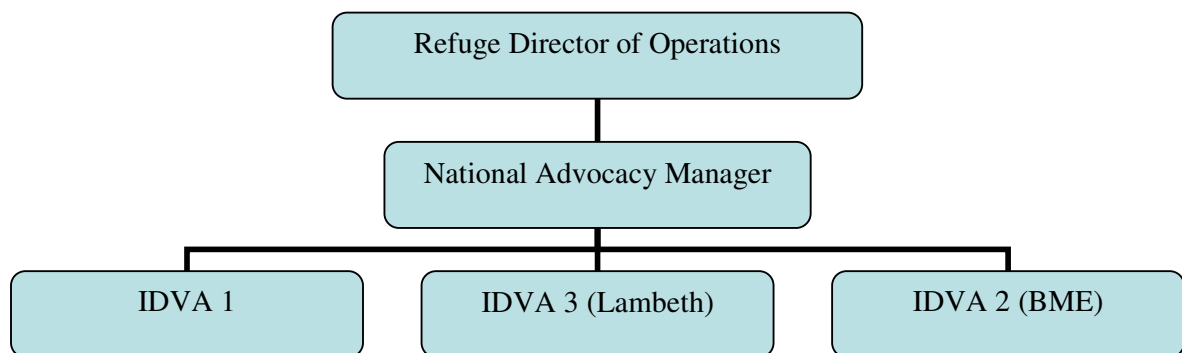
In addition to the Southwark funding for a full time advocate, funding was secured by Refuge from Government Office London for six months for a specialist advocacy caseworker to increase referrals from BME women in Southwark, enhance their

² . Funding was also awarded to Victim Support and Bede House to provide housing advocacy and general advocacy support.

engagement with the CJS, and raise awareness among professionals and agencies about the needs of BME women experiencing domestic violence. Funding was also secured for the Modus database, used in the Hestia evaluation and specifically designed for domestic violence advocacy services. This database, which became live from January 1st 2007, captured information on all women being supported by the RSAP.

Thus the RSAP formed one aspect of wider developments in advocacy work by Refuge; this evaluation report deals with the Southwark element of these developments.

Management structure



As part of larger planned developments in Refuge, the RSAP was managed by the National Advocacy Manager, who had a national strategic development remit along with managing local advocacy services. She in turn was managed by the Director of Operations at Refuge.

RSAP staff

The RSAP initially started with a full-time advocate in mid-November 2006 who was joined six months later by a part-time BME advocate (for 6 months). The advocates were preceded by the full-time National Advocacy Manager, a Refuge funded post created to oversee the management of the service as part of a national remit for the development of national advocacy work. The initial strategic development work in Southwark was carried out by the National Advocacy Manager. Almost a year later, the team were joined by an advocate dedicated to working in Lambeth. The staff team had hugely experienced backgrounds, including work in the violence against women sector, both in the UK and the USA.

Southwark – local context

The total population in Southwark numbers 253,800, of which 49% are male and 51% female. Compared to England as a whole, this population is relatively young, with 1 in 5 being below five years. Over the past decade, there has also been an increase in those aged 30-44 years. Almost half of the population in Southwark is from minority ethnic communities, with the largest BME groups being Black or Black British (26%),

Black African (16%) which is the largest Black African community nationally, and Black Caribbean (8%). The Asian population is fairly small (4%), with the fastest growing groups being Bangladeshi and Indian. The Chinese group (1%) is more than three times the national average. The White Other group constitutes 7.7% of the population, with 5.6% being born in the EU and 25% being born outside the EU.

Two-thirds of the Southwark population lives in wards with high levels of deprivation, and the borough is ranked seventeenth most deprived area out of 354 local authorities in England. Unemployment is nearly double the national average, with 6.2% people being unemployed.

Domestic violence

As with other boroughs, Southwark has a range of agencies delivering domestic violence services³ including a Southwark Domestic Violence Forum, serviced by the post of Domestic Violence Co-ordinator. At a strategic level, the Safer Southwark Partnership has developed a four tier approach to tackling violent crime enshrined in an action plan for the borough.

A 12 month Police review (1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007) of domestic violence offences in Southwark showed that there were 4,377 cases flagged⁴, which were widely spread in the borough, but mainly concentrated in the northern and central parts with less cases in the south of the borough (Ramanlal, SSP, 2007). The Review also revealed that the majority of victims were female (77%) and aged between 25-34 years, with 85% being under 45 years; 30% of the victims were partners of suspects and 36% were ex-partners. 42% of the victims were African-Caribbean. Around 15% of the offences were repeat victims.

In Southwark, domestic violence accounts for 20% of violent crime (compared to 25% nationally). The peak months for domestic violence were July, September and December. During the Review, a sample of 10% of July 2006 cases (41 incidents) showed that children were present or nearby when an incident of domestic violence took place in 15 cases; 10 cases recorded issues around child contact or disputes over custody. Alcohol was involved in nearly half of the sample. One in eight of the victims said this had not been the first time they were attacked (Ramanlal, 2007:6). The Review also showed that though domestic violence was spread throughout the week, offences were more frequent during the weekend (33%).

Other Refuge led services in Southwark

Refuge delivers a range of services within Southwark, including three refuges, floating support services and a sanctuary scheme. Refuge also runs a culturally specific community outreach project for women from Vietnamese, Asian, Somali, Turkish and Portuguese speaking women in South London. Southwark forms one of four boroughs across which this service operates. Refuge has also secured funding to pioneer a domestic violence victim support group in Southwark.

³ These include Victim Support, Bede House, Refuge Floating Support, the VAST project, a Sanctuary Scheme, and a range of smaller community based groups.

⁴ In reality this number is likely to be much higher due to under-reporting from victims and under-flagging from officers.

The evaluation

The main aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the impact and merits of the advocacy pilot, including the role and impact of the BME advocate as part of the wider intervention.
- Assess the effectiveness of multi-agency partnerships and any lessons learnt.
- Contribute, through lessons learnt, to the development of national Refugee advocacy services.
- Contribute to an evidence-base of independent advocacy work and add to the debate in this area.
- Identify good practice for wider dissemination.

Methodology

In recognition of the processes involved in this initiative, the evaluation was conducted using a range of approaches drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The evaluation incorporated local context, process, and outputs data. Local context included the collation of information, through interviews, discussions, documentary sources, and a literature review, on the local context in which the intervention was implemented, both in terms of the local community and the multi-agency context. The process information drew on both general information and data specific to the project to assess the operation of the intervention. Interviews and discussions were held with all strategic and operational project staff and other multi-agency players (n=15). Monthly project team meetings were also attended and notes taken. In order to make an assessment of the immediate and wider impact of the project and whether or not the intervention was meeting its stated aims (outputs), information from other agencies such as the police and the CPS, as well as data specific to the project (from Modus database), was gathered. In order to get feedback from service users on the service, a detailed feedback survey was devised and completed by 38 women.

By drawing on all data gathered throughout the period of evaluation, this report presents the key findings of the evaluation of the RSAP. Project implementation took place from November 2006 to the end of March 2008 and the evaluation was conducted from May 2007 to March 2008.

Section 1: Overview of women using the RSAP

A total of 295 women were supported by the RSAP, 65% (n=192) of which were referred to the service; the remaining 35% (n=103) were directly contacted by the advocates, cases which were picked up while sitting in court and confirmed with the Police. There were a total of 325 incidents recorded on the database, the higher number included repeat incidents of violence for some women (where perpetrator assaulted woman while on bail or if woman returned as a repeat victim).

Profile of women

The ethnic background of women supported by RSAP was varied. While 91 were White British, the majority were from a range of BME backgrounds. As the table below shows, the largest single group was White British, followed by Black (British, Caribbean, Other), Black African, and White Other. The Asian category, though small, is in line with the percentage of the Southwark population of Asian origin⁵. Overall, a range of BME women were the largest group using the RSAP. The table below provides a breakdown of the age and ethnicity of women.

Table 1: Recorded Ethnicity* and Age**

Ethnicity	Number (%)	Age 18-20	Age 21-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55+
White British	91 (31%)	9	8	15	28	5	1
Black - Caribbean, British, Other	28 (9.5%)	6	7	5	2	3	
Black African	23 (7.8%)	2	3	6	2	2	
Black Somali	3 (1%)			2			
Mixed ⁶	9 (3%)	2	2	5			
Asian	6 (2%)		1	4			1
Arab/Middle Eastern	4 (1.4%)	1		2			
Latin American	3 (1%)	1		1	1		
White Other – Romanian, Polish etc.	24 (8.1%)		3	11	4	2	
White Irish (Southern Irish)	4 (1.4%)			2	2		
Chinese	1(0.3 %)						
Unknown	16 (5.4%)			1	2		
Total	212 (72%) (295 total)	21	24	54	41	12	2

* Ethnicity for 83 women was not entered.

** Age and ethnicity is only recorded for 154 women.

⁵ Ethnicity was not entered for a third of the women (n=83).

⁶ Mixed category includes: any other mixed background; White and Black African; White and Black Caribbean.

The largest group of women were aged 25 to 44 years; the group aged 25-34 constituted the biggest group, followed by those aged under 25, and then those aged 35 to 44 years.

Where the immigration status was recorded for 188 of the 295 women, it revealed that the majority of women were British/EU nationals (n=152) though a range of other immigration status was also evident.

Table 2: Immigration status

Immigration status	Number
British/EU national	152
Permanent resident	15
Provisional resident	3
Spousal visa	2
Asylum seeker	2
Other	2
Visitor	1
Not known	11
Total	188

Where it was entered for 59 women, the data showed that 36 women were single, 19 were married and 4 divorced.

Nature of abuse

As would be expected, women had experienced a range of abuse, with physical and emotional abuse being the most common.

Table 3: Nature of abuse

Type of abuse	Number
Physical abuse	173
Emotional abuse	159
Sexual abuse	6
Financial abuse	7
Multiple abuse	10
Total	355*

*Totals are higher as there are repeat counts in the different types of abuse.

In relation to alcohol and drugs, information had only been recorded for 20 cases, showing drink to be involved in 17 cases and drugs to be involved in 3 cases.

Children

In over half (n=167) of the 295 cases, women had no children. Of the 128 women who did, there were a total of 235 children. Of these, 118 were female and 110 male (gender was not entered for 7 children).

Social Services were involved in 74 cases while CAFCAS had an involvement in only 3 cases. With regards to the relationship of the child to the abusing partner, in the majority of cases the perpetrator was a parent.

Referral source

The source of referrals was only entered for 128 cases (out of 192); 103 were picked up by the advocates in courts and not referred. The following table reveals that the largest single source of referrals was the Police.

Table 4: Source of referrals

Referral agency	Number
Police	99
Victim Support	13
Criminal court	7
Domestic violence outreach services	7
Refuge services	1
Other	1

14 women were referred onwards by the advocacy service.

Criminal outcomes

Information on criminal outcomes was available for 116 of the 295 cases. Recorded data shows that imprisonment (n=44) was the most common outcome followed by community orders (n=36). However, details of the length of prison sentences were not available. The missing data indicates that many of the clients were non-contactable or had very limited engagement with the RSAP. Data was also only entered for cases that proceeded; many cases were discontinued earlier in the process and therefore would not have a criminal outcome.

