

## Make a Change: Policy Position Paper

Make a Change is an early intervention programme developed by Respect, in partnership with Women's Aid Federation of England. Respect and Women's Aid are national membership organisations for perpetrator services and survivor services, respectively. Both organisations campaign and help shape legislation and policy as well as developing practice, supporting members and accrediting services through recognised standards. By coming together, we have created a response to perpetrators that places the survivor at the heart.

Make a Change provides a community-wide, early response to people who are concerned about their abusive behaviour in their current, or previous, intimate relationships and are motivated to change. The programme is designed to offer help at the earliest possible point, often before other perpetrator programmes can, and ideally before the need to involve a professional agency, such as the family court, social services, or police. Make a Change is referenced as a 'best in class intervention' for perpetrators by the Home Office in the Standards for Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Interventions and the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Intervention Fund (2023).<sup>1</sup>

The model forms part of a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) through its three strands: **expert support**, which consists of a group behavioural change programme for perpetrators and separate support for survivors; **community outreach** to empower friends, family, neighbours and colleagues to know how to respond and what help is available; and **workforce development** to build professionals' confidence and skills to recognise perpetration, respond safely and effectively, and refer to local services.

### The challenge:

- Each year, more than two million adults in England and Wales experience domestic abuse - an estimated 1.7 million women and 699,000 men.<sup>2</sup> These figures are likely an underestimate and hide the fact that domestic abuse disproportionately impacts women, who typically experience higher rates of repeated victimisation and are much more likely to be seriously hurt or killed.
- Currently, less than 1% of domestic abuse perpetrators receive specialist intervention.<sup>3</sup> Domestic abuse perpetrator programmes (DAPPs) are not universally available and existing provision is often uncertain due to a lack of commissioning and funding, creating a postcode lottery of services. This is exemplified by the current gap in provision in the family court arena, following the Ministry of Justice's removal of the DAPP referral pathway in Child Arrangement Order proceedings.<sup>4</sup> These gaps put survivors at further risk.
- Where a DAPP is available, it is rarely widely accessible. Participants are commonly funded to attend by police, court, or social services, and few programmes are supported to work with low-level offenders. Some require participants to pay a fee or travel a long distance to attend. This makes services inaccessible for people who want to change but don't fit the criteria, can't afford the cost, or can't get to the programme. The University of Stirling's 2020 evaluation of Make a Change identified a lack of provision 'particularly for those who are not accessing perpetrator interventions that are court or child protection mandated.'<sup>5</sup>
- Pathways into DAPPs outside of the criminal justice system are limited. Results from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping of services found that fewer than half of survivors were able to access the community-based support they wanted/needed, and only 7% of those who wanted their perpetrator to receive behaviour change support were able to access it.<sup>6</sup> Relying on pathways largely within the criminal justice system excludes a multitude of both perpetrators and survivors – in the year ending March 2022, 39% of domestic abuse-related incidents resulted in a conclusion that no notifiable crime was committed.<sup>2</sup>
- People seeking help do not always identify as a 'perpetrator' or recognise their behaviours as domestic abuse. Naming and owning harmful behaviours as domestic abuse is a process and requiring acknowledgement at the beginning of a programme risks alienating people who

don't identify with the language. Asking for help can also be a barrier, particularly for men who may see it as a threat to their masculinity.<sup>7</sup>

