

SOUND OF SILENCE

A JOURNEY OF CO-CREATION IN YOUTH-LED
RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

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SAFELIVES

We are SafeLives, the UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good.

We work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. We want what you would want for your best friend. We listen to survivors, putting their voices at the heart of our thinking. We look at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well. We challenge perpetrators to change, asking ‘why doesn’t he stop?’ rather than ‘why doesn’t she leave?’ This principle applies whatever the gender of the victim or perpetrator and whatever the nature of their relationship.

Last year alone, 25,000 professionals received our training. Over 79,000 adults at risk of serious harm or murder and close to 100,000 children received help through dedicated multi-agency support designed by us and delivered with partners. In the last six years, more than 4,000 perpetrators have been challenged and supported to change by interventions we created with partners, and that’s just the start.

**Together we can end domestic abuse. Forever.
For everyone.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to The Dulverton Trust, and a second grant-making trust who wish to remain anonymous, who have generously funded this project and offered their continued support as the work has evolved.

There are many current and previous SafeLives staff who have shaped this work, including the authors of this report. Our thanks go to all of them.

The biggest thank you goes to our incredible Changemakers, past and present and all the young people involved in our inner and wider network. This work is both for you and because of you.

We’d also like to thank the external organisations and individuals who took time to engage in this work and shared their expertise and the spaces they hold with us:

- **The frontline services** who participated in Listening Rooms
- **The police staff and police youth cadets** who participated in feedback workshops
- **The specialist youth organisation** who participated in feedback workshops
- **The organisations who delivered training** to our Changemakers and members of the inner network of young people
- **The Your Best Friend network** and others in the DA and VAWG sector who supported the recruitment of Changemakers

SOS at a glance

The Sound of Silence (SOS) was led by young people – their priorities, opinions and experience



We worked with 17 Changemakers (aged 13-22) over the lifespan of the project



We offered skills development through access to training, involvement in public speaking and workshop facilitation, and co-designing and conducting research

We are working to embed the legacy and learning from SOS across everything we do as an organisation

We delved deeper into the issues young people told us were most urgent by speaking directly to them



We co-created a Youth Authentic Voice Toolkit with Changemakers, SafeLives' staff and partner agencies to guide work with young people and ensure it is safe and effective



We heard from 1113 young people through co-created surveys focusing on the new RSE curriculum and young people's relationships with the police



We spoke directly with 163 young people through a series of Listening Rooms across England

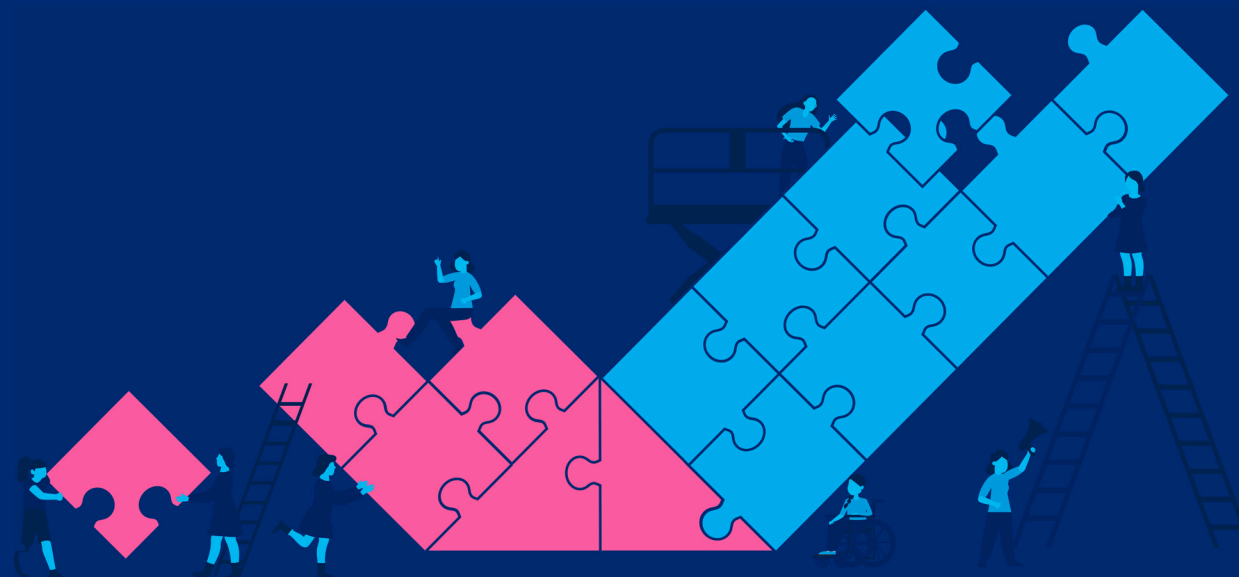


We co-created recommendations with young people and practitioners around areas of focus chosen by the Changemakers, and used these to support our influencing work and to shape our policy asks

We facilitated opportunities for young people to put forward their recommendations in person, with the Changemakers representing young people's voices in a range of spaces, including:

- Taking part in the Victim and Prisoner's Bill consultation
- Giving an interview to Radio 1's Newsbeat programme on healthy relationships
- Attending a reception at Buckingham Palace hosted by Her Majesty The Queen to raise awareness of violence against women and girls (VAWG)
- Meeting MP Jess Phillips (Shadow Minister for Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding) in the Houses of Parliament to discuss recommendations around young people's relationship with the police
- Facilitating workshops with police forces across the UK
- Speaking to cross-party MPs, as well as officials from the Department for Education
- Talking to statutory and philanthropic funders and academics at a Safe Young Lives event

Project background and aims



The Sound of Silence (SOS) project was developed as part of a ‘Whole Picture’ approach, which seeks to end domestic abuse for all members of the family. SafeLives recognises children and young people as victims in their own right¹ and has spotlighted the experience of young victims highlighting that those aged 13-17 experience some of the highest rates of domestic abuse². Despite this, there continue to be significant gaps in the provision and accessibility of domestic abuse support for young people and young people tell us that not enough is being done to engage them meaningfully in sharing their expertise and experience to deepen understanding and drive change.

SOS sought to address this by creating a meaningful way to involve a large and diverse number of young people in delivering our Whole Picture strategy, which aims to create long-term improvement. Initially, the project aimed to reach a wider network of 1000 young people, and from this number to recruit an inner network of 100, and a steering group of 10. The impact of Covid-19 meant this design had to be reviewed and adapted, instead starting with the recruitment of the steering group, then seeking the involvement of the inner network and including the voices and views of a wider network of young people, otherwise known as the ten, the 100, and the 1000.

1. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/section/3/enacted>

2. <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>

3. <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/early-findings-from-our-mapping-show-a-huge-discrepancy-of-services-across-england-and-wales-and-an-acute-lack-of-funding-that-prevents-services-being-able-to-meet-demand/>

THE 10 – CHANGEMAKERS



At the core of SOS is a youth action steering group of ten young people who led the project and decided which issues they felt were important to those their age and should be the focus. The membership of this group changed during the life of the project and in total 17 young people took part. The young people were all aged between 13 and 18 when they joined the steering group, but there were two who remained part of the group for the duration of the project and continued to work on SOS as young adults. The original steering group members, including these two young people, decided to name the members of the group the ‘Changemakers’:

“The name Changemakers was chosen by the young people because the group gives a voice to those who are often overlooked, ignored or silenced when talking about important issues. It serves as a reminder and promise to our young people that their voices are powerful and can help create significant change.”

STEERING GROUP MEMBER

As part of the steering group, the Changemakers were given a platform to share their views and influence:

- The work done by SafeLives
- Policy makers
- The development of support and approaches for children and young people

In order to ensure the Changemakers were properly supported, SOS also involved the creation of a young person’s Authentic Voice co-ordinator (YPAVC) role. The YPAVC built strong relationships with the Changemakers and provided a consistent point of contact, facilitating meetings and keeping Changemakers up to date throughout the project. The YPAVC also developed a package of support available to Changemakers, including remuneration for their time and involvement in SOS, 1-2-1 check-ins, access to clinical supervision and paid access to the Headspace app.