Table 5: Criminal outcomes

Criminal outcome	Number (%)	Guilty plea
Imprisonment	44	34 (10 not known)
Community order	36	29 (7 - no)
Conditional discharge	7	6 (1 - no)
Suspended sentence	17	14 (3 - no)
Fine	3	3
Probation order	3	2 (1 - no)
Probation order (+perpetrator program)	3	3
Bind over	2	1 (1 - no)
Not known	1	1
Total	116	116

Of the 116 cases, the majority had pleaded guilty (n=93), and 17 had not pleaded guilty, while this information was not available for 6 cases. It is worth noting here that the Modus database does not separate cases in which there was a guilty plea from cases in which the perpetrator was found guilty by court. For this reason, this data has to be treated with caution.

In relation to criminal outcomes, it is difficult to ascertain whether an advocate accompanying a woman to court had any impact on the criminal outcomes though interview data, as later discussed, suggests women were more likely to stay in the system when accompanied/supported by an advocate.

Civil proceedings

Information was recorded for civil proceedings in 23 cases. The table below provides more details of these and shows that non-molestation orders were the most common civil measures to be taken by women.

Table 6: Civil proceedings

Civil proceedings	Number	Breaches
Non-molestation order in respect of woman (FLA)	17	2 breaches of injunction (PHA) 1 breach of order (FLA)
Non-molestation order in respect of woman and child (FLA)	2	
Contact order to perpetrator (CA s8)	1	
Emergency/interim care/exclusion order for child attached (CA)	1	
Injunction/damages (PHA s3)	1	Breach of injunction (PHA)
Occupation order (FLA)	1	
Total	23	4

Accompanied to court

Accompanying women to court was one of the key services offered to women by the advocates. Where it has been entered, the data shows that advocates had accompanied 96 women to court. Where women were not accompanied, this was because they did not turn up for the trial. Once being accompanied was offered, very few women turned this down.

Impact on risk

Information on high risk cases – intake risk assessment (RA) and a review at three months to capture what had been done to reduce risk - was recorded on the Modus database as part of the Hestia evaluation. Information was available for 37 women (though 62 women had been risk assessed) defined as high risk using the Hestia criteria (those scoring 8 or over) and who had *significant contact* with the RSAP and were given support through the CJS. Significant contact was defined as at least one month of contact, though this was often longer, where a review of risk had been undertaken and on-going contact maintained. Where no review was completed, this was because the RSAP had lost contact with women, either because the partner had been imprisoned or where women were engaged with other support services. The table below shows the impact on the positive reduction of risk for 27 women for whom this information was available (and who had been reviewed), though it was stated that risk had been reduced for all 37 high risk women. Although 9 women still remained high risk, the initial risk had reduced for them all.

Table 7: Difference in risk level

Initial RA	Review RA
14	10
14	11
12	9
12	9
11	9
11	9
11	7

14	8
14	12
10	7
8	7
10	7
13	7
14	5
9	6
12	3
10	5
11	7
10	6
9	1
10	4
9	4
10	2
10	7
11	10
12	6
10	4

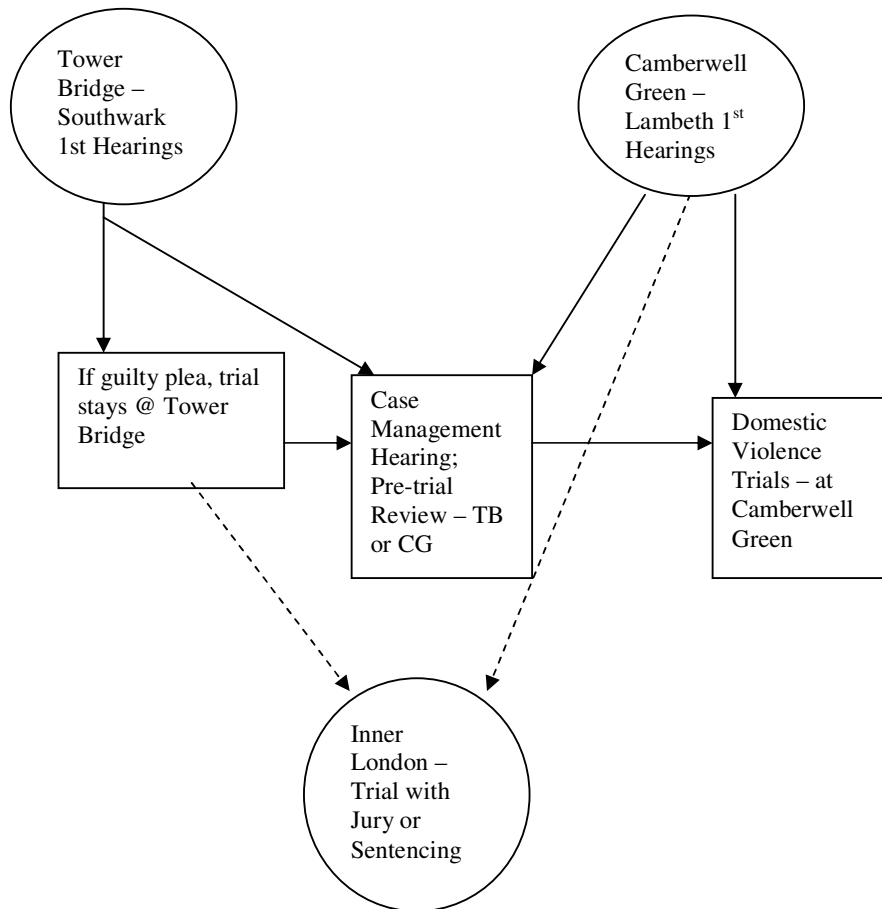
Of these 27 high risk women, information on criminal proceedings was available for 20 women. Of these, a guilty plea had been entered for 10 cases and criminal outcomes were available for 10 cases – the most common being community orders (x4) followed by imprisonment (x2), probation order, fine, suspended sentence, and conditional discharge. Where there was no information on criminal outcomes, this was either because the case was discontinued or the partner was found ‘not guilty’.

In addition to the 37 high risk cases, there were other women who were considered high risk but had no significant contact or contact was so brief that no risk assessment had been completed for them. What is evident from the RSAP data – quantitative and qualitative – is that higher numbers of women were contacted and supported than is often apparent from information recorded on the database.

Section 2: Services offered by the RSAP

By supporting women through the CJS through court based advocacy, and by working in collaboration with key agencies to co-ordinate and improve responses to domestic violence, the RSAP aimed to increase the safety of women and children and reduce further risk. Although there have been developments nationally around specialist domestic violence courts (SDVCs), the court based advocacy in Southwark was provided in the absence of a SDVC, and where cases of domestic violence were being channelled through different courts in a process that was fairly complicated. The diagram below provides an overview of this process, which had to be understood very quickly by the RSAP advocates, and which also created to time pressures. The RSAP office was located in Camberwell Green court which had better facilities for this even though very few first hearings of Southwark domestic violence cases were held there.

Court process for domestic violence cases in Southwark



1. Almost all Southwark cases first hearings started at Tower Bridge Magistrates Court.

Advocates went to Tower Bridge in the morning and requested a copy of the court lists from the Listings office. From this they identified those cases that looked like domestic violence – based on whether a woman’s name was listed

as the victim though sometimes they picked up cases which appeared to be burglary or theft but which were domestic violence.

Advocates sat in court and listened to cases to determine the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. If this could not be done in court then they rang the police to get this information.

2. Camberwell Green Court (which held first hearings for Lambeth cases) held the Domestic Violence Trials, and where very few Southwark first hearings were heard.

There can be many hearings between the first hearing and the trial – reasons included perpetrator coming back for a bail application, no legal aid being granted, or the defence or prosecution coming back to exchange information if they did not have all their files prepared.

3. Once this hearings process was completed, there was a case management hearing or a pre-trial review, which could be at Tower Bridge or Camberwell Green.

If he pleaded ‘not guilty’, and once a case was sent for trial, most of these happened at Camberwell Green Court (though some were still held at Tower Bridge).

If he pleaded ‘guilty’, the case could stay at Tower Bridge for its entirety until the sentencing.

If during the hearings, the judge considered the case too serious and beyond their sentencing powers then the case could be sent to Inner London Court where the trial was heard with a jury. If the trial happened at a Magistrates Court, then the judge sometimes sent it to Inner London for the sentencing.

4. If, as often happened, for various reasons the trial did not go ahead on the day for which it was scheduled. If this happened then the case usually stayed at Camberwell Green Court.

Advocacy services

To be able to provide most of the women in Southwark who are going through the magistrates courts systems with information about their cases...I spend a lot of time talking to them about what's going to happen at court, what they can expect, how to prepare for safety around those issues...that's a major transformation in terms of the service that women are getting.

If we have a client I almost always have a conversation with a case worker and say 'what work are you doing with her....you're working on her housing, you're working on this. OK its sounds like you've covered a lot of these bases. I'll just really focus on the criminal justice issues but certainly let you know if anything else comes up'.

I explain to women who I am but I think it's still confusing for them...but they are very appreciative to get to know what's happening with their cases and very appreciative to have the support in court.

The RSAP advocates spent around 90% of their time at Camberwell Green court and 10% in the other courts and tried to follow a case through these various phases to its conclusion. They kept women informed and updated throughout this process. Offering

practical and emotional support to women whose cases were being processed was a crucial part of the advocates' role. The following were the key services offered to women:

- Being kept informed about case
- General telephone support
- Being accompanied to court
- Risk assessment and safety plan
- Requesting special measures
- Pre-trial visit to court
- Victim impact statements
- Criminal restraining orders
- Referral to other agencies

The work carried out by the advocates required a high level of expertise. They were on site in the court, perusing the daily court listings for each court to identify domestic violence cases, contacting women to assess their safety and support needs, requesting special measures if required, attending hearings and feeding back to women immediately, and doing victim impact statements if they had not been done by the police. A lot of advocacy work was carried out in court, informing prosecutors directly with the most up to date information if needed. They also referred women onto other support services if appropriate and provided information to and attended the MARAC meetings.

As well as accessing the court lists on a daily basis, the advocates also started to pick up cases as and when they came up in court, thus spending a lot of time in court sitting in initial hearings. Cases identified in this way allowed limited time for one to one contact with women for a pre-trial visit or a trial, and the advocates often conducted risk assessments over the telephone, something which women did not appear to mind. In order to avoid duplication, the advocates ensured that they contacted any agencies women had previous contact with to ascertain if a risk assessment had been done and to obtain a copy if it had, as well as to build up a picture of the case and support accessed. Inevitably, most of the cases dealt with tended to be in the high risk category, though women's engagement with the advocates determined the type of work and support that was offered to women.

RSAP advocates had a specialist knowledge and insight into the way the courts and the CJS operate; being present in court and able to identify and track cases was seen to have made a huge difference to the support that women received and to the numbers of women who were getting the support. The most important aspect of the service offered by RSAP advocates, and identified most positively by women, was the rapid feedback of information about the progress of their cases. The level of expertise liaison carried out by the advocates with the police, CPS and other court staff was not being done by any other service in the borough.