- Early intervention is frequently interpreted as short-term intervention, targeting low risk perpetrators, which is not necessarily true. The current framework for assessing risk too often focuses on individual incidents rather than understanding the dynamics and harm caused by coercive control. Bringing forward the point at which people recognise and intervene in domestic abuse is crucial for keeping survivors safe. Conditional Cautioning has increased the provision of awareness raising workshops, such as CARA, but this is not the same as a behaviour change programme addressing coercive control.<sup>8</sup>
- Perpetrator provision is rarely joined up with existing survivor provision in a locality. The Respect Standard states that intervention with perpetrators must be accompanied by a corresponding integrated support service (ISS) for survivors focused on the safety and freedom of those affected by abuse.<sup>9</sup> It requires programmes to provide concurrent but separate support for both perpetrators and survivors, to ensure safety and confidentiality, with structured communication between teams to inform the work. Domestic abuse provision in most localities includes a Women's Aid member service for survivors, who are expertly placed to deliver this ISS support where they choose to do so. Commonly, survivor provision in relation to a DAPP is not delivered by or alongside local survivor services.
- Friends, family and the wider community around the relationship are often the first to know that abuse is happening, but they don't necessarily know what to do or how to respond safely. Unhelpful and harmful myths and stereotypes about domestic abuse are prevalent, and so opportunities for training and learning are vital to ensure family and friends do not collude with a perpetrator.<sup>10</sup> The 2022 Crime Survey for England and Wales indicated that, of the 80% of survivors who disclosed their experiences of partner abuse, 71% had told someone they knew personally, compared with 31% who had told someone in an official position.<sup>11</sup> The response to perpetrators needs to focus urgently on challenging and preventing abuse in communities, not only through the criminal justice system.
- The UK Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (2022) identifies that 'professionals who often encounter domestic abuse need support and training to improve their ability to identify and appropriately refer cases.'<sup>12</sup> Professionals tell us they lack the confidence to engage with perpetrators. This contributes to perpetrators remaining invisible in addressing domestic abuse, where too often the onus is put on survivors to reduce the risks to themselves and their children. Making the choices and behaviours of perpetrators visible to public sector services – such as the police, health, children's services, and housing – is key to ending victim blaming attitudes and responses in these services.

### Proposed solutions:

- Every local authority needs a DAPP, delivered in line with Respect accreditation standards, as an essential part of responding to domestic abuse. The 'Pursuing Perpetrators' pillar of the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan commits to a strategic approach to domestic abuse perpetrators which states that, 'we need to deploy interventions and programmes.' In 2015, Project Mirabal's longitudinal study of 11 Respect accredited services found that DAPPs in line with the Respect Standard are effective in reducing harm and increasing survivor's 'space for action' – a person's freedom to act and think without being influenced by another person's abusive behaviour.<sup>13</sup>
- DAPP provision must acknowledge and work to overcome barriers to access. It should include an early response programme such as Make a Change that is free of charge, accessible by public transport, accepts referrals from multiple sources (including survivors) and is available to people motivated to change, such as self-referrals. This is in line with the 2021 Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, where the call for evidence found that 'It is crucial that we have interventions in place to stop perpetrators at the earliest opportunity and prevent further offending.'<sup>14</sup>

- Project Mirabal found that Respect accredited behaviour change programmes enabled perpetrators to acknowledge and name their harmful behaviours as abusive. The Make a Change programme recognises this acknowledgement as part of the behaviour change work and does not require naming or recognising abuse as a prerequisite for taking part. Instead, it is an intervention goal of the first 10-session phase of the programme. This allows perpetrators to access the programme at an earlier point.
- Diverse routes to DAPPs are needed. The National Police Chiefs' Council's VAWG Strategic Threat Risk Assessment (2023) states that, "a criminal charge should not be viewed as the only positive outcome for victims."<sup>15</sup> Self-referral is crucial to reach perpetrators outside of the awareness of agencies/the criminal justice system, and findings from Make a Change indicate that participants who self-refer are more likely to complete the programme. In 2022/23, 35% of referrals received were self-referrals and 64% of people who completed the programme had self-referred.<sup>16</sup>
- Perpetrators of domestic abuse are not a uniform group. Respect's commissioning guide recommends a comprehensive response to include a range of interventions including prevention, early intervention, group-based behaviour change work, intensive 1-1 case management for high-risk, high-harm perpetrators (through programmes such as Drive<sup>17</sup>) and specialist responses for specific groups, such as young people, LGBTQ+, female or disabled perpetrators. This should be delivered within a multi-agency response that considers disruption, statutory provision, and training needs.<sup>18</sup>
- Pathways into DAPPs must also be available to other programmes that perpetrators may be involved in. For example, the Reducing Parental Conflict programme is "aimed at conflict below the threshold of domestic abuse."<sup>19</sup> When abuse is identified, professionals must be able to refer to a programme like Make a Change, with flexible assessment criteria and the skills to support people to acknowledge abusive behaviour. Any awareness raising course, such as CARA, should have a pathway to a full behaviour change programme. Awareness raising is a useful method to encourage people to consider their behaviour, which must be followed by an opportunity for a perpetrator to continue through the stages of change in a DAPP.<sup>20</sup> This also allows the survivor to access continued support and for risk to be monitored.
- Anecdotal evidence shows Make a Change can help to facilitate safe separations, potentially reducing the risk of post-separation abuse, which can include stalking and harassment. (See Tom's story below.) This has the potential to reduce the need for future agency involvement.
- Make a Change can also include provision for children, who are now recognised as victims in their own right under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.<sup>21</sup> Phase 3 of the programme for perpetrators is focused on parenting – it includes child-centred parenting techniques and respectful co-parenting, and takes place over six sessions.
- The three strands of the Make a Change model deliver a Coordinated Community Response to domestic abuse, by bringing services together to ensure local systems keep survivors safe and hold perpetrators to account.
  - The expert support strand provides direct support to perpetrators and survivors, including children. It establishes a partnership approach between Respect accredited perpetrator services and Women's Aid member services to deliver the DAPP and ISS respectively. This brings together services' respective expertise, while strengthening multi-agency working and referral pathways. It promotes a collaborative rather than competitive funding environment.
  - The community outreach strand encourages promotion of the programme across the local community, to raise awareness, break down stigma and encourage self-referrals. An education and awareness raising programme for friends and family of perpetrators of domestic abuse is being developed alongside local sites, to provide support for people to take action when they have concerns. We are also part of the