THE 100 – THE INNER NETWORK

In addition to the Changemakers, SOS engaged with an inner network of young people who took part in consultations, Listening Rooms and feedback workshops. Young people involved in the inner network were offered specific opportunities with clear remits for sharing their voices and views, meaning they could engage in the project without the ongoing commitment of being a Changemaker.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

As well as creating spaces to hear from young people and platform their views, SOS also sought to provide opportunities for young people to develop skills. Many of these skills were built through their direct involvement in the project, including public speaking, workshop facilitation and research and analysis, but there were also opportunities to take part in broader skills development sessions. All of this was guided by the aim of young people leaving with more than they came with.

As we built relationships with the young people involved in SOS, the skills-building opportunities became more tailored to their requests. When new Changemakers were recruited in Spring 2023, conversations about the skills they would like to develop were part of their onboarding process. As a result of these conversations, we met with the British Youth Council and developed a tailored training programme focused on public speaking, confidence building and campaign development. This training was then delivered remotely over the summer holidays ahead of some of the young people attending Parliament to speak at an event organised by the Department for Education (DfE).

THE 1000 – THE WIDER NETWORK

Beyond the inner network, SOS also engaged a wider network of young people through surveys co-designed by the Changemakers. While our Changemakers were the most involved and drove the work, it was important that they weren't expected to speak for all young people, and instead were a part of gathering many more voices to add to their own.



Changemaker areas of focus

Consultations with Changemakers resulted in three key areas of focus and a fourth area centered around missing voices within the group:



Relationships and sex education



Toxic relationships and the police response



Men and Boys (Missing voices)



Domestic abuse and intersectionality

Relationships and Sex Education



RSE research and co-creation

RELATIONSHIPS
AND SEX EDUCATION

At the point of the project when the Changemakers decided on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) as one of their areas of focus, SafeLives were already in the early stages of a research project exploring how the 2019 RSE curriculum was being experienced by students and teachers. Rather than creating a separate piece of work, the Changemakers decided to get involved in shaping the existing research. They took part in multiple co-creation sessions and, together with the SafeLives research team, developed a mixed-methods survey that was completed by 1025 young people, surpassing the original aim for a wider network of 1000 young people. The Changemakers also co-created and piloted a focus group schedule, which was used in focus-groups with a further 37 young people. The full RSE report has now been published⁴ and the key findings and recommendations are outlined here.



SEE REPORT

“I love it - but wish it were taken more seriously”

4. https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/RSE_Report_2022_0.pdf

KEY FINDINGS

THE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Staff are usually chosen to teach RSE based on timetabling and capacity, and 17% of RSE teachers surveyed volunteered to teach the subject due to their interest or skillset. This is likely to impact the quality of RSE young people receive, as well as the value students place on RSE as a subject.
- There is large variation in how frequently schools teach RSE and their form of delivery, with most schools (65%) teaching through timetabled lessons, but some teaching through 'drop down days' or assemblies.
- RSE is unlike other subjects as young people receive information and education about relationships and sex from many different sources outside of school. RSE teachers are positive about their roles, yet face unique challenges. These include navigating their role within the multitude of information relating to the topics, debunking myths and misinformation, and feeling pressured to deliver learning that they see as paramount to the emotional development of young people.
- There are inconsistencies in terms of how school governance and leadership prioritise and resource RSE. This impacts the ability to embed a whole-school approach and the quality of support teachers receive.
- As a result of lack of confidence and training, some subjects are being taught more consistently than others. When asked which topics they thought were taught well, there were no topics that over half of all students surveyed agreed well taught well. The topics taught the most well were sexual health and safe sex (48%) and consent and how to communicate it (46%). The subjects taught least consistently and least well were female genital mutilation (FGM) and coercive control.
- Teachers want more training in RSE, access to free and engaging resources and more time built into their roles to plan for and deliver RSE.



The way in which the RSE guidance is being developed, interpreted, and delivered by schools varies a great deal from school to school, in terms of who teaches, the frequency with which it is being taught and the form it is delivered through.

Teachers want accessible and in-depth RSE training:

Only 58%

of teachers surveyed agreed with the statement
'I have had sufficient training to teach RSE effectively'

14%

of teachers surveyed
have received no training in RSE at all.

This has led to some teachers avoiding 'tricky topics' or discussion-based activities that are crucial for young people's learning.

Only half (52%)


of young people surveyed agree or strongly agree

that RSE classes gave them a good understanding of toxic and healthy relationships.

KEY FINDINGS

INCLUSION IN RSE

- RSE is being received differently by students according to their gender, ability, and racialised, sexual and religious identities, as well as how these identities intersect. This impacts how they experience their relationships with themselves and others, as well as how they receive education about it.
- Gendered norms and gender inequality impacts all young people's experiences of relationships and help-seeking. Boys face a different set of unique gendered pressures in relation to conducting their personal relationships, including pressures to join gangs or criminal behaviour, the pressure to 'man up' and to conceal emotions and refrain from asking for support.
- Teachers and schools are not clear about what constitutes 'sex education' within RSE and therefore which parts of RSE students are legally permitted to opt out of. This leads to varied approaches in different schools and some students being removed from RSE due to LGBT+ content, which is not permitted in the guidance.
- Although limited data was collected on the prevalence and impact of opt outs, there is evidence to suggest that young people opted out of school RSE may not be receiving information about relationships and sex elsewhere, potentially preventing them from learning information and skills they need to keep themselves safe.



LGBT+ students are receiving less education in RSE than heterosexual students: they feel less comfortable, less confident about where to go for support if they or someone they know is experiencing a toxic relationship or sexual abuse, and a significantly smaller proportion have a strong understanding of toxic and healthy relationships.

The majority of LGBT+ students

61% disagree that LGBT+ relationships are being threaded throughout RSE, as is legally required by the guidance.

Only half (54%)

of young people surveyed have been taught about

gender roles and gender equality, and a third (31%) thought this was taught well.

KEY FINDINGS SPEAKING TO THEIR REALITIES

- Students want RSE to be normalised and introduced at a younger age. They are aware of the stigma surrounding the subject and feel this impacts their quality of education.
- Students are often exposed to materials or discussions relating to sex or relationships before formalised education is provided, which prevents school based RSE from playing its vital role in supporting young people when they need it and reinforces a stigmatisation of discussions around relationships and sex.
- As a result of the ‘taboo’ nature of RSE in schools, RSE is sometimes an uncomfortable experience for students. Only around half (58%) of students surveyed reported feeling comfortable or extremely comfortable during RSE.
- Stigma around engaging in school based RSE was most evident when it came to the topic of sex and pleasure, however students have expressed an interest in learning more about this topic area. Students want discussions of sex and pleasure to be normalised as understandings of healthy relationships and sexual pleasure are intrinsically linked to understandings of unhealthy and healthy relationships.
- Strategies for normalising and creating safety in school-based RSE from the perspective of students includes discussion-based activities, a relaxed classroom lay-out and trust between students and educators.
- Students value trust between students and teachers and want transparent communication around the limits of confidentiality and safeguarding, as they feel this would encourage help seeking.



Students want practical and relatable education that equips them with the practice-based skills to navigate relationships safely and healthily; be able to identify harmful behaviours, navigate situations in which someone is using harmful behaviours, and access support.

When asked about what they want from RSE, the most popular responses from students indicate that they want more from RSE: they want

**‘more relevant examples’
(47%)**

**‘more open discussions’
(44%),**

**‘more regular classes’
(42%).**

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research led to the development of the following recommendations:

RSE GUIDANCE

- Guidance on RSHE should include information on intersectionality and a recognition of the importance of it as a concept. Young people are not a homogenous group and their experiences of relationships are simultaneously affected by distinct parts of their identity. The curriculum should make reference to the complexities of young people's lives and how this impacts their relationship with themselves and others.
- It should include the teaching and inclusion of LGBT+ relationships at an earlier stage in young people's education, supported with free and accessible resources demonstrating diverse types of relationships and family structures.
- It should also acknowledge the impact of gendered norms and gender inequality on all genders, in particular boys who may also be facing a range of challenges relating to their gender, and it therefore must be nuanced, integrated and comprehensive when addressing their needs.
- Finally, it should include education on sexual intimacy and pleasure, reducing the stigma surrounding healthy and unhealthy sexual relationships and supporting young people to understand boundaries and consent.