Although the initial vision within Refuge necessarily changed around the breadth of the work (civil and criminal) to be covered by the advocates as it was not possible, given the volume of cases, for limited personnel to cover all domestic violence cases; not knowing which courts cases were going to appear in also made it very difficult to cover every case. However, as the discussion above shows, the advocates were

extremely proactive in their attempts to reach all women going through the CJS and ensure they were offered support.

With all cases (referred from the police or identified in court), the following process was followed by the advocates:

- Call client carry out a risk assessment and a safety plan
- Offer support around the court process
- Try to attend all the court hearings where perpetrator is present
- After hearing inform client and update on progress of her case and check in about safety (is he adhering to bail conditions etc)
- If there was to be a trial then look at special measures and victim impact statements
- Advocacy within the courts
- Referrals either to MARAC or other support services such as Floating Support, Bede House or Victim Support.

Women getting information immediately about their cases was the biggest difference in the services offered to women – *‘It’s the number one thing they want from us’* - and the advocates placed a lot of emphasis on this as well explaining the court processes to women:

Women are so confused and that must really add to their anxiety of everything else happening. Women are saying ‘do I need to get a solicitor and do I need to come to court, do I need to be at that next hearing, do I need to be at his bail application’...it’s such a complicated system to navigate and having someone who’s kind of always on hand to take the time to give clear explanations well I think it makes a tremendous amount of difference for clients.

Keeping women informed and updated was thought to contribute to women’s safety as they better understood bail conditions and the general process. It was further thought that *‘you can’t expect women to come as witnesses to court if you’ve done absolutely nothing to support them’*. As other research has also highlighted (Robinson 2005), it was evident that many women felt they could not move on with their lives until the court case was finalised:

they’re just spending so much time worrying about it and planning their lives around it and a court is clueless about the fact that a woman may have spent the last six months planning her life around this trial date and to the court it’s well why wasn’t she here five minutes earlier?

Since the advocates were focused on criminal court work, work around civil issues remained a gap for the RSAP, though unavoidable because of the funding and remit. This did raise a number of issues in practice. As a result of the lack of communication between criminal and civil courts, there was sometimes a contradiction between bail conditions and terms set out by the civil courts for child contact, whereby conditional bail could not be put in place. Although the advocates advised women about contact centres and solicitors, this was seen to be limited. A further issue around this pertained to women’s safety, so that even though so much effort was placed on

ensuring a woman did not come into contact with the perpetrator in court, she could be facing him in civil court proceedings a few weeks later:

A client comes here, we plan the back entrance, we meet outside, we plan these very elaborate schemes to make sure she never has to have any eye contact with that perpetrator. And then she goes 'oh in two weeks I have to go back to the civil court for my injunction, I'll be facing him'. And you think how sad is it that we're working so hard on this end and there's these huge gaps everywhere else.

Referrals

The RSAP advocates received around 75-80% of the cases in the first week of the case through either sitting in court during first hearings or through police referrals. Around 10% of these cases were picked up at Camberwell Green, and the remainder from Tower Bridge. Since cases were also channelled to Inner London through Tower Bridge, the advocates attended Inner London every two weeks to pick up cases.

Clarifying the process of referrals with key agencies took place in the initial stages of the intervention. In particular, it was important to establish a positive relationship with the police to ensure the flow of referrals. Following face to face meetings between the Hate Crime Unit (HCU), the Advocacy Manager and the advocates to discuss referrals, and although it took some time for the process to be ironed out, advocates received most of their referrals from the HCU. The Head of the Hate Crime Unit was extremely positive about the advocacy work, and towards the end of the evaluation period, the process of referrals was reported to be working better, with the police emailing a daily spreadsheet of recent charges – including information about the crime reference number, victim's name, address and telephone number, the officer of the case, perpetrator's name, the charge and first day of appearance in court. Since the police were only referring around 85% of the cases (3-4 cases daily) and a further ongoing issue for the advocates was the delay in receiving referrals so that many cases only got to them a few days after the first appearance in court (caused by the time lag between a person being arrested and sent to court the following day when the case had not had time to get to the HCU), the advocates addressed this by continuing to go to Tower Bridge (where all cases start) 2-3 days a week to pick up cases not referred by the police.

An issue to emerge with the police referrals was the broader remit of the HCU compared to the advocates, who were only dealing with intimate partner violence. This resulted in the advocates getting referrals for all hate crimes and then having to filter out intimate partner violence cases before they even started to work with clients. While unable to resolve this initially, a later discussion towards the end of the evaluation period had led to the police agreeing to filter cases before sending referrals to the advocates.

The Witness Care Unit (WCU) was also a source of referrals, though referrals came later, often a short time before a trial. The Witness Service (WS) passed on cases that appeared to be domestic violence, and some referrals were also received from Bede House and Victim Support. In some cases where women were being supported by community based services, they were referred to the advocates just for the court based support. The key issue to emerge around referrals was the brief timescales before cases appeared in court, leaving the advocates very little time to work with a woman.

Receiving cases from the police after the incident had taken place was considered to be an ideal time for referrals as it would enable the advocates to do more support work with women, especially around ensuring bail conditions were appropriate or to have special measures in place.

The advocates were the only court based independent professionals to sit on the MARAC, to which they referred all high risk cases and played an invaluable role in providing information about what was happening in court. In other non-high risk cases, the advocates referred and liaised with other support services such as Victim Support, Bede House, and Floating Support.

Proactive work with the CJS

In addition to supporting women, the proactive work undertaken by the advocates within the CJS was the biggest departure from existing work in Southwark, not only in making initial contacts with women but also the level of facilitation and advocacy carried out on behalf of women with other key agencies in the CJS. The account below provides an illustration of the nature of this work.

Substance abusing women are sometimes the hardest to engage with and to get to come to court. So I've been trying to contact her for a long time. She didn't show up for her trial, they managed to adjourn the case. I called her several times leading up to the trial and very fortunately the closest support was a probation officer. And she was very very frightened of court, very very afraid. And on the morning of court she called her probation officer drunk and said 'I don't think I'm going to be able to make it'. But the probation officer kind of talked her into it. I went across to the prosecutor, explained to him what was happening with the case and I said 'look if she makes it here you can't adjourn her to another day, there's no way she's coming back. It's monumental for her to make it here today with everything else she's had to do'. With the support of her probation officer and myself calling her, she did finally make it in that day and the prosecutor have almost never had a conversation with a woman until about five minutes before the trial happens so they don't know what it takes for someone to make it to court.

And she made it to court, she was very scared, very nervous. I organised for a back entrance into court which made her feel a lot safer, accompanied her out when she had a cigarette, accompanied her back in, and just went very slowly through the whole process. I always go to the prosecutor and say 'please can you have a word with her before the trial, just speak with her for a few minutes'. So we spoke with her about everything and the guy ended up knowing she was there and ended up pleading guilty. And she didn't have to testify, she didn't have to go through that. And that was an example of when that kind of multi-agency working works so well because she's one of those people who needed the support of probation, a separate domestic violence support worker as well as myself.

The account above illustrates the complex and detailed range of work carried out by the advocates – support to women, facilitation between women and the CPS, and liaison with other agencies. Of particular note was the advocacy done within the courts -

sometimes we'll be sitting in court and we'll hear the defence say something about the victim that we know isn't true so we will go to the prosecutor and inform them about the reality of what's happening with the case'.

Securing special measures for women was actively taken up by the advocates who received training from the prosecutors to do special measures statements. In time, advocates also started to do the victim impact statements, important for many women who had raised this as a gap in their feedback about the police.

Evidently proactive advocacy in court was time intensive creating some frustration for the advocates in relation to staff shortage, especially in the face of unpredictability in court processes. Clearly, if this type of work is to be done well, then the issue of an adequately funded staff team which can cover more courts between them and reduce the high levels of case loads has to be seriously considered. In particular, the link between the criminal and civil courts was a continuing gap as a result of the shortage of staff caused by inadequate funding. In an ideal situation, and given the absence of a SDVC in Southwark, it was suggested that four advocates would be required for this work - at Tower Bridge, Inner London, Southwark, and one additional person to fill in and pick up cases that could not be covered by the others. The presence of an SDVC would clearly free up advocates time to do other advocacy work, including work in the civil courts, as the experience of SDVC areas illustrates.

Moreover, the experience of providing court based advocacy support to women highlighted the importance of not doing this in a vacuum. The Home Office evaluation of SDVCs highlights the need to provide support to victims outside of the court process (which results in higher levels of engagement of victims) and to support victims at court (results in higher levels of successful prosecutions), clearly showing the need for both (Home Office 2008). In Southwark, it was apparent that such support is most effectively provided in the context of a range of other support services for women and children, which include, at a minimum, refuge accommodation/housing, floating support/outreach support, and counselling. This has implications for multi-agency work which is crucial to providing a holistic and co-ordinated community response to women and children and recognises that the experience of court can be traumatic for women who may need on-going support beyond the remit of the court based advocate – *after her trial she was kind of inconsolable, she was shaking and tearful. The defence solicitor spent twenty minutes saying 'you're lying, we know you're lying'. She needed a lot of support – and that this has to be considered in any planning of services.*

BME advocacy

If this system is confusing and hard to understand for perhaps a White British woman who's spent her life here, it comes out when I'm working with a lot of BME women, it's about a thousand times more incomprehensible to them. It's really really difficult.

The issue of supporting BME women, who are generally recognised to have specific needs, has been raised for some time (see Thiara 2005). The importance of advocacy for BME women - seen as including giving information and options, offering support and advice, and representation with/negotiating access to other agencies/services - who often do not know how the system works has been emphasised. Advocacy has

been highlighted as particularly useful in ensuring that a multi-agency approach is taken to meeting the needs of BME women (Thiara 2005).

The difficulties reported for all women in negotiating the CJS are often further exacerbated for BME women due to a lack of sensitivity and awareness on the part of professionals and agencies, cultural issues, and language barriers. Consequently, the need to have specialist advocates has been highlighted as a 'pressing issue' (Robinson, 2005). This is something also reinforced by the recent Home Office Review of SDVCs, in which Component 6 in relation to equality and diversity raised best practice issues (Home Office, *Safety with Justice*, 2008)⁷. The CPS's *Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment on the Violence Against Women Strategy and Action Plans* also flags up the need for more research in relation to ethnicity and prosecution issues (2007:19). Thus, it is evident that a further examination of issues for BME in relation to the CJS is needed and has been flagged up by a number of different sources.

With this in mind, Refuge secured short term funding for a BME advocate to be introduced in Southwark to support women to engage with the CJS. In general, it was thought that large numbers of BME women were not accessing the CJS in Southwark and that they '*need to be reached out to*'. Although the population of Southwark is fairly diverse, the advocate targeted Bangladeshi and Somali communities, perceived to be impenetrable. In trying to establish the BME advocacy work, considerable time was spent in contacting local BME organisations and all relevant professionals/agencies such as solicitors, GPs, schools and Health. It was evident that this work was slow to progress – '*we have to seep it in slowly*' - as the advocate encountered a number of gatekeepers within particular communities, though the fact that she was already known through her FS work made this process sometimes easier. The development work highlighted the need for training of 'community leaders' and groups around the importance of reporting violence/abuse. The marginal position of the dominant BME communities made many among them suspicious of 'outsiders', preferring to deal with their own problems though linking in with a police officer at the HCU assisted in building some links. Hostility was also encountered from existing mainstream services, where professionals' lack of insight into domestic violence was often exacerbated by a lack of cultural understanding.