steering group for the Findaway project, a service launched by Wearside Women in Need (WWIN) in 2022 to support friends, family and community members.<sup>22</sup>

- The workforce development strand includes a programme of training to mobilise and upskill professionals to build their knowledge, skills and confidence to address perpetrator behaviour and have safe conversations. To date, 780 professionals have attended our 'Recognise, Respond and Refer' training. In 2022/23, 98% of participants reported that they had learnt to recognise the signs that someone is behaving abusively towards their partner or ex-partner, as well as practical skills to engage with people who may be perpetrating domestic abuse. For 89% of attendees, it was their first training on working with perpetrators.<sup>16</sup>

## Recommendations:

- **Specialist domestic abuse services and programmes for perpetrators need substantial, long-term funding to create sustained universal provision.** On a national level, the Treasury needs to deliver funding to ensure every locality has a DAPP and, locally, commissioners, local authorities and regional domestic abuse partnerships must ensure their provision includes a community-based response that is free of charge, outside of the criminal justice system and accepts self-referrals, such as Make a Change. This funding must be part of a wider coordinated strategy to end domestic abuse and is in no way a substitute for investment in the full range of support services required for survivors – including refuge and community-based services, support for children and specialist 'by and for' services.
- **Commissioners should support existing local services where possible and explore collaborative commissioning** – in the case of perpetrator services through the dual delivery of the DAPP and ISS by local perpetrator and survivor services with Respect and Women's Aid and/or Imkaan accreditation. This supports the recommendation in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan which states, 'Local areas should have the right interventions in place for perpetrators. One way we will ensure this is through empowering local areas to develop their own perpetrator strategies.'<sup>12</sup>
- **Comprehensive, coordinated training on the role of survivor support and perpetrator behaviour change programmes must be developed** and embedded for commissioners and wider professionals. It should connect the workforce and include the development of clear pathways that professionals can use to support survivors and hold perpetrators to account, as part of a Coordinated Community Response.

Find out more and get in touch at [www.makeachange.uk.net](http://www.makeachange.uk.net)

### Tom's story

Tom contacted Make a Change because his wife Elsie left him after 37 years of marriage. Tom was shocked that Elsie had been advised by a GP that she was in an abusive relationship, and he did not see himself as a perpetrator of abuse as he had never hit his wife.

As he progressed through the Make a Change programme, Tom began to recognise and own a pattern of subtle abusive behaviours and unrealistic expectations he had placed on Elsie. He gained insight into what this would have been like for Elsie and built empathy for her.

By mid-way through the programme, Tom shared that his motivation had changed from getting his wife back to becoming a better person. He was able to acknowledge the impact his behaviour had on Elsie and accept that their marriage was over.

### Caroline – a survivor supported by Make a Change

The support gave me the strength to carry on.

It helped me break away, stop contact with him and move on with my life.

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## Sources and further information

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- <sup>12</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan>
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- <sup>17</sup> 'Respect's commissioning guide. Adapted from Respect, SafeLives and Social Finance Guide 'Responding to Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse', July 2021.
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