LEADERSHIP

- Schools should be supported by their governance bodies to ensure that RSE is prioritised and provided with resources and time to meaningfully embed a whole-school approach, as recommended in the statutory RSHE guidance. School leaders should foster trust with students and clearly communicate the school's approach to safeguarding and transparency, to enable help-seeking from students.

CAPACITY

- Schools should aim to have a distinct pool of comprehensively trained RSE teachers who deliver the subject consistently year upon year. This will allow those teachers to build upon their learning, support one another with queries or challenges, and build trusting relationships with young people, which we know is essential for in-depth RSE skill-building and discussion.



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Teachers should be offered some training in RSE to adequately implement a whole-school approach which recognises the importance of the subject to young people's personal development and safety. This should include training on which parts of the RSE curriculum students can and cannot opt out of, and how to manage requests to parental withdraw whilst ensuring children receive relationships education.
- PSHE/RSE Leads and teachers who deliver part or all of the RSE curriculum should receive comprehensive training in RSE, which includes practical teaching strategies and specialist knowledge about delivering RSE in an inclusive way. This training should include:
 - how to deliver skills-based learning about the practicalities of conducting personal relationships, as young people want practical skills as well as information-based knowledge.
 - how to deliver education on healthy relationships and sexual intimacy/pleasure in an age- appropriate and comfortable way, as this is essential for young people's understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
 - how to provide guidance on where to seek support for themselves or others who are experiencing domestic or sexual abuse
 - how to deliver education about gender norms in a way that includes everyone's experiences, including ensuring boys feel included, informed and supportive in RSE, particularly regarding the negative impacts these can have on the relationships and mental wellbeing of boys and young men. how to deliver RSE in a LGBT+ inclusive way, including information on gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation
 - how to address the concept of intersectionality, how it impacts young people's experiences of themselves and relationships, and how to teach RSE content in an intersectional way.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

- Teachers should ensure that RSE classes include not only factual based information, but also discussion-based activities that address the complicated nuances of navigating relationships. This should include examples and practical advice about how to handle different situations, in order to better reflect young people's realities.
- There should be a greater focus within RSE on engaging with young men and boys from an early age about gender norms, masculinity and gender inequalities, stimulating conversations which they themselves tell us are missing about their experiences, attitudes, behaviours and expectations when it comes to forming relationships.
- Teachers should work with students through surveys, consultations and other regular engagement to identify when and how they want to receive RSE, to ensure it is meeting young people's needs.



Influencing decision-makers

RELATIONSHIPS
AND SEX EDUCATION

Following the completion of the research, two Changemakers attended an event in Parliament in September 2023 on 'Moving Forward with Relationships, Sex and Health Education'. The event was organised by charities Brook and the Sex Education Forum in response to the Government's announcement of a review of the statutory guidance on RSE this year. One of the Changemakers was invited to sit on a panel with other young people from organisations including Girl Guiding and Brook. Each of the panel members were given the opportunity to speak about their experiences of RSE education and then to answer questions from the audience, which included Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords.

The Changemaker group further fed into the review of the RSE guidance by taking part in a young person's consultation on RSE for the Department of Education. Their feedback will help inform the new RSE guidance due to be released early 2024. Our Public Affairs team have also shared our young people's recommendations for change with key Parliamentarians, such as Maria Miller MP and Sarah Champion MP, who have both been vocal allies to the sector on this issue. We are continuing to ensure that Changemakers have every opportunity to use their authentic voice and their experiences of RSE by speaking with Government ministers and senior civil servants, drafting joint letters, and attending key Government events.



Toxic Relationships and the Police response



Listening Rooms

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS AND THE POLICE RESPONSE

Changemakers developed an approach to hearing from young people that they decided to call ‘Listening Rooms’:

“The Listening Rooms is like a really informal and relaxing chat or chat space for anyone to come and share their voice, share their story. It doesn’t even have to be their own story. It could be someone else’s and they’re just advocating for them. It’s somewhere where you can shout and you can scream about society and just get your views across. And we decided to call it Listening Rooms because that’s quite a nice and comforting term. You can come along and you’re going to get heard, you’re going to get listened to, and also you might find that you’re not alone and other people have felt the same way as you. All the feedback that we got was just really good. It was like people were saying ‘ohh my God. I’ve always wanted to share this part of my story, but I’ve never had the platform to, and you’ve just given me the platform’. It’s just an amazing, amazing resource.”

CHANGEMAKER



SafeLives asked youth workers from across England and Wales to run Listening Rooms with the young people they work with. This involved members of the SOS project team at SafeLives facilitating a session with a series of questions relating to toxic relationships and the police response. Four organisations came forward to take part, and a total of 11 Listening Rooms took place, including 70 young people. The ages of the young people ranged from 13 to 23. Within the Listening Rooms, young people were asked:

- If you were in danger, how would you feel about going to the police?
- Would your view on this change if you were in a toxic relationship? Would you go to the police about the toxic behaviour?
- If you felt you had to go to the police, would you be nervous about this?
- If you went to the police for a toxic relationship, do you know what would happen or what your rights are?
- If you were in a toxic relationship, is there another way you would get help?
- Do you have any ideas on what the Changemakers could do to help you feel more able to get help – with the police or something / someone else?
- Is there anything else you think is important for us to know? Anything we haven’t talked about today?

The Listening Rooms were recorded and transcribed. We received recordings from three of the organisations, and analysis of the transcripts lead to development of two overarching themes; ‘Where we are now – the risks outweigh the benefits’ and ‘What we are working towards – improved engagement and outcomes’.

WHERE WE ARE NOW – THE RISKS OUTWEIGH THE BENEFITS

Young people taking part in the Listening Rooms discussed numerous fears, risks and expectations, which they described as barriers that would prevent them from going to the police if they were experiencing abuse, and in some cases had prevented them from going to the police in the past. These have been grouped into the following five sub-themes:



RISK OF BACKLASH



FEAR OF POLICE



MINIMISATION AND DISBELIEF



TOO MANY UNKNOWNNS



NOTHING WILL BE DONE

RISK OF BACKLASH

A number of young people described the ‘backlash’ they would anticipate facing if others were to find out that they had gone to the police, and how this would actively prevent them from doing so. There was discussion around negative attitudes towards the police among young people, and how this led to social consequences if peers found out you had interacted with police:

‘In this day and age and generation, if you call the police, and it isn’t like life-threatening, it just ruins your reputation, it just, like, ruins you as a person, so... I’d rather just not really do that. I’d just use other resources or like, other ideas, than use, like, the police’

For young men and boys, this anticipated backlash was tied to toxic masculinity and perceptions among their peers that going to the police was an indicator of fear, and not what men do:

‘They’ll think that if they go to the police and people find out that they’ve gone to the police for a reason, they’ll probably call that person a scaredy-cat and isn’t man enough in dealing with stuff on [his] own.’

Social media was also mentioned as part of this discussion, with some young people specifically referencing this as the arena for such backlash:

‘Say you did report it and say it wasn’t dealt with in a way you wanted it to, that could really give you backlash on social media.’

Other conversations focused on the fear of consequences from the person instigating harmful behaviour, should they find out you had gone to the police:

‘Sometimes the risk of going to the police outweighs any benefit you can get of going to them. I suppose if it’s a long process and if said person found out you’d gone, it could be a lot worse than what it would have been in the first place.’

While this is a shared fear across adult and young people’s DA cases alike, some young people in the Listening Rooms felt this was exacerbated for children and young people who were experiencing abuse in the home and were unable to leave:

‘I think maybe like stuck, because there’s so many ways it could go wrong for them and technically make it worse. Because they’re kind of like trapped in like they’re still a child. So, they can’t just leave.’