Unless there is clarity about the BME focused role/remit, a part-time post can easily lose its focus and become subsumed within a highly pressurised small team and be a solution for a heavy case load. In the RSAP, though there was some confusion, the links the advocate was able to develop in the short time were possible because of the level of experience and embeddedness in the locality. Overall, the short period of intervention with BME women raised many valuable issues, not least the importance

⁷ Best practice issues included: IDVAs and specialist support services to work with BME communities to provide services and address any significant disproportionality in provision of service; victim and defendant profile data is collected to inform performance; needs of a range of victims – men, LGBT communities, disabled victims and BME communities – to be addressed. It also made the following recommendations: SDVCs address statutory equality duties and draw up equality impact assessments in relation to the range of communities; SDVCs involve victims from a range of communities in court visits and consultation to improve performance and public confidence.

of developing dedicated advocacy support to BME women within the CJS. Some of the issues that arose included:

- The importance of being clear about the remit of the BME advocate.
- Considering how the dedicated BME post ‘fits’ with the generic team – recognising that not all BME women want a specific advocate and that generic advocates may be able to support BME women.
- Recognising the extent of the development work that is required around equality and diversity issues across the whole range of professionals as well as BME communities/community groups.

Issues in supporting BME women

In supporting BME women through court cases, the advocate tried to meet with women wherever possible to build up trust. Although there was a perception that BME women were less likely to follow cases through, it was believed that they needed more support through the process given the numerous pressures, including family and community, on them to withdraw. When going through trials, the advocate’s presence had supported some women to continue with cases, and in instances where women did not want to pursue the case but were summoned to court, the advocate had been able to provide them with options to encourage them to take out bindovers to prohibit the perpetrator from going to the home. Prosecutors fed back that they were getting more results with BME women when they were supported by the RSAP service.

Language was an issue when supporting a number of the BME women. Although the advocates made use of Language Line to speak with these clients, they found it extremely difficult to explain things to clients when using a telephone interpretation service. From the advocates’ view, it was doubly difficult for BME women as not only did they lack understanding of the court system but there was the greater challenge of getting that information across to them in another language – *‘just constantly trying to work out is it best to meet in person with an interpreter, is it best on the telephone, is it best to get workers who speak those languages involved?’*

As is evident from the overview of service users, advocates worked with a wide range of BME women from diverse backgrounds. Some of the issues that emerged included:

- Many women experiencing abuse from family members as well as intimate partners, and family being a big issue in itself in pursuing cases – *how do you go to court knowing there are other family members who are implicated?*
- Confidentiality was a considerable concern for those women with relatives who were professionals, something not always understood by other professionals. For e.g. a woman whose close relative was a probation officer refused to give her address to the police and the CPS who were angry with her about this; she was supported by the advocates who were aware of the consequences of information getting into the wrong hands.
- Unsettled immigration and no recourse to public funds for women was frequently encountered and impacted on women being able to source support and led to fear of police involvement.

- Women being unable to express themselves to the police or some confusion among women about the role of the different services – police, witness care unit etc. This is well illustrated by the following:

They said to her ‘why didn’t you ever tell us any of this before, he’s been calling you, harassing you and breaking his bail conditions since July of last year?’ And she said I tried to but nobody really listened. She’s a young Jamaican woman with no recourse. Also when the witness care unit calls they say we’re calling from Peckham police station and she thinks oh great I can report the last six months of harassment. So she told them what was happening and it was never taken any further and she thought I keep telling the police I don’t know why they’re not doing anything about it....so a lack of understanding of the systems and her ability to articulate kind of what was happening posed a greater challenge to her. Not to mention her concerns about police involvement because she had no recourse.
- As the above shows, it was vital for many BME women to have a worker advocating for their rights with other agencies, who often either did not respond to BME women or responded negatively. Also women often did not understand the system and were not guided appropriately to the right services.
- The lack of BME support services was encountered as a problem in being able to refer women on. In some cases, even where considerable time was spent locating services, some women refused to engage with them because of political differences based on the place of origin – e.g. an Egyptian woman refusing to engage with an Iraqi service. Another issue related to women fearing workers who spoke the same language being on the husband’s family’s side.
- The need for proper support through court for many BME women, who often lacked the support of their families, was underlined as a significant issue by the advocates who spent a lot of time working with and advocating on behalf of BME women who were seen to require a greater level of support. Some of this work was beyond language issues, involving *‘just taking the time to understand, to listen, to be patient, to explain things thoroughly’*.
- The negative response to BME women from some professionals was also highlighted: *‘One of my clients came into testify and when she left the defence solicitor made a really nasty comment about what she was wearing. He said ‘wow I really didn’t like her get up’.*
- Although individual women’s situations are different, a range of pressures on BME women (of whom more are likely to want to withdraw) to not pursue cases was highlighted. It was reported that Black Caribbean women often informed advocates about the pressure they were under from community members to withdraw cases – *‘they often call me complaining that people in the community are saying how could you do this to them, how could you get the police involved? Putting that kind of pressure on them’*. Many Asian women were reported to be under pressure to remain as a family unit, often wanting the partner to return home but stop the abuse. In their evaluation of

MARACs, Robinson and Tregidga highlight that personal determination, as well as strong family support, contribute to a woman's continued participation with the criminal justice system – *'it was very important that they were able to show the perpetrator that they were serious in their intentions, and no longer willing to put up with the abuse'* (2005:27). Where women retracted, this was either due to fear of repercussions or a sense of not being physically or mentally strong enough at the time. Clearly, for many BME women who take action without family support, one of these key factors is missing thus requiring them to have a greater sense of personal determination. As discussed in the next section, this is reinforced in the comments women made in this evaluation.

- On the other hand, a number of BME women were reported to be extremely keen to go through the CJS, some wanting to give information to the police and the CPS on a daily basis. For these women, it was very important that the perpetrator learnt that he could not get away with his behaviour and also to show him that they no longer wanted to live with the abuse. It was believed that women who worked tended to be more likely to pursue the CJS than those who did not, partly because they were likely to be less financially reliant on the partner.

Modus

As one of the participating agencies in the Hestia evaluation, RSAP used Modus for capturing project data. After training, staff were expected to maintain the database themselves without any administrative support. In practice, the responsibility for this fell on a minority of staff and was clearly experienced as an extra pressure, especially as the volume of work increased. Generally, although Modus has been somewhat useful for generating information about the advocacy work, it has been demanding on staff time and the information generated has been limited for Refuge purposes. Indeed, during the evaluation, Refuge developed its own electronic casework management and information system, which has been implemented throughout the organisation.

Section 3: Partnership work

Multi-agency work

The importance of multi-agency work as part of a co-ordinated approach to tackling domestic violence has been underlined by many for some time (Mullender and Hague, 2000). Development work with statutory and voluntary agencies was key to establishing the presence of the RSAP. In particular, building clarity about the nature of the advocacy service and the role of the advocates among external agencies was especially needed to counteract any confusion, especially among court personnel, caused because of the uniqueness of the role:

I promise you there's still a lot of confusion as to who I am because I'm having to sit everyone down and say I'm an independent advocate, you've never seen anyone like me before but this is what I do. I work for a voluntary organisation but I'm placed in court. It's confusing for people. It's taking a lot of time.

To achieve this, formal meetings with the key agencies were held to build up personal contacts and discuss the flow of referrals and joint work. Clearly, this can be a demanding period of development work, creating great pressures for limited personnel also doing direct work with women. Tapping into existing structures as well as setting up new ones focused on their work were found to be useful for the RSAP. Liaising with the local domestic violence co-ordinator and the forum, and providing a report on the advocacy work to feed into the Southwark Safety Partnership was an effective way of keeping local agencies updated and informed about RSAP. A Domestic Violence Operational Group was also initiated, and included Refuge, Bede House, Victim Support, and the Police Borough Commander, to discuss issues around the advocacy work. Advocates attended meetings of the court based Trials and Issues Group (Southwark and Lambeth) where key services such as Witness Service, Witness Care Unit, the CPS, and head court clerk and the representative court clerk came together on a regular basis to discuss any issues around trials and cases. Finally, advocates attended MARAC meetings from early on, and arranged meetings with other community based services. Building relationships with the Witness Care Unit, the Witness Service and the CPS required on-going work.

The process of 'getting your foot in the door to court' was found to be 'a lot of work' and something that required time to be invested in at the outset by senior staff. After discussions had taken place with the listings office, this enabled the team to have a copy of the lists every day as well as access to a walkie talkie 'so that they can call me up when someone's ready to come down to testify'. An important aspect of getting timely information on results of cases was negotiating access to court computers which took a long time to achieve:

There's not a formal relationship established between myself and the resulting office, they can tell me what happened in court. But they're a little suspicious about who I am because they're not allowed to give out things like bail conditions...So I've been trying to get actual access to the computers they use, which my colleagues at witness service have that access.

However, the presence of a voluntary organisation in court raised some suspicion about their role:

People are really suspicious about a voluntary sector organisation coming into the Court, you know, and I want access to a lot of information and people are very suspicious about that. I have people saying to me 'that's not your role, that's the police, the police should be doing that'.

Although there was some overlap with the services offered by the Witness Service, a key difference was seen to be the on-going case work and safety planning, underpinned by a specialist knowledge of domestic violence. While the relationship between the Witness Service and the advocates was somewhat strained at the start (a sense that their toes were being trod on), this was ironed out after building relationships and closer working developed – involving close liaison and sharing of information about domestic violence clients so that they were automatically passed on to the advocates upon arrival - *'Witness Service is usually the first one to see clients come through the door so it's important for us to be clear about whose is which client'*.

In the process of getting the RSAP known among other agencies, a number of issues were highlighted which are useful for future developments:

- Clarity about the nature of the new service and how it complements existing services is needed through the dissemination of a flier.
- Clarity about the role of different staff from the outset to avoid confusion among external agencies about who is 'fronting' the intervention and who they should refer to - *'clarification of different levels of responsibility at different levels of the hierarchy'*.
- Continuity in the same staff attending meetings needs to be maintained to avoid confusion resulting from different individuals going at different times.
- Clarity about which meetings are to be attended by senior and operational staff.

CPS

I explain each time who I am, what I do and then telling them the information I need or trying to help them with the case. And that's been a long process. I have prosecutors asking me 'are you a volunteer?'

Doing a presentation to the CPS was crucial in clarifying the role of the advocates and in building up a relationship between the CPS and RSAP advocates. However, since relationships were built up *'prosecutor by prosecutor each time a case comes up'*, ignorance still existed about the advocates' role, suggesting that presentations needed to be done on a regular basis to address this. In particular, the need for domestic violence training for lawyers was identified.