FEAR OF POLICE



For a few young people, the main barrier preventing them from feeling comfortable going to the police was the fear of the police themselves. In two instances, this was specifically related to concerns around racism within the police and feeling at risk as a racialised young person:

‘Nobody likes the police, cos of, like, racist stuff, like Muslims, people who got reported, black people, just for, like, walking down the road, like, George Floyd getting suffocated to death. That’s why people don’t like the police, and you can’t really blame them...so you just don’t even wanna trust the police, cos, if one policeman’s capable of doing that, and they aint getting no punishment, imagine, like, what millions, or, like, billions of police officers gonna do’

‘I just don’t really like the police in general cos of, like, past stuff, like George Floyd and all that, so I just don’t wanna risk it’

MINIMISATION AND DISBELIEF



Many of the young people felt that if they were to disclose experiences of abuse to the police, they wouldn’t be believed or taken seriously:

‘And it’s just the police believing you and that. I just don’t think they really do a lot’

‘Because so many women and men, as well, go to the police to seek help. And sometimes they don’t get believed for stuff, so it’s hard to open up.’

One of the young people described how this had previously acted as a barrier for them when they were considering going to the police about the abuse they were experiencing:

‘I was scared to go thinking I’m just going to waste their time; they’re just going to laugh at me.’

Again, while this is often a fear for adult victims, the young people in the Listening Rooms felt there was an added layer for young people experiencing toxic relationships, due to adults often minimising these relationships and therefore the harm experienced through them:

‘I think most adults don’t take it seriously. Whereas if it was an adult, they’d take it more serious.’

‘... some people tend to look at kids and say [they’re] being stupid and not know what it actually means. So, obviously, I feel like they just be like, oh, you just been silly, and you’re just young, you just don’t know what you’re talking about.’

TOO MANY UNKNOWNNS



While young people discussed some pre-conceptions about the police and what might happen if they were to talk to them about abuse, there was a significant amount of young people who described a lack of knowledge or understanding of what this would involve. A number talked about how these unknowns would make them more anxious about going to the police:

'I think I would be nervous, personally because I've never had to go to the police, so I'd be like, right, what do I actually have to do?'

Some young people were worried that their lack of understanding around the process would mean they might set something in motion without being aware that they were doing so, or what this would mean:

'I wouldn't want to do something and then I don't understand what that means. And then me not being able to kind of understand what I've done. And what's going to happen.'

In some cases, young people felt that this lack of available education around accessing the police was a result of negative perceptions of the police within their community:

'The general view of the police is that they're pretty corrupt, so we had no educational lessons about how to go to the police if something was up'

Overall young people talked about being hesitant to go to the police until they had a better understanding about how they would do this, what would happen when they did, and what the consequences might be (both for those using harmful behaviour towards them, and for themselves).



NOTHING WILL BE DONE



There was a strong, shared belief among many of the young people involved in the Listening Rooms that the police do not affect change, and therefore if they were to speak to the police about experiencing abuse, nothing would be done:

‘I’ve got so low expectations, the police are meant to protect you, the police will look after you if you’re in danger, or the police are supposed to help and they just don’t.’

‘Because most coppers they do nothing about anything, even if you tell them stuff, they still do nothing.’

‘Well, in my eyes they wouldn’t follow through with it. And they wouldn’t be very supportive, or it would just get dropped or left, and then it will continue to happen’

Some young people talked about the impact of being turned away by the police, or being asked to come back later, and how this might lead to young people resigning themselves to experiencing abuse:

‘I think one of the worst things that can happen is you go to someone with an issue and they turn you away or say, ‘Come back later,’ or, ‘We can’t deal with this right now.’ And if I was in a toxic relationship I would think, right, well that’s my chances done. This is it. This is just my life now.’

While this was based on negative perceptions of the police for most of the young people, for some this belief was based on previous negative experiences. This illustrates the significance of a young person’s first interaction with the police, and the impact of this on the likelihood of them engaging with the police in the future:

‘Due to my experiences, I wouldn’t ring the police if I was in a toxic relationship or toxic situation, because if they wouldn’t help us then, then they wouldn’t help us now is my side of it.’

SUMMARY

Overall, the discussions had within the Listening Rooms made clear that many of the young people felt there were too many risks involved in talking to the police about abuse. They anticipated social and reputational backlash if their peers were to find out, and significant consequences if the abusive person/people were to find out. Some were held back by a fear of the police themselves, and others by a lack of understanding around engaging with the police, which meant they felt unsure how to access the police and unclear about what would happen if they did. Many young people also described feeling that if they did go to the police, they would not be believed, or their experiences would be dismissed due to their age. In addition, they expressed a lack of confidence that anything would be done by the police in response. As a result, they saw the risks of going to the police as far outweighing the benefits.

WHAT WE ARE WORKING TOWARDS – IMPROVED ENGAGEMENT AND OUTCOMES

Young people within the Listening Rooms described a series of changes they would like to see implemented by the police, specifically around their interactions with young people. They felt these changes would begin to remove some of the barriers outlined in the previous sub-themes, therefore increasing engagement between young people and the police, as well as improving outcomes. These changes have been grouped into the following three sub-themes:



RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT



SOFTENING THE APPROACH



TAKING ACTION

RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT



When asked about positive experiences of the police, or changes that would lead to more positive experiences, many of the young people talked about the importance of having a trusted adult with them during any interactions with the police. Some young people talked about wanting family with them to offer emotional support:

‘Facilitator: how important is it that you have to have your family there with you when you speak with the police or not?’

Respondent: Like really important...I would definitely want them there to help us with the hard situation like just be there and give us some comfort’

Other young people felt practitioner support was most helpful, as practitioners would ensure their voices were heard and their needs were met:

‘I’d contact the police with [organisation name] and then they can ring the police, and they can sit with me through it and make sure that I’m being treated fairly. And that’s when I would do it, I will not do it unless I had a worker with us to make sure that my needs will be met’

Those who talked about wanting a practitioner with them during interactions with the police also described how their presence provided reassurance, as they would be able to hold the police accountable if needed:

‘So when I ring them it’s actually more important, the police now actually listen, because I’ve got workers who have worked with the police, and if they don’t follow what they’re supposed to do I then tell my support workers, and my support will actually tell them off’

As a result, the young people felt the police should be asking all young people if they would like to have someone with them, at the beginning of any interaction:

‘Always ask if I can have someone in with us or if I’m to shaken up and I cannot talk because of anxiety they could talk on my behalf, and they can give a better perspective of what went on.’

SOFTENING THE APPROACH



Discussions within the Listening Rooms made clear that, when it comes to young people, the police are not starting from a blank slate. The majority of the young people held negative preconceptions of the police and commonly described them as intimidating and as an institution that invokes fear. Young people therefore suggested the police need to work to change these perceptions in their interactions with young people:

‘The police need to relate to young people or do more with young people and change the perspective of the terrifying police force to people who are actually here to help and not put you away’

Many of the young people felt that the police could begin to change these perceptions through softening their approach. Within the young people’s responses, police body language, attitude and tone of voice were frequently discussed and described as playing a significant role in young people’s experience of engaging with the police.

In order to soften the approach, young people’s responses therefore suggest a need to adapt these aspects of police communication and ensure that the way police communicate with young people challenges, rather than reinforces, negative perceptions. One young person also

reflected on the particular importance of addressing any intimidating elements of communication when interacting with young victim-survivors:

‘They’re not going to open up [to] the person that’s been toxic towards them, that they need help. So then you end up with someone who’s also then kind of showing the same behaviour by shouting at them’

In addition to adapting these elements of communication, the young people also advocated for more open communication in general, during interactions with the police. They talked about the importance of being listened to and feeling heard, as well as the need for police to explain what was happening and why:

‘I feel like they’re just doing it, because it’s their job to do it, I don’t feel like they do it because they care. I feel like they were just doing it, and then they left, like it was as if they didn’t care, they weren’t telling us what was going to happen. They didn’t ask how I felt about it, how it made me feel, and due to that it made it feel a lot worse than it probably should have if they had been on it.’

As part of a softer approach, the young people also advocated for a more balanced dynamic in relation to respect. They described the current dynamic as one-sided, with the police expecting respect from young people but not showing respect, and the desired dynamic as one of mutual respect:

‘I think it should be mutual respect. We have to respect the police like we have to. But I think the respect should be mutual too we should get the respect that we deserve as well as they should get respect they deserve. I just don’t think they give us enough time as we should actually get, I know they are busy don’t get us wrong. But they also don’t give us enough time’

Though this softer approach was described by the young people as requiring extra time and specialist training, it was also described as far more effective. When asked about positive experiences of the police, the elements of this softer approach often featured, and a number of young people stated that such an approach would mean they were more likely to engage with police and cooperate with the process:

‘Their talking and their voice, and their attitude really, and if I feel comfortable with them really, I would say, easier for me to share stuff with them, just like someone walking in and being rude, I wouldn’t want to talk to them.’

**‘Facilitator: How would that make you feel, if the police were considering your thoughts and feelings about that?
Young person: Probably trust them a lot more, what you would actually do to help them.’**

TAKING ACTION

Finally, young people emphasised the need for police to work to change perceptions that nothing would be done if a young person spoke to the police about experiencing abuse. They described wanting to feel confident that they would be taken seriously and that the police would take action:

‘So, I’d want them to take what I’m saying seriously, and so to make me feel like there’s actually something being done about it, rather than me going to them for help and not having anything to do with it.’

For many of the young people, taking action meant a risk-led approach which prioritised the victim’s safety by removing them from the potentially unsafe situation, alongside ensuring consequences for those using harmful behaviour:

‘Get us out of the situation, to somewhere safer. Take us away from that person, far away and lock him up and do stuff about him’

They also emphasised the importance of the speed of the response and how a quick response demonstrated to them that the police were taking their situation seriously:

‘If it was like, and about maybe just like a quick response to like actually get to me. But yeah, it’s all about like quickness, rather than just like putting you on the list and then get into it too late.’

SUMMARY

Overall, the young people involved in the Listening Rooms provided a series of suggestions for how the police could begin to address the negative preconceptions held by young people. They advocated for a softer approach where police body language, tone and attitude was reassuring rather than intimidating, and there was clear and open communication as well as a dynamic of mutual respect. They highlighted the need for additional support from trusted adults to be recognised and prioritised, and the importance of a quick response where police took the necessary action to ensure victim safety and hold those who harm to account. While the young people acknowledged that this approach was likely to require more time and specialist training, they were also confident that it would lead to better engagement between young people and the police, as well as improved outcomes.

Trip to Parliament

The findings from the Listening Rooms and further conversations with the Changemakers led to an initial set of recommendations around the police response to young people affected by domestic abuse. Once a draft version of the recommendations had been co-created, the SOS team accompanied our Changemakers, some of the young people from the Listening Rooms, as well as colleagues and young people from Stopping Unsafe Relationships Together (SURT) on a trip to parliament to meet Jess Phillips MP for feedback. The young people from SURT attended parliament in their SURT Steering Supporter Role as part of the SOS project. The main aim of this trip to Parliament to meet Jess Phillips MP for her feedback. The main aim of this trip was to give some of the young people involved in SOS the experience of going to the Houses of Parliament and speaking with a politician about their work. The young people were given a guided tour of both the Commons and the Lords, offering them an insight into how laws are passed, how committees run and how debates are conducted in the chambers. They then took part in a discussion with Jess Phillips MP on the draft recommendations relating to Toxic relationships and the police response.

The young people were given a chance to speak openly with Jess about the recommendations, what they contained, how they came about, and why they felt they were important. There were discussions around the lack of support available for young victims of abuse, the need for a better police response that meets the specific needs of diverse young people, and systemic gaps in recording relevant data in this area. Jess expressed her support for our work and how vital it is that young people across the UK can trust in their local police force.

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS AND
THE POLICE RESPONSE



Finalising the recommendations

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS AND THE POLICE RESPONSE

The initial recommendations were then reflected on through a series of feedback sessions with four Police forces in the UK, which were attended by Policing staff with specialist roles relating to young people and/or domestic abuse. We are grateful to the staff from these forces for making the time to take part in these sessions and engage with the process, and for their openness to the feedback and recommendations shared by the Changemakers, as well as their reflections on the importance of building relationships between young people and the police.

Three sessions were also carried out with young people involved in Police Youth Cadets and young people accessing a specialist youth service. The Changemakers both co-created the structure for, and co-facilitated these feedback sessions, as well as taking part in sessions with the SOS team where the recommendations were updated based on the feedback. These updates led to a finalised set of six recommendations, in line with the original themes from the Listening Rooms.

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS, AND SOFTENING THE APPROACH

The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) should renew their guidance on child-centred policing with a focus on the barriers to police engaging with and understanding young people. Within this, we want to see an exploration of police culture and how this may be preventing forces working effectively with young people from disadvantaged or marginalised communities. This guidance should recommend that all local forces receive comprehensive training around working with young people with a variety of different backgrounds.

All police forces must receive ongoing training on how to work with young victims of DA, and how to spot signs of abuse within early relationships and peer groups. It should be delivered by someone external and be co-created with the authentic voices of young people. Learning aims should focus on embedding empathy, understanding, and recognising the unique needs of young people. The training must cover communication approaches, and how the police can mitigate feelings of distrust. A 'Young People's Champion' role should also be developed within neighbourhood policing units to ensure the continued sharing of learning and best practice.

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements must strengthen the links between the police, charities, schools and youth organisations. Through these partnerships, local police officers should regularly visit schools, sports teams and youth clubs to meet with young people in an informal, approachable manner. The purpose of this is to build trust and create a dialogue between police and the local community. Officers should come on the visits both in and out of uniform, using first names rather than titles, and hearing from young people directly about what effective neighbourhood policing looks like to them.

RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

The Home Office, in conjunction with the police, young people, and specialist DA organisations, should fund the creation of free, online resources where young people can go to find out information about their rights as victims of domestic abuse, as well as support for those causing harm. This should also signpost to local support services, including the police, and have the option of being discreet and anonymous. This resource should cover individual's rights under the Victims Code, as well as easy to understand information on the laws around domestic abuse and what processes are followed when a crime is reported. It should be widely publicised through Government campaigns and on social media to raise awareness.

TAKING LONG-TERM ACTION

The Government's guidance on multi-agency safeguarding practices must acknowledge specialist frontline charities and education providers as statutory safeguarding partners. All guidance should also recommend that Operation Encompass be adopted by all police forces across the country. Schools need to be supported to refer young people and their families into specialist services and be clear on their own safeguarding role if a young person reports to the police. All safeguarding partners should be clear on what advocacy and support young people can expect throughout this process.

Independent support and advocacy services, such as Ypvas and Chidvas, should be provided for all young people who think they might be experiencing abuse, so they don't have to re-tell their stories to several different agencies. This support must meet the needs of each young person and recognise how intersecting experiences of oppression shape experiences of abuse. This should be in place before a young person knows if they want to report or not, during the criminal justice process, and in the aftermath. Police and the courts should always work collaboratively with these services.

Next Steps

SafeLives will be taking these recommendations forward as part of our wider influencing work, calling for all agencies, including the police, to take a risk led approach to domestic abuse, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of adult and child victim-survivors and challenging perpetrators. At a local level, we are calling for the provision of adequate funding to meet demand and a focus on the importance of specialist 'by and for' services. At a national level, we want to see more joined-up thinking at a senior level across Government departments.

Given their responsibility for supporting young people experiencing domestic abuse, we will continue to work with our Changemakers, and other young people, to influence the Departments for Education, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Health and Social Care, and the Home Office. We are calling for more cross-departmental oversight and funding, to ensure there are adequate interventions available to support children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse. We will continue to share the learnings from the SOS project, as well as our wider Safe Young Lives data, with policy makers to influence the design and implementation of whole family interventions, which offer support for adult and child victims, as well as the person causing harm.