Over time, the presence of a CPS Specialist Domestic Violence Prosecutor enabled close working relationships to be developed between the CPS and the RSAP, though the response from prosecutors in court was reported to be mixed. Where this worked well, it was when prosecutors took time to speak to the advocate about a case beforehand, spoke to clients, and responded to questions raised by women with the advocate about the legal process. Where this did not work well was when prosecutors *'think they're way too busy'* or did not respond to requests for information.

The role of the advocates in assisting with the preparation of cases was recognised as important by a minority of prosecutors – *‘I had one person say ‘so you’re the domestic violence advocate, we’ve been waiting for you, you’re really going to be helpful for us in preparing our cases and getting things together’.* Although the advocates were proactive in contacting prosecutors to offer assistance with preparing cases – *‘I always say to them if you’re preparing a case and you have any questions please call me, I probably know the client, I probably can tell you what’s going on in her life, and I can contact the police, I can chase things up –* there was often little take up of this and the advocates had to do a lot of chasing of people. However, the importance of convincing the CPS that the advocates could be of benefit to them was key to bringing about change and developing closer working relationships. At the same time it was recognised that the impact of the advocates’ role was both of benefit and served to complicate the role of the CPS who had to respond to information and requests made by the advocates. This is illustrated by the following:

...the other day there was supposed to be a trial but the case was not going to go ahead and I said I am going to sit in the court anyway. If he brings anything up about bail conditions I can make sure they don’t get changed because he has been harassing her at work. I sat in the court and the guy tried to change his bail conditions and the prosecutor had to go through a lot of effort that I never see them go to. I ran out and made sure I got the address of the work, came back in, gave it to him and he added that as a bail condition and this defendant was raging mad...And the prosecutor had to defend his position to the magistrate and afterwards I said to the prosecutor ‘thank you so much, I want you to know it’s really important what you did’ and I explained why. But I know my work puts more work on them, it’s more of an effort. But I think it’s so necessary in terms of getting someone a good service.

The respondents from the CPS were extremely positive about the role of the RSAP advocates and their mutual professional relationship. Being located in close proximity in court was seen to assist in the flow of information and exchange between advocates and the supportive prosecutors who liaised closely, popping in and out of each other’s offices if needed. In particular, it was seen to be helpful in providing the most up to date information on individual cases – *‘its very useful for having information regarding if women are coming to give evidence’.*

RSAP advocates’ role in supporting and talking to women was especially welcomed and identified as valuable by the CPS, along with their insights about why women retract statements and general knowledge about domestic violence. There was also a strong view among CPS professionals (and the Police) that what frustrated the progress of domestic violence cases was the unwillingness of women to give evidence and the high number of withdrawals. Following the location of the advocates in court, it was believed that the number of women giving evidence had increased and hence the number of withdrawals decreased.

In June 2007, I prosecuted a defendant for assaulting his wife. Although the defendant did not have any previous convictions, there was a history of complaints from the victim which were recorded by the police. This time however, the victim had been brave enough to make a statement and to support a prosecution.

I recall this case in particular because of the level of violence which warranted the

defendant to be remanded in custody from the first hearing and the fact that it had all the ingredients of serious domestic violence. The victim, a Muslim lady, had only been living in the UK for a few years. As such, she felt isolated and this had been exacerbated by her husband's violence and control. On the day of trial she attended but informed me that she did not wish to give evidence because she did not want her husband to spend any more time in prison for the sake of her children, although she felt he should be punished for what he had done to her. However, I could not guarantee that he would not be imprisoned if convicted.

This is where the help of the Refuge advocate was invaluable. She could spend more time with the victim and could empathise and explain the options and consequences far better than I could. I returned after 20 minutes and the victim seemed far happier that she had spoken to the advocate who was able to articulate the victim's particular concerns, one of which was the presence of the defendant's family in the public gallery. This allowed me to make a last minute application for screens for the victim whilst giving evidence and it was agreed that she would give evidence against her husband. This would not have happened without Refuge.

As is often the case, when the defendant was informed that the trial was to proceed, he changed his plea to guilty.

The presence of the advocates in court was seen to have made a 'definite difference' to how domestic violence cases progressed in court – *'they're on the spot when you need them. It's a fast moving situation and they can fill you in on information not always forthcoming from the police. When a case is on, (advocate) sits in court which is helpful if you need extra information, for example, in a remand hearing if a particular address is appropriate or not'*. It was strongly believed that the advocates would be greatly missed if they did not continue to provide their services.

Police

As already noted, the police was one of the agencies that the advocates had close contact with. In building up the relationship, it was important to gain senior management support and in Southwark the head of the HCU was supportive of the intervention from the outset. Issues regarding joint work were addressed with the police from the start through joint meetings focused on looking at the logistics of referrals and information exchange and how all domestic violence cases could be passed on to the advocates. Although this improved considerably during the course of the intervention so that by the end the police were passing on most cases, it was recognised by senior police officers that some issues related to their internal systems (police officers being able to retrieve data quickly enough to pass on, especially problematic for 'in custody' cases) still needed to be ironed out. The time spent by advocates in chasing officers for information/actions was a further issue that arose and required skill and diplomacy in dealing with it.

A way the RSAP team overcame these issues was to build up links with individual officers (facilitated by the head of the HCU who recognised the need to standardise practice) and to undergo training for conducting victim impact statements themselves so that by the final phases of the intervention, things were reported to be working fairly well. The role of the advocates was seen as invaluable by the police respondents

– *‘it needs more people. Victims benefit hugely and the criminal justice system benefits. The police don’t have time to do support work’*. It was further said that having the RSAP advocates had

definite benefits for victims ...and in supporting a proactive policy and practice in relation to domestic violence, aimed at reducing domestic violence. Keeping the victim supported is crucial to the process, its fundamental and we don’t have enough of them.

Other statutory agencies

Other statutory agencies were similarly positive about the work of the RSAP advocates even if contact was limited. It was generally considered important that *‘there’s an advocacy service for victims before and after court in terms of risk management that is providing a holistic service and looking at the wider picture of risk management’*. Moreover, it was recognised that the decision to see a case through was very traumatic for women and they needed to be supported to do this. The involvement of the advocates at the MARAC meetings was seen as especially crucial *‘as they have unique access to victims and sensitive information. Without their input, our decision making process wouldn’t be properly informed’* and a need for the advocates to be a part of the formal proceedings and not an ‘add on’ was voiced. The possibility of greater information sharing with Probation so that information could be given on every case even if not sentenced was raised.

Given the overlap between their roles, there was some disquiet on the part of the Witness Service (WS) about Refuge ‘coming in’, also underlined by a competitive funding environment. As already noted, relationships with the WS required close development, especially as there was no formal protocol in place to facilitate joint work. Although these issues were resolved, the need to have early liaison and better guidelines around roles was highlighted, especially regarding the roles that Refuge staff had in relation to local and national work. While initial difficulties around joint work had been considerably resolved, it was evident that further clarity was still needed between their roles to avoid duplication of work. For instance, there was some frustration among the WS of contacting clients they thought were theirs but were in fact were those of the RSAP. This is an issue that has been flagged up by the Standing Together Support at Court report which states that *‘a clear delineation of duties is imperative between the IDVA and the Witness Service’* (2007:10). Although a daily exchange of client lists would have addressed this issue, the lack of time on the part of the advocates had made this hard to do. Since the WS are often the first point of contact for many calling the courts, they were constantly passing on messages to RSAP which also created some frustration. It was suggested that work developed by Standing Together in Hammersmith and Fulham should be consulted to see how the two organisations work together.

The Witness Care Unit was very positive about the RSAP, seeing it as complementary to their services despite some overlap in their roles, and believed the advocates had made their job easier. It was thought that the work of the advocates assisted in getting cases to court because they were known to be independent rather than a part of the police or Victim Support. The expertise of the RSAP in working with domestic violence was recognised as was the need to have a dedicated service. It was commented that:

they have proven their worth and they are another avenue for us to use. The court is the best place for them, they can observe, they're there on the ground, know what the bail conditions are first hand and explain to victims. We have to wait until the next day so the advocates are ahead of us. Also women may put the phone down on us but not the advocates.

In sum, although some critical issues were raised, the court based advocacy being provided by RSAP, the advocates' style and approach to the work, and the positive impact it was having on women present within the CJS, was widely praised and something that would leave a gap if it was to no longer exist.

Voluntary organisations

Feedback from voluntary organisations raised some issues that are worth consideration in similar future developments by any organisation. Many of these pertained to the role of Refuge beyond the borough as a national organisation and it was evident that some of the issues raised were shaped by the competitive nature of funding in the borough, where it was felt that smaller groups suffered as a result of bigger national organisations like Refuge having greater bargaining power, which then prevented effective local partnership work. In relation to BME women, though work in the borough was seen as limited with a general absence of discussion about BME issues, there was a fear that one organisation would begin to be seen as the 'BME specialist' and others with a history of developing this area would not get future funding. It was suggested that BME posts should be spread across different organisations and a strategic discussion needed.

Although there were some issues highlighted at management level with the other funded partner agencies, operational level relationships with Bede House and Victim Support were seen as positive. The case workers and the advocates liaised closely over cases. In particular, the operational relationship was seen to be working well because of the discrete role of the advocates in offering court based support and a resource that the case workers, who were doing more general support work, could use for clients that needed support at court.

Any new intervention requires the intense development of partnership work, with clarity about roles, referrals procedures and information sharing. In building up links with existing agencies, it was apparent that one-to-one contact between RSAP and other agencies/professionals was greatly important in explaining the role of advocates and in exploring future working relationships. Where this was done it was hugely valued, and where it was not developed fully with agencies⁸ it highlighted the need for constant relationship building work in the first year of a new intervention. Given the shortage of staff in RSAP, it was thought that key development work should be undertaken before referrals began to be taken.

Clearly, with a new service such as the RSAP, it is necessary to formalise joint work and have clarity about roles and expectations through the development of joint protocols. Towards the end of the evaluation, the CPS and RSAP together had devised

⁸ Mainly because of the lack of personnel. This issue was addressed early on in the evaluation and a decision made by the team around which staff should attend particular meetings.

some protocols to look at how they could exchange information about cases⁹. Overall, however, protocols remained undeveloped with other partner agencies and greater strategic work was still needed around this. While understandable constraints prevented this from happening, such issues do need to be resolved early on in any similar future developments. The importance of protocols to link advocates and the CJS to ensure that all agencies address both justice and safety has also been underlined by the recent Safety with Justice report (Home Office, 2008).

Defining the remit - commissioning

The RSAP was developed in response to Southwark Council's call for funding for an independent advocacy service. The process of commissioning and funding was considered to have been unhelpful by a number of the respondents as it created confusion and competition among existing services providing domestic violence support in the borough. As well as this, there was a lack of clarity on the part of the Council about what independent advocacy should look like within each of the three funded services. As a result, several constraints were created in the setting up of the RSAP as what would have been defined as effective court based advocacy and the resources needed for this had to fit within the stipulated parameters. For instance, support to women around civil legal processes as well as CJS processes was necessarily constrained. Overall, the 'imposed partnership' between Bede House, Victim Support, and Refuge had not worked well as it *'hasn't grown organically out of a common need and a common drive'*, though at an operational level links had been positive.

Given the range of issues raised by the funding process, an open commissioning process by the Council was thought to be more desirable than what had transpired, creating as it did unnecessary suspicions. Despite the government emphasis on independent advocacy, there is an absence of a common understanding and a consensus about the nature of advocacy work. Despite attempts to arrive at greater clarity, it can still mean different things to different people. Although CAADA has been advocating a certain view, in practice different models have been developed and implemented. For these reasons, it is important in any locality to clearly define 'advocacy' and to communicate this to others. In order to avoid competition and confusion, the lessons from RSAP and the issues encountered suggest that it is important to: clearly define the role of an independent domestic violence advocate when commissioning a service; adequately address civil as well as CJS support issues; have open and transparent commissioning process which does not obfuscate the competitive funding environment.

⁹ This raised issues around confidentiality (especially of informing the CPS if clients did not attend court) and a way found to address this; another issue related to special measures and victim impact statements so that if they were not done by the police the CPS contacted the advocates to do this.

Section 4: Impact of the RSAP

Institutional change

I think a lot of this is going to take time. When we get women to do a victim impact statement it can change the result of a trial, it can change the sentencing. Or myself going to a prosecutor and asking them about bail conditions, that's something you never would have done if I wasn't there. There's a lot of gradual change that's going to happen.

Institutional change necessarily takes time and it was evident from the work of the RSAP advocates in Southwark that this was starting to happen in various ways. It included people asking questions and having their awareness raised:

I went to the listing office and asked if I could get a trial changed over to Camberwell and he said 'but it's a harassment charge' and I said 'yes it's domestic violence'. He said 'is that DV?' and I said 'yes harassment can be domestic violence too'. There's a lot of these gradual changes.

The presence of an advocate in court was resulting in some change:

I know that when I sit in court I feel as though a prosecutor handles the case a little bit differently than if I wasn't there. In a way sometimes I feel like I'm a bit of a watchdog in terms of what's happening in court.

The fact that advocates chased the police for their actions meant they were more likely to do so:

the police are more likely to do a victim impact statement or the special measures with me calling and saying 'can you please do this', knowing we sit on the MARAC and we have a relationship with their supervisor.

The largest positive impact was on the way the CPS worked with domestic violence cases. This was partly facilitated by the presence of a Specialist Domestic Violence Prosecutor and a Case Progression Officer. However, changes were slowly happening as a result of the pressure placed by the advocates who picked up on mistakes on a daily basis – for e.g. putting the victim's confidential address on a restraining order and handing it to the perpetrator. In this case, the advocate had written a complaint letter to the head of the CPS who recognised its seriousness and promised to make changes; in the past these issues would not have been raised. Advocates had also tried to set up a system to ensure victims got copies of the restraining order in the post to keep them informed. It was evident that more victim impact statements were being done and special measures being granted, especially screens for victims. Moreover, conversations were taking place between prosecutors and advocates over issues such as unconditional bail and '*occasionally prosecutors will run up to us after court and say this guy was released on bail, it's an urgent case, can you please get this information to the victim? So they've started using us a lot more*'.

The advocates had not only built up relationships with the Results office to get access to court results by telephone but were being emailed confidential information, such as bail conditions, so they could inform women immediately. The lack of information about bail conditions, among others, was an issue that women had complained about continually.

As already highlighted, it was evident from the CPS and the advocates that the presence of women in court often resulted in guilty pleas by men:

When I support a woman in court I will be running back and forth, running to the court room, running to the CPS, keeping them informed of what's happening. If a woman goes to court alone there's no way that she's going to have any idea what's happening with her case, what's going on, why has this taken two hours, that kind of thing...women always say I don't want to go to court, I don't want to testify...but they do say I want to know what's going on. And when they do come to court, often because they know I will support them and it gives them a friend rather than a hostile kind of body, we get guilty pleas.

The unique role of the RSAP also meant that other support services were using the advocates as a 'court resource' for information about court matters, something not documented but seen to be very time consuming. It was clear that the advocates provided valuable links in terms of informing other agencies about what was happening in court ('who gets bail and why'), in liaising with the CPS, to get victim impact statements done, and to provide information about how things work in court – 'I don't think anybody could really understand how everything actually works on a day to day basis unless you're in it'. The fact that advocates gained an insight into court work and built up important relationships meant that if asked to do something 'we know exactly who needs to be called, who we can speak to at this place or that to get the information we need'.

In general, the RSAP court based advocacy had the following impact:

- Advocates were able to challenge defence solicitors and defendants around information being presented to court by providing CPS with up-to-date information about RSAP clients.
- Advocate on behalf of clients for conditional bail.
- Improving the number of women attending court thus impacting on successful prosecutions.
- Improving the quality of CPS cases by assisting the Police and CPS with evidence and information gathering.
- Increasing the safety of women at court by using the back entrances and arranging for the Police to take clients to and from court.
- Improved information sharing and referrals between the Police HCU, WCU and court departments.
- Ensured access to court results, including confidential information such as bail conditions.
- Initiated discussion around establishing a protocol between the CPS, HCU and WCU about informing women about the release of perpetrators from prison on bail.
- Domestic violence trials were being held at Camberwell Green Magistrates Court.
- More Domestic violence trials at Inner London Crown Court were being given fixed dates (rather than being put on Warned Lists to appear at any time in 2 weeks).
- Domestic violence cases were being fast-tracked through the Magistrates' Courts.

- Established a positive working relationship with CPS and the specialist domestic violence Prosecutor, and there was a strong exchange of information between the agencies.
- As the only service from the criminal courts to attend the MARAC, advocates were usually the primary informants to the panels about what was happening with MARAC cases in court.

A gap identified in relation to institutional change was the ability of the advocates to input into initial hearings by preparing better evidence for cases, made difficult by the fact that initial hearings took place in Tower Bridge where no advocates were based. Given the on-going misunderstanding among CJS professionals, that domestic violence is caused by alcohol and drugs for instance, the need for greater work with these professionals was identified. Passing inappropriate sentences to perpetrators, such as fines, conditional discharge, and IDAP programmes, was also an on-going issue which was likely to take longer to address than the intervention period. Thus, alongside observable process changes, the need for on-going work with Judges, Magistrates, CPS, Legal advisors and other court staff was recognised. Although training of court staff was considered highly important, it was something the advocates had had little time to do given the staff shortage. More formal training for court staff was being considered by the Domestic Violence Operational Group.

The achievements of the RSAP cannot be underestimated as the level of work the team had to develop and deliver in a very short timescale was considerable. Inevitably, they also encountered court and other professionals who were very set in their ways and practices and had to work sensitively to slowly begin the process of change – *the speed of getting the service up and running, their effectiveness in court, they made relationships work very well.*

Police data

Information for all reported domestic violence incidents to Southwark Police was received for the period April 2005 to March 2008 to provide a before and after comparison. The figures below show a slow decline of reported domestic violence incidents over the three year period. The figures in italics represent the period of the evaluation.

Table 8: Southwark Police Reported Domestic Violence Incidents, April 2005-March 2008

Month (total)	April05-March06	April06-March07	April07-March08
April	235	228	<i>206</i>
May	268	192	<i>207</i>
June	245	210	<i>185</i>
July	287	230	<i>206</i>
August	269	207	<i>233</i>
September	222	207	<i>235</i>
October	248	212	<i>194</i>
November	239	208	<i>192</i>
December	222	<i>212</i>	<i>189</i>
January	216	<i>212</i>	<i>215</i>
February	173	<i>195</i>	<i>190</i>
March	268	<i>205</i>	<i>195</i>

Total	2892	2518	2447
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A breakdown of ethnicity for all reported incidents of domestic violence, in the table below shows, and as highlighted by the Police Review, that those of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity constituted a substantial proportion of the reported incidents (41%) with White British being the highest (47%).

Table 9: Ethnicity and reported domestic violence incidents

Ethnicity*	Total	% of Total
Afro-Caribbean	1532	41%
Arabian/Egyptian	20	0.5%
Asian	151	4%
Dark European	211	5.6%
Oriental	60	1.6%
White European	1770	47%
Declined/Refused	3	0.1%
Unknown	16	0.4%
Total	3754	100%

*These categories were used by Southwark police.

A breakdown of the arrests in the table below shows a steady increase in the percentage of arrests made for domestic violence incidents (as part of the police positive arrest policy). Seen against the same for the previous year, it is evident that, despite fluctuations, there was an upward trend in the rate of arrests so that it was 54% in the month that the RSAP started and 63% for the same month a year later¹⁰ (the evaluation period is highlighted in italics).

Table 10: Total Arrests of Domestic Violence Incidents for April 2006-March 2008

Month (total)	DV Arrests for Ap06-Mar07 (Arrest rate %)	DV Arrests for Ap07-Mar08 (Arrest rate %)
April	108 out of 228 (47%)	<i>109 out of 206 (53%)</i>
May	121 out of 192 (63%)	<i>119 out of 207(57%)</i>
June	103 out of 210 (49%)	<i>106 out of 185(57%)</i>
July	125 out of 230 (54%)	<i>137 out of 206 (67%)</i>
August	123 out of 207 (59%)	<i>136 out of 233 (58%)</i>
September	127 out of 207 (61%)	<i>152 out of 235 (65%)</i>
October	114 out of 212 (54%)	<i>152 out of 194 (78%)</i>
November	<i>112 out of 208 (54%)</i>	<i>120 out of 192(63%)</i>
December	<i>121 out of 212 (57%)</i>	<i>121 out of 189 (64%)</i>
January	<i>129 out of 212(61%)</i>	<i>136 out of 215 (63%)</i>
February	<i>102 out of 195 (52%)</i>	<i>132 out of 190 (69%)</i>
March	<i>97 out of 205 (47%)</i>	<i>110 out of 195 (56%)</i>
Total	<i>1382 (54.88%)</i>	<i>1530 (62.53%)</i>

When the figures for police arrests are seen against the CPS figures for cases being pursued through the CJS and their outcomes, it is possible to build a picture of the numbers of cases being successfully prosecuted as a percentage of the total arrests.

¹⁰ The evaluation of 64 specialist domestic violence courts in 2008 showed that in 11 out of 23 SDVCs an average of over 80% domestic violence crimes were being arrested.

Table 11: Breakdown of case outcome from June 2006-December 2007

Date	Police Arrests	CPS prosecutions (% of total arrests)	Successful (% of total arrests)
June 2006	103	27 (26%)	15 (14.5%)
June 2007	106	16 (15%)	10 (9.4%)
July 2006	125	20 (16%)	12 (9.6%)
July 2007	137	Missing	Missing
Aug 2006	123	22 (17.8%)	10 (8%)
Aug 2007	136	27 (19.8%)	15 (11%)
Sep 2006	127	28 (22%)	12 (9.4%)
Sep 2007	152	23 (15%)	18 (11.8%)
Oct 2006	114	9 (7.8%)	6 (5%)
Oct 2007	152	27 (17.7%)	15 (9.8%)
Nov 2006	112	32 (28.5%)	14 (12.5%)
Nov 2007	120	25 (20.8%)	13 (10.8%)
Dec 2006	121	19 (15.7%)	7 (5.7%)
Dec 2007	121	23 (19%)	7 (5.7%)
Jan 2007	129	16 (12.4%)	8 (6%)
Feb 2007	102	22 (21.5%)	11 (10.7%)
Mar 2007	97	21 (21.6%)	13 (13.4%)
Apr 2007	109	13 (11.9%)	6 (5.5%)
May 2007	119	30 (25%)	19 (16%)

Since there have been a number of national developments among the police and the CPS in relation to domestic violence, this makes it difficult to associate any positive changes with just the RSAP. Without a much more detailed analysis, the frequent fluctuations also make it hard to link any positive outcomes in particular months to any one intervention. However, it is likely that the positive arrest policy by the police, the employment of the specialist CPS advocate and the RSAP advocates all contributed to some positive changes in the percentage of cases being prosecuted and successful outcomes.