Men and Boys



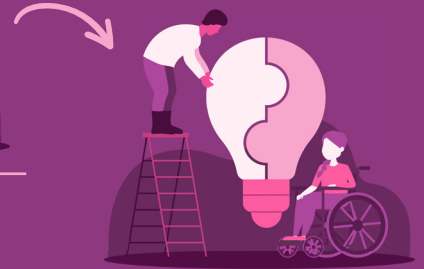
Discussion with Changemakers around missing voices



Discussion within SOS team about building relationships with men and boys orgs



Creation of Men and Boys coalition



Learning used to create workshops on masculinity



Set of recommendations for change created



Feedback and input from Changemakers



Pilot workshop with 14-16 year olds + workshop with 18 year olds

Masculinity workshops

MEN AND
BOYS

Following conversations with the Changemakers around missing voices within the steering group, SafeLives developed a workshop on the theme of 'harmful masculinity' among men and boys. So far this workshop has been delivered twice by a member of the SOS team. The first workshop was with a group of young people aged 14-16 who were engaged with a grassroots charity in East London. At the end of the workshop the young people produced a number of creative pieces giving their reflections on what harmful and positive masculinity looks like to them, and what can be done to support young men to live a life free from harming.

The second workshop was with first year male students at a University in the North of England and involved a reflective conversation with the group about what being a man means to them, the impact of gender norms on their lives, and their views on what constitutes unhealthy relationships. Again, they each produced a creative piece to represent their reflections on the topic and discussion. These workshops provided a way to engage young people, and young men specifically, in direct conversations about healthy relationships, and the way that harmful ideas about masculinity negatively impact their lives.

**Dear Masculinity,
I've come to the realisation that fighting was a form of hiding.
Running away from my past I tried to leave behind but end up running into.**

**Each punch disguised as pain.
Replicating the punches from the man I knew masculinity to be.**

**The man who stood by you,
tainting your image.
Misconfigured your identity.**

I knew you not by your name but by the harm in front of you.

**Drowning inwardly in my invisible tears who refuse to be seen.
I'm in the pool engulfed by the ocean, emotion.
The plan was to engulf it not to be engulf by it.
Damn it.**

**I take part of the blame and all the shame
I'm taking accountability,
for my Tranquility.**

**As my heart weeps,
My soul bleeds.**

WRITTEN PIECE BY JOSIA OSA-ONI
BRADFORD UNIVERSITY

KEY THREADS

The workshops generated some powerful conversations and five key threads.

RELATIONSHIP MODELLING

The relationships young people see in their own lives and the messaging about what constitutes a healthy relationship was a key discussion point in each of the workshops. Relationships between parents and carers are significant, and those involved in the workshops felt that that domestic abuse and violence can become normalised within the home. Likewise, peer relationships are important to young people, and violence within peer groups can also be normalised. These relationships that take place around boys and young men link into gender norms which are then reinforced on social media, music, film and other media outlets. Social media is a key place where messaging about unhealthy relationships can take place. Pornography is also easily available and being accessed from a young age.

UNDERSTANDING OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND COERCIVE & CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

Most attendees felt that young people understand certain behaviours as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (i.e., physical violence is wrong), but there is a huge amount of ‘grey area’ where behaviour and impact isn’t necessarily understood, including things like financial abuse and some controlling behaviours. Workshop participants described how abusive behaviour in relationships can be downplayed by both partners, and how this is particularly true with controlling behaviour. The groups in the sessions did suggest that young people are more open to talking about this in recent years and there is more awareness of controlling behaviours within relationships, but understanding what this looks like or identifying it in their own relationships may be different.

The workshop groups discussed how topics like healthy relationships, domestic abuse, and identifying abusive behaviour are often taught and explored with girls, but there was uncertainty as to how much this is done with boys and young men. The boys and young men we spoke to expressed concern over being labelled as potential perpetrators in conversations around domestic abuse, and how this can lead to defensiveness and feeling attacked. The groups showed a desire to be more curious and ask questions without fear of being judged.

The groups appreciated the safe space we provided to talk about relationships and behaviour in relationships. They need the space to work through ideas in a safe community, as opposed to unhealthy behaviours being left unchallenged, and potentially getting worse over time.

THINKING INTERSECTIONALLY ABOUT MASCULINITY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

Group discussions highlighted the need to remember that we live in an unequal society, and that the media often focuses on harm caused by disadvantaged and racially minoritised boys and young men, not addressing the harm caused by men who hold more privilege in society. The way that men and boys model themselves can stem from their experiences of poverty, racism, deprivation, mental health needs and trauma, and the young men in the workshops reflected that performing aggressive masculinity can become a form of survival, where men feel the need to be tough, hard and violent to make up for the perceived lack of control in their lives.

PRESSURES ON BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

The participants made it clear that there are substantial pressures on young men today and these seem much greater than five or ten years ago. In this part of the work, it was felt that gender norms were still prevalent in society and there is an expectation and pressure to be ‘a man’. The responsibilities, or “requirements” that are placed on men were picked up in part by the attendees – for example, providing for the family, having a high-status job, achieving financial success, being sexually active with women, and being physically strong. The young men we spoke to feel these pressures acutely in their own lives, yet struggled to see how these expectations can negatively impact their own wellbeing, as well as their ability to form healthy relationships. Participants felt there is little early intervention and schools do not discuss healthy relationships and unhealthy gender norms enough. The link to mental health when talking about relationships was highlighted and it was felt important to explore each of these areas with young people.

PEERS

Help seeking behaviour was discussed in a variety of ways and differed between the groups. One discussion focused on the importance of friends and how young people will go to their peers for support, especially in the early stages of help seeking. Friends can and do offer help and this can be positive. However, it is thought that friends often don’t ask if everything is ok or share their experiences so there are sometimes missed opportunities. The group discussed how practitioners can better support boys and men to give good advice to friends, countering the narrative that there is something ‘unmasculine’ about being a good friend, and that speaking up should be viewed as ‘grassing’ and responded to negatively.

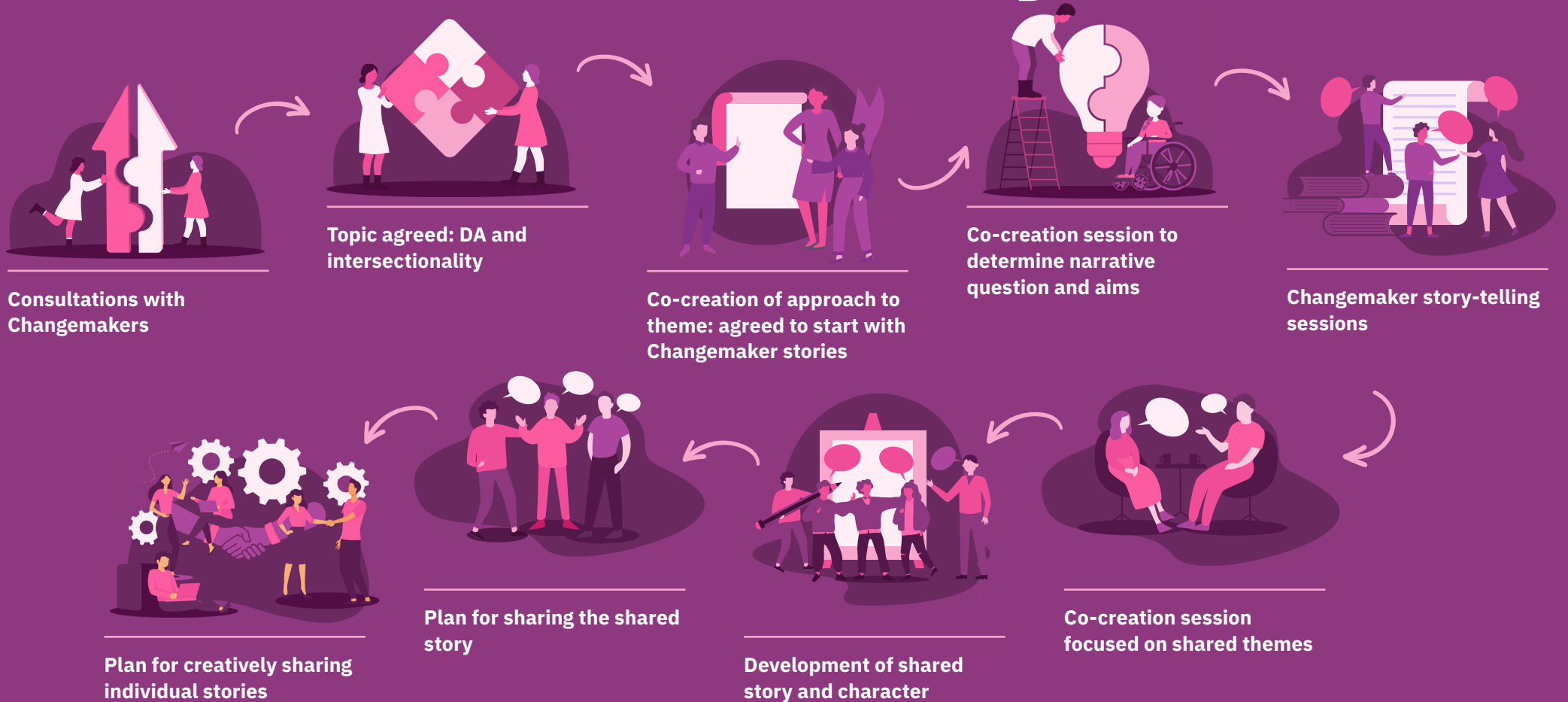
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these group conversations, and further consultations with Changemakers on this theme, the SOS team developed a set of recommendations to support young boys to live lives free from harm and harming:

From these workshops we have developed new relationships and now hope to deliver further workshops in the future. By co-creating content alongside people with relevant personal experience – especially young men and boys – we have started to make them part of the solution.