CPS data

Data was obtained from the CPS for the period June 2006 to May 2007. This was analysed to assess the possible impact made by the RSAP advocacy service. The tables below provide details based on the three categories of 'successful', 'unsuccessful' and 'guilty plea'.

Table 12: 6 months prior to RSAP

2006	Monthly total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Guilty plea
June	27	15	12	11
July	20	12	8	7
August	22	10	12	7
September	28	12	16	9
October	9	6	3	4
November	32	14	18	10
Total	138	69	69	48
%		50%	50%	35%

Although the first six months of the RSAP (below) had a lower total number of cases being prosecuted than the previous six months, there were marked differences in the percentage of cases that were successful, a decrease in unsuccessful cases and over a 5% increase in the number of guilty pleas.

Table 13: First 6 months after RSAP

2006/07	Monthly total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Guilty plea
December 06	19	7	12	5
January 07	16	8	8	7
February 07	22	11	11	7
March 07	21	13	8	10
April 07	13	6	7	5
May 07	30	19	11	15
Total	121	64	57	49
%		53%	47%	40.4%

This is further reflected in the second six months, as shown in Table 15 below, so that not only is there an increase in the total number of cases being prosecuted between the six months before and 12 months after, but a 5.3% increase in successful cases, 5% decrease in unsuccessful cases and a 10% increase in the number of guilty pleas. If we note the point raised in the interviews with the CPS, that the presence of an advocate increases guilty pleas, then the impact of the advocates supporting women at court is significant.

Table 14: Second 6 months after RSAP Service

2007	Monthly total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Guilty plea
June	16	10	6	7
July	Missing	-	-	-
August	27	15	12	13
September	23	18	5	16
October	27	15	12	14
November	25	13	12	8
December	23	7	16	5
Total	141	78	63	63
%		55.3%	45%	45%

Although the total for each six month period differ, *when taken as a percentage for the total figures for the 18 month period, the table below clearly shows the increase in the percentage of successful cases¹¹, the decrease in the percentage of unsuccessful cases, and the increase in the percentage of guilty pleas.*

Table 15: 18 month comparison

Period	Total cases	Successful %	Unsuccessful %	Guilty plea %
6 months before	138	50%	50%	35%
First 6 months after	121	53%	47%	40.4%

¹¹ The SDVC evaluation shows there were an average of 66% successful outcomes for SDVCs.

Second months after	6	141	55.3%	45%	45%
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The CPS had a very clear view that since the advocates had come into post the number of guilty pleas had increased as had the number of women appearing in court and/or supporting the case. Indeed, the recent Home Office evaluation found that where SDVCs addressed both justice and safety, there were improved prosecutions, engagement of, and support for victims both in and out of the CJS; where SDVCs had high levels of successful prosecutions there was higher levels of support for victims at court (Home Office 2008). In Southwark, the CPS saw a significant correlation between support being given to victims by the RSAP advocates and the number of cases going through. When this support, viewed as vital by the CPS and Police, was absent, numbers were stated to drop off. Special measures were also seen to make a significant difference to whether or not women appeared in court (requests for special measures were seen to have greatly improved since the advocates came into post).

It is evident from the police and CPS statistics, as well as their comments on the process, that the RSAP advocates had some positive impact on the outcome of cases as well as the process of joint work within the courts, especially with the CPS and the police. The RSAP had begun to be seen by them as a crucial and necessary support service to women going through the CJS and the numbers of successful prosecutions/guilty pleas was in part seen to be linked to their presence in court.

Section 5: Feedback from women

Research shows that, in the absence of dedicated support, women's experiences of going to court are often negative, with many feeling nervous, unsafe and intimidated (Robinson, 2005). The disconnection between the criminal and civil courts often adds to this. Even where their experiences are fairly positive, women report the intimidation they feel in having to face their abusers in court and acting as 'witnesses' to the crime. In particular, women view the criminal courts as especially difficult, especially as cases can take a long time to be processed, preventing them from moving on with their lives. In general, research shows that SDVCs impact positively on the victims' experiences at court, especially if they are given information about the court prior to their court date and they may feel safe on the day because of the presence of an advocate (Jacobs 2007:5).

As part of the evaluation, a questionnaire was devised to gain feedback from women using the RSAP and a total of 38 questionnaires were completed (13% of total service users). Some open ended questions were included which asked women to give comments on particular issues. Questionnaires were either completed face to face (55%) or by telephone (42%). The findings from the feedback questionnaire are discussed in this section.

Women in their 30's and under comprised the largest group providing feedback (women aged 25-34 were the largest group using the RSAP). The majority of women had children (n=30), which is significant for advocacy services as they tend to be largely/exclusively focused on support to women.

The ethnic background of women completing feedback questionnaires was varied - while 47% were White British, the majority were from diverse BME backgrounds with the largest single BME groups being African-Caribbean (18%) and Black British (11%). Again, this was reflective of the profile of all women using the RSAP.

Help before contact with RSAP

Women were asked if they had contact with any services for support before they had contact with RSAP. The overwhelming majority (97%) had previous contact with a range of services, with only one woman reporting that she had not. Women were also asked about the level of helpfulness of each agency. It was apparent that the top five agencies/professionals women were likely to have contact with were the police, the courts, victim support, housing and solicitors (this is unsurprising given women were involved in the CJS system). In detail:

- 89% (n=34) of women had previous contact with the police, 79% of whom had found the police either very helpful or helpful while 21% said they were not helpful or very unhelpful.
- 63% of women had previous contact with the courts, with a third of these women finding this contact very helpful or helpful, while 27.5% said this had been not helpful.
- 60% of women had previous contact with Victim Support with the majority having found this either very helpful or helpful.

- Half of the women had previous contact with Housing, with just over half of these having found this either very helpful or helpful while just under half found Housing either not helpful or very unhelpful.
- 42% of the women had been in contact with a solicitor, with the majority finding this very helpful.
- 34% of women had been in contact with a GP with the majority having a positive experience.
- 21% of women reported having previous contact with Social Services with almost two-thirds having found social services helpful.
- Only 13% of women had previous contact with a Women's Aid/Refuge service with the majority having found this either very helpful or helpful.
- 24% of women had previous contact with a hospital A&E department and the majority found this contact either very helpful or helpful.

Contact with RSAP services

Most women did not know about RSAP and the majority (82%) first had contact when they were contacted by the advocates; 18% had contact when they were referred by another agency. At the time of contact with RSAP, the majority of women were living at home without the abuser (92%), and a minority were either living in a refuge (5%) or in a homeless hostel (2.5%). Women were asked which RSAP services they had used and the level of helpfulness of these services. The detailed findings are provided below.

Being kept informed about case

95% of women had been in contact with the advocates and been kept informed about their case. All of these women had found this 'very helpful'. This was one of the services offered by RSAP that was highly valued by women and is in line with what existing literature reveals – that women often feel uninformed by the police and other CJS agencies about what is happening with their cases and therefore are very positive when this is done.

General telephone support

87% of women had been given support over the telephone, and all of them found this 'very helpful'/'helpful'. Telephone support was the second most common service to be used and found to be helpful by women.

Being accompanied to court

Half of the women had been accompanied to court, with the overwhelming majority reporting this to have been 'very helpful'.

Risk assessment and safety plan

As a key part of the process of supporting women, risk assessments and safety plans were conducted by the advocates with all women. These had been done with 95% of women and the majority found this to be 'very helpful'/'helpful'.

Requesting special measures

37% of women had been helped to request special measures and all of them had found this very helpful. Just under 60% were women from BME backgrounds, perhaps suggesting that BME women feel more vulnerable when appearing in court.

Although the numbers of women who had a pre-trial visit, had a victim statement done, were helped with criminal restraining orders, and referred to other agencies were fairly small, where this had happened all said this had been 'very helpful'/'helpful'.

Impact on safety

Women were asked if contact with the RSAP had affected their level of safety. For half of the women there had been 'no difference', while 44% said they felt 'safer', and only two women said they felt 'less safe'.

Support / help expected from RSAP

Women were asked what support/help they expected to get when they had contact with the RSAP. The following were the most frequently stated expectations:

- To get information about their case and to know about the court process, without any pressure.
 - o *I wanted to make sure I know what was happening in court.*
 - o *I wanted to know what to expect from court, have all the legal jargon explained to me and to be kept up to date.*
 - o *To be kept informed without pressurising me into anything. I was getting enough pressure from the police.*
- Provide support, advice and guidance throughout the case.
 - o *Support mainly, this was a very difficult time for both the children and myself and having someone to call and let me know what was happening was very comforting.*
 - o *I mainly wanted support and to express how I was feeling. It was nice to be able to speak to somebody.*
- To ensure safety and protection for themselves and their children.
 - o *Make sure we're safe and away from the violence so it wouldn't occur again.*
- To have help separating from abusive partner.
 - o *I wanted to have peace of mind and help so that everything could be resolved as soon as possible. I wanted help in separating with this person.*
 - o *I wanted you to rescue me from this man I married. He's a liar. I wanted him deported and I didn't want to have any contact with him*
- A number of the women did not know what to expect and only one woman said she '*wanted justice*'.

Views about the RSAP

When asked if they would like to see any changes in the way that the RSAP works with women, only four women responded with comments. The overwhelming majority said they did not want any improvements, suggesting they were very positive about the services offered and received. The comments made around improvements included: wanting to know that screens would be in place before the trial; the importance of looking beyond safety and at the needs of the person; wanting a home visit.

Women were also asked if they would like RSAP to provide any other services and the majority said they did not, with a number of women providing positive statements about the service they had received from the advocates. Of the three women who did raise issues, these included: needing a refuge or other accommodation; wanting more information through leaflets and contact details of services; requiring safety improvements with new flat.

Women made many positive comments about the service they had received from RSAP:

I don't know if I could have done it without the support of Refuge... I hope more women speak out and do the same. It's frightening but worth it in the end.

You were brilliant, reliable, informative and put my mind at rest. Without you I would have gone mad. You provided me with information within minutes. Everyone was really helpful, from getting locks and fireproof boxes. I was glad to be informed about what was available and not available. The police were great at the beginning but it would have been helpful if they were involved more afterwards. Although they did refer me to all the right people so maybe that made up for it.

All the waiting about what was happening in court was hard. I had you to break that wait but I wish the court would keep in touch. He knows what he can and can't do but I don't. I thank you for your support, it really helped to have met you before court. I'm pleased with Refuge. You were excellent.

I received more help than I expected. It's been good, it's good to know I'm not alone.