- 1** Young males need to have role models and people to look up to who talk about stopping violence against women. This could be celebrities, or people in their own lives such as teachers and parents.
- 2** We need to provide better education about domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. This could be through sessions at school, or through campaigns across social media. Toxic behaviours need to be named, as some individuals may not realise that their behaviour is classed as abuse.
- 3** We need to support young people to critically consider the concept of masculinity, and support young boys to question the narrative that being a feminist makes you feminine, or weak, and demonstrate that being an ally to women doesn't mean you are an enemy to men. Perhaps this could be done through the media or TV shows portraying more men as allies.
- 4** Boys should be supported to support their friends and 'keep them in check'. Boys need to understand what is and isn't okay and call out their friends if they cross the line.
- 5** The RSE curriculum should include more topics relating to boys' needs specifically, in a way that is relevant to their age group. Boys should be taught how to combat forms of toxic masculinity in their own lives.
- 6** Men and boys need more positive social media influences, so that they can see broader depictions of what it means to be man today. Boys need to be given a framework for masculinity that is broader than going to the gym and being sexually active and includes emotional intelligence and being respectful to peers.
- 7** We should create more readily available support groups for men from different backgrounds, which speak to their specific needs. For example, support groups for men from racially minoritised backgrounds.
- 8** Training programmes on masculinity should be aimed at sports teams and associations.
- 9** We need to see men play a bigger role in the domestic abuse charity sector, including more male practitioners who can play an instrumental role in engaging young men and boys who are at risk of, or causing harm in their own relationships. Men should be involved in the development of communications methods to address men's harmful behaviours.

Domestic abuse and intersectionality



Changemaker stories

Final consultation took place following recruitment of five new Changemakers. Within the initial conversations between the young person's authentic voice coordinator (YPAVC) and the new Changemakers it became clear that the group felt passionately about breaking the stigma around DA within their communities, and this passion carried through into the final consultation and led to a final theme of domestic abuse and intersectionality.

While activities under previous themes had focused on gathering the voices and views of other young people, the Changemakers felt strongly that this time they wanted to start with their own stories. Workshopping sessions then took place to decide how to approach this, and Changemakers and SOS team members from SafeLives agreed on a narrative approach where those who wanted to share their story took part in storytelling sessions. These sessions were facilitated by the YPAVC with support and guidance from the research team, and Changemakers were asked the following co-created narrative question:

While the Changemakers came from diverse communities and had a range of experiences around domestic abuse, they wanted to understand if there was anything shared across their stories, and what message they wanted to share as a result.

This question provided space for Changemakers with lived experience of domestic abuse to talk about this if they wanted to, but focused on understandings of DA, and therefore meant this was a choice and not an expectation, as well as ensuring Changemakers without lived experience of DA were not excluded.

Following the story-telling sessions, Changemakers wanted to consider their stories collectively and individually, and to produce a series of resources tied to the theme of domestic abuse and intersectionality.

DOMESTIC ABUSE
AND INTERSECTIONALITY



The shared story

DOMESTIC ABUSE
AND INTERSECTIONALITY

How has your understanding of domestic abuse changed over time and how has this been influenced by your identity, culture, and community?

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES – LAYERED EXPECTATIONS

All of the Changemakers who took part in storytelling sessions were aged between 14 and 20 and identify as female, and their responses to the narrative question showed how their age and gender intersected to shape their understanding of domestic abuse and experiences related to it, as well as various other elements of their identity, namely religion, culture, race and ethnicity.

For the young people sharing their stories, with each of these identities/elements of who they were, came another expectation or responsibility to carry; the pressure and expectations of being a young person, the challenges of being a woman, the opinions of my community, my family's reputation, honouring my religion, representing my culture. It was almost like carrying a stack of boxes precariously placed on top of one other, requiring a careful balancing act to keep upright. And with each of these boxes of expectations, came an enormous amount of noise:



For some of the Changemakers, the underlying message behind this noise was that appearance matters more than experience – we would rather you keep quiet and continue experiencing harm than make a scene and the community find out we are not a happy family.

'HUSH HUSH'

In comparison to all of this noise, **around domestic abuse there was often silence.** A number of the young people talked about domestic abuse as a taboo topic within their communities and being taught that all relationship issues should remain private. For the Changemaker who talked about experiencing abuse in the home, the incidents they witnessed and experienced were followed by silence. They saw so much but were told so little about what was happening. This young person and others described how the absence of discussion around DA, and it not being named or identified as wrong, led to the normalisation of abuse. Though the Changemaker experiencing DA could feel within herself that what was happening was wrong, none of the adults around her acknowledged it, and even told her not to make a scene when she tried to name it for herself. As a result, she learnt that even though it feels wrong, it's normal and acceptable.

BARRIERS TO BREAKING THE SILENCE

In addition to DA being taboo within their communities, the Changemakers also described a range of additional barriers to disclosure, linked to experiences of marginalisation and racialisation.

STIGMA AROUND DIVORCE

A number of the young people described the shame attached to divorce and family-separation within their communities, something which made leaving an abusive marriage or relationship even harder. They described victims being seen as villains for ending a relationship or stopping the abusive parent having contact with children, and the resulting ostracization by the community.

CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITIES

Though Changemakers were clear about the strengths and positives of being part of close-knit communities, they also described this often meaning a lack of privacy, and a sense that if you disclose to one you disclose to all. One changemaker reflected on the normalisation of DA in her community, and how separating from an abusive partner might require separation from, and therefore loss of, an entire community.