If I'd given a hint that I needed something you would have helped. You phoned when you said you would and explained everything to me in terms I could understand.

Women's views about outcome of cases

Women were asked how they felt about the outcome of their cases in terms of their level of satisfaction. Of the 36 women who responded, there was a fairly equal split between those who were 'satisfied' (39%) and those who were 'not satisfied' (36%) while a quarter were 'fairly satisfied'. The majority of women (n=34) made further comments about the outcome of their cases. These included:

- Happy with him being found guilty but unhappy about the length or nature of the sentence given.
 - o *Nobody was looking at my situation. My immigration status was used against me. His defence team was making it look like I couldn't take care of my children. He deserved a stronger sentence. I was disappointed with the sentence.*
 - o *I think he should have gotten longer in custody because its not the first time he's done something like this. There was loads of evidence against him. I feel the sentence is giving him license to do what he wants.*

Whatever he does he'll only spend 6 weeks in prison. I also don't understand how the judge could say he's doing well with probation. He only saw them twice and then committed another offence. How is that doing well?

- Unhappy about the outcome - also resigned to it as perpetrator thought to get away with everything, which the system allows.
 - *It's not what I would have wanted but it's what I expected knowing him. I didn't expect any different.*
 - *Well for someone who was going to harm me and my child I am very upset about the outcome. He is a danger to me and my daughter.*
 - *Not satisfied – the judge didn't think about my safety and my family. My daughter is scarred for life and he gets away with going to the head doctor once a week.*

- Feeling let down by the process / system and not having information about the case.
 - *He wrote me letters breaking his bail conditions and the police never did anything about it. The police told me to bring the letter down to the police station which I did but it was a waste of time. It annoyed me that he got away with it. I'd prefer he was still in there (prison) and stayed away from me.*
 - *I felt bushwacked into going to court, didn't feel I was in an emotional state to do it. Felt forced. It was a bit of a farce, 'you put me through all of that for what', I felt like asking the police officer. I thought the outcome was appalling.*
 - *I wasn't happy that he wasn't even warned or anything. I would have liked them to have cautioned him at least. I didn't expect him to walk out completely free without any conditions attached. I believe he has now more power to continue harassing me.*
 - *There was no justice. Why should he be walking on the road? I don't know why people study law for so many years just to let that happen. Criminals should be behind bars. They keep saying DV is serious but it's just a front.*
 - *I was frustrated that I didn't have any information about my case for months until just before the trial. All I got was some information in the mail. Then this strange lady (WCU) was leaving me messages. I don't understand how offenders are allowed to carry on like this. He's going to re-offend.*

Other issues

Women were asked to provide additional comments at the end of the feedback form. These are summarised below.

- Need for the CJS to give the same punishment to perpetrators for similar offences.
 - *The criminal justice system is wrong sometimes. Someone else will get off so light for doing the same thing. It should be one size fits all. If you do this, that will happen. As a result there is one law for one and one law for another. It should be the same for all.*

- Longer and tougher sentences needed to send a message to perpetrators that their behaviour is unacceptable.
 - *He should have gotten longer in prison. I know him and I know this means he'll think he can do it again.*

- The CJS reinforces the perpetrators control, especially when the police are seen not to have done their job properly. Importance of being believed for women.
 - *Going to court was overwhelming. It seemed like I wasn't a strong person. At the end of the day you're a victim and its hard to be in that situation. I feel like I achieved things but not what I wanted. I wanted to be believed but I don't think I was. He's used to being in control and he controlled this situation also. Also the police wrote the date and other things wrong in the statement and that didn't help. I also felt uncomfortable doing the victim impact statement with 2 male officers. It was difficult to say what I wanted for this reason and also because my children were present.*
 - *The law is not there to help you, there is no justice. I'm really disappointed in the system. The one good thing is he got arrested for what he did. You did what you can but it's really up to the judge.*

- Lack of information and follow up from the police and women wanting the police to keep them informed to feel they counted.
 - *The police were good when they turned up at the incident but the aftercare was rubbish. I didn't know when he was released on bail. I should be kept informed. You were the only one who told me anything about the case. I also wanted to get rid of his stuff and they weren't interested (police). Everyone else has been really helpful.*
 - *I felt like a number to the police and wanted to feel as though I counted.*
 - *I was disappointed it was only you contacting me and not the police. Your service is the best compared to the others. Its even better than the police.*

- Importance of having the process explained and being supported through it.
 - *The offender shouldn't have been allowed to leave court at the same time as me. If you didn't call me the day before the trial I wouldn't have gone to court and I wouldn't have stayed there. I appreciated having you explain the court process and issues regarding the case to me.*
 - *It's nice to be phoned and have someone check up on you, especially since there was a child involved. It's good to know someone cares.*

- Going to court makes women feel more vulnerable when the outcome was not what was expected.
 - *I feel less safe. I've found myself not going to places I used to go for fear I'll run into him or his mates.*
 - *I feel less safe. I've threatened him with the police and they've done nothing. Now he knows from my witness statements that I'm scared of him.*

- Women feeling safer when given support, when abuse is recorded and the outcome sends a message to the perpetrator that she can act positively.
 - *I feel safer that there is now a record of it. I'm satisfied with everything and I've been fine.*

- *I was very happy with your service. I'm definitely safer now because he knows that I can act.*

In sum, while not all the women giving feedback had used/received all of the services offered by RSAP, where they had they were extremely positive about this, with none finding it other than very helpful and helpful. Gaining feedback from service users is a valuable way of improving the support offered and ways need to be devised for this to happen regularly so that it can be used in any service planning.

Section 6: Concluding summary

Summary

The RSAP provided support to women going through the CJS through court based advocates. By the end of the evaluation period, the role of the RSAP advocates had become crucial in filling a gap within the CJS processes for domestic violence victims. It was considered to complement the work of the Police and the CPS and to complete the circle for the support necessary for witnesses/victims. The advocates were considered 'a great benefit', who would be greatly missed if no longer there, and the fact that they were not motivated by the need to get a conviction (like the police) but represent the victims was regarded as '*fundamental to finding the right solutions*'.

Overall, despite the extremely small timescale to set up, great progress was made in the RSAP's implementation and delivery of services, and the take-up and feedback by women was extremely positive. Inevitably, as a pilot, lessons were continually learnt about the best way of delivering CJS advocacy in the absence of a SDVC and of engaging the key agencies. Managing a growing workload with limited personnel and uncertainty over funding were key challenges for Refuge, RSAP advocates, and other agencies which had begun to greatly value the advocacy work.

As the report highlights, the achievements of the RSAP were tangible towards the end of the intervention. Having become much more established, the advocacy team had extremely good working relationships with the key CJS agencies – the CPS (described as the best working relationship with the statutory sector), the Police, the Witness Care Unit (who were calling on regular basis to give referrals and speak about clients), and other court departments (Listings and Results). Relations with the WS were also far improved than at the outset. Referrals from the Police HCU had become much more consistent and the advocates had a better sense of the right person to ask about particular issues. Effective multi-agency work is crucial to providing an effective independent advocacy service to victims of domestic violence. During the intervention in Southwark, many issues were raised around partnership work, many of which were addressed during the life of the intervention. However, given the lack of direction from the funder and a pressurised funding environment, it was also apparent that this process required on-going work with other agencies, something clearly recognised. In particular, links with the Police HCU needed to be continually built so that knowledge of the advocacy work among police officers could be enhanced, important given staff turnover.

In developing court based advocacy, location mattered and being based in court made a big difference to building these relationships and to accessing information – '*it would be a completely different job and we wouldn't have the same entry if we were based outside. And we're able to get all kinds of information that other domestic violence workers don't have access to just because we're here*'. Having another advocate post, albeit dedicated for another borough, had made a huge difference in establishing the service. This meant that one person was able to be in the Camberwell Green court office almost all the time, resulting in greater visibility and presence.

The process of building partnership work had resulted in a range of institutional change noticeable in the ways that key agencies were responding to domestic

violence. For instance, it was evident that the way the court was dealing with domestic violence cases had improved since the presence of the RSAP advocates. While this could not be captured in hard data, advocates had observed a change in the way that prosecutors conducted cases – *‘a little more effort is being put into certain things they wouldn’t have otherwise because we’re in the room. When I started I was hearing sentences like anger management, think first programmes, I haven’t heard that kind of talk for a long time’*.

The impact on women’s experiences of court had also changed considerably – *‘big changes have been made in terms of what happens on the day of court... so that every client gets offered a back entrance into court, a safety review is done for every client and it’s a huge change that clients are getting immediate information about what’s happening with their cases’*.

As reported by the CPS, and although the number of withdrawals was still high, the RSAP advocates helped to keep women engaged with the court process and it was their view that a woman’s presence led to more guilty pleas on the part of the perpetrator. A before and after comparison of CPS statistics clearly shows a steady increase in the number of successful prosecutions and guilty pleas.

A consideration for the funding of advocacy work in the future is to ensure adequate resources for staff, so that workloads can be properly managed. This is also highlighted by the recent Homes Office evaluation of SDVCs which recommends that local funding for advocates ensures workloads within the CAADA good practice levels (25-30). The linking up of support to women within criminal court and civil court proceedings so that this gap is bridged also needs closer attention by those commissioning services.

Good Practice points

Being clear about the exact focus of the advocacy service is of the highest importance and how it fits into existing services within a locality is important to communicate to other agencies as well as the value added by it. Being clear and realistic with other agencies about what can be done to prevent promising to do too much with limited resources and to avoid confusion is also necessary.

It is important for a new service to have intense development time to build relationships within a multi-agency context, especially with court based services (listings office, results office, WS, court clerks), the WCU, CPS, Police, and other key voluntary services. Dedicated time, with the involvement of senior staff, needs to be set aside for such development work at the start of the intervention. The necessity of formal protocols with agencies to formalise relationships, outline information sharing processes, and route of referrals is vital. This could include protocols with CPS, other domestic violence services, Witness Care Unit, Witness Service, and the Police.

In the absence of a SDVC, becoming part of the court process is key to successfully gaining access to domestic violence court cases. Building positive relationships with the listings office to gain access to court lists and getting them to give a ‘walkie talkie’ can be key to court based advocates becoming established.

Regular team meetings, formal supervision and support, and informal support are crucial in lessening isolation, sharing positive practice and offering support to staff carrying large work loads. It is important for these to be in place from the outset. The presence of a Manager who spends substantial time with the staff team at the start of the new intervention, helping to build external relationships is crucial.

If a post of a BME advocate is to be developed, then it is crucial that the parameters of this are carefully worked out, and the dedicated work is not subsumed within the general work.

Court based work is highly pressurised and it is vital that adequate administrative systems are in place before the support work begins.

Monitoring and service user feedback are crucial in gaining a sense of the work being done and it is important to develop systems of monitoring and feedback early on.

The advocates appointed were exceptionally skilled and able to achieve a lot in a short space of time. In any future intervention, a clear remit for the work to be conducted by operational and senior/strategic level staff is needed so that others coming in with less experience are able to do it to the same level and there is clarity from the outset about who is to do what. This is important to ensure that advocates are not doing everything – one to one work, liaison over cases, awareness raising, strategic level meetings etc.

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