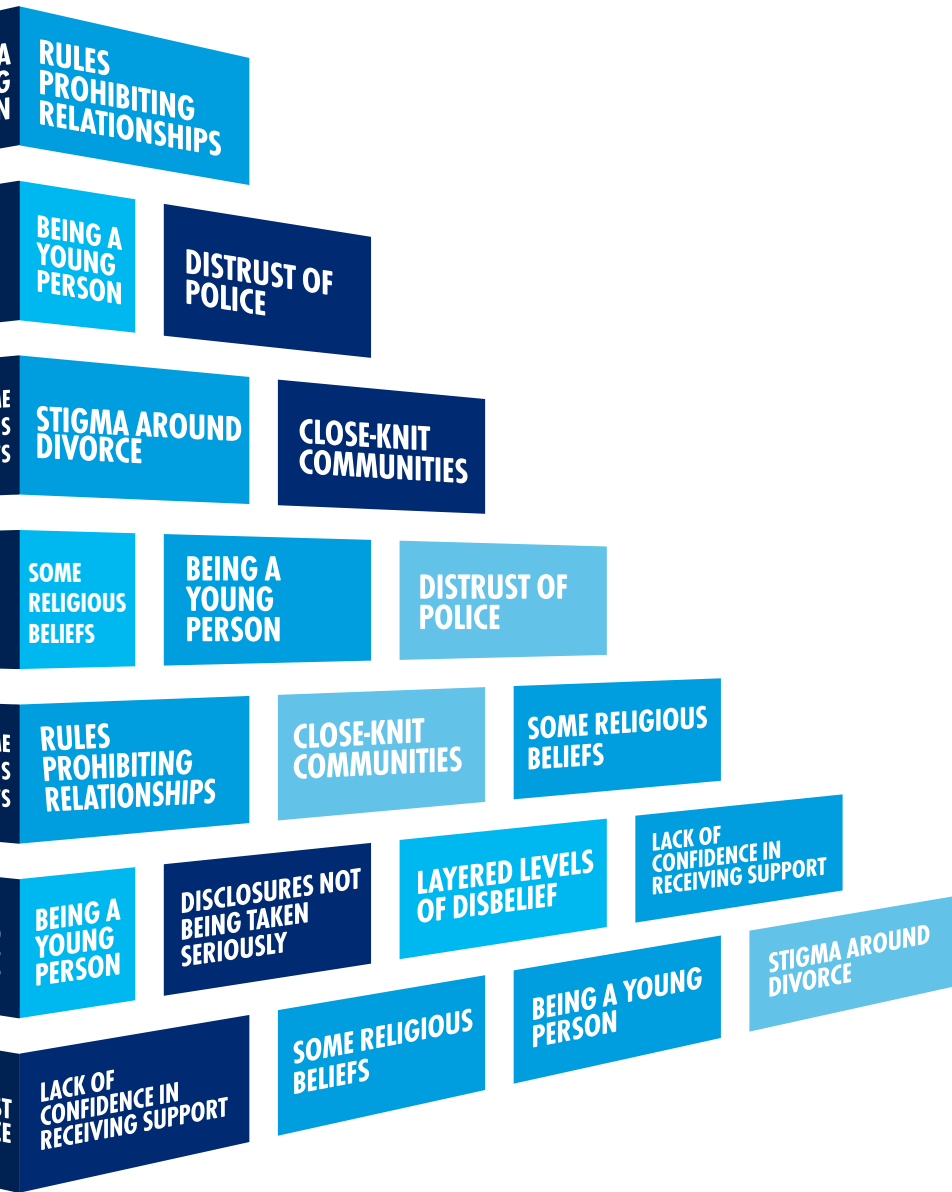
BEING A YOUNG PERSON

Often the relationships in which harm is happening aren't 'official' or labelled, so young victims aren't sure if what's happening to them 'counts' as abuse. Changemakers also felt that sexist and harmful behaviours from boys and young men are taken less seriously than those from adult men, and therefore there is an absence of consequences.

RULES PROHIBITING RELATIONSHIPS

Two of the Changemakers described growing up with rules that either prohibited romantic relationships entirely, or prohibited certain kinds of relationships. For the young person who was not allowed to date, this meant having to hide her relationships, and therefore the harm she was experiencing within them became even more hidden. As a result, disclosure was made even more difficult, as a disclosure of abuse meant having to disclose a prohibited relationship. The other young person described how dating outside of her race was seen as a betrayal, and how disclosing an experience of abuse would be taken as further evidence for this belief and seen as a risk you accepted when choosing not to date within your race.





DISCLOSURES NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

While the Changemakers described the normalisation and prevalence of DA within their communities, they also emphasised the work being done by many within the communities to challenge such beliefs and practices. Conversely, one of the Changemakers reflected on the lack of challenge from those outside of these communities, due to an incorrect assumption that the normalisation of abuse is an inherent and fixed part of the culture/religion, which leads to disclosures of abuse from minoritised and racialised people being taken less seriously than disclosures from non-minoritised and non-racialised people.

LAYERED LEVELS OF DISBELIEF

In addition to their disclosures not being taken seriously because of an assumption that ‘this just happens’ within the communities they are a part of, the Changemakers were also aware of a climate of disbelief of women, and the narrative that ‘women lie’. One Changemaker reflected on the intersection of their gender and race, and the layered levels of disbelief they would be likely to experience as a young Black woman.

SOME RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

One of the Changemakers reflected on the strong ties to religion within her family and community, and a belief that the response to abuse should be to pray about it and hope it changes, rather than to take action and leave.

DISTRUST OF POLICE

One of the Changemakers described the distrust of police within her community, and the fear surrounding any kind of criminal justice response. She talked about victims of abuse within her community feeling they needed to protect perpetrators from the criminal justice system, and therefore feeling unable to disclose.

LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN RECEIVING SUPPORT

Connected with many of the barriers already discussed, some of the Changemakers described a lack of confidence that if they did disclose abuse, this would result in them receiving the necessary support. Some felt the response to their disclosure would be dismissive, others felt it would be punitive and they would be punished, but few felt confident that if they did manage to overcome all of the barriers to disclosure, the response they would receive would be worth it.

RESISTANCE –BREAKING THE SILENCE

Though silence around domestic abuse ran as a thread through the Changemakers stories, in each story there were examples of people breaking the silence and resisting the normalisation of domestic abuse.

SCHOOL

School was mentioned in each of the Changemaker's stories, and RSE lessons as somewhere relationships and surrounding issues were discussed, though the content, frequency, and quality varied. For some young people these discussions didn't go far enough in naming unhealthy and abusive behaviours, while for one the topic of healthy relationships was regularly revisited in more depth as they aged. For most of the Changemakers, school was the first place they heard about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

FRIENDS

For one of the young people experiencing abuse from the person she was seeing, her friends were the ones to name the relationship as 'toxic' and 'wrong' and to tell her what was happening to her was not okay. This young person was open that it took her friends speaking up multiple times before she felt able to end the relationship.

PARENT(S)

For some of the Changemakers, their parents also broke the silence in talking about relationships and abuse. This was described as generational resistance in some of the young people's stories, with parents naming the normalisation of abuse within their community and identifying it as wrong. For one Changemaker who experienced abuse in the home, though there had been silence around the abuse when it was occurring, it was their mum who later named it.

THEMSELVES

Though they were told not to make a scene, and their concerns dismissed, the Changemaker experiencing abuse in the home tried to break the silence for themselves and tell family what was happening.

PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS

One young person talked about regularly seeing posters about DA on the backs of toilet doors, and this serving as a reminder in between those in her life breaking the silence.



The key message from the Changemaker's stories is that breaking the silence cannot be a one-off event in young people's lives. The noise we make about domestic abuse, in naming it and calling it out as wrong, needs to be loud enough to be heard over all of the other noise in their lives.

It's time to get loud.

REFLECTIONS

Once these shared themes had been created, they were presented back to the Changemakers for their reflections and feedback before being finalised, and with their permission these reflections were recorded:

“Embracing your culture and your community shouldn’t come with the fear of speaking out against older and typically more knowledgeable members, and having the fear of being told ‘I told you so’”

“In order to break the silence, we have to create more noise to counteract the noise that we are already hearing”

“It’s nice that [the themes] are shared, I don’t know how to put it, you are not alone...no one is truly on their own, everyone has some kind of shared experience”

Conversations with the Changemakers around next steps for their shared story are already underway, and we are exploring creative outputs such as an animation or movement piece. The Changemakers will also have the opportunity to work with the Incubator team at SafeLives to develop a case study following the ‘If I were a stat’ framework.⁵

THE INDIVIDUAL STORY

Looking at the shared story among Changemakers involved breaking their individual stories down into themes. As a result, we wanted to ensure Changemakers individual stories weren’t lost, and recognise the points of difference in their experiences. We therefore worked with Changemakers to create a list of ways they could share all, or parts, of their individual story if this was something they wanted. As with the shared story, work will continue around the sharing of individual Changemaker stories within the follow-on funding for Young People’s Authentic Voice, something which is explored further within the next section of this report.

5. <https://sheffieldflourish.co.uk/stories/dawn-munroe-if-i-were-a-stat/>

Impact on Changemakers

MEASURING
IMPACT

These reflections come from the two Changemakers who have been part of SOS from the creation of the steering group, and who continue to work closely with us.

MAYA'S REFLECTIONS

Last year, I was volunteering as a Changemaker and working a full-time job in a business degree apprenticeship. I enjoyed the work I was doing with the Changemakers much more than I did my day job and, because of this, I decided to change apprenticeships to do something similar. At SafeLives, I particularly enjoyed planning, carrying out and analysing research so I decided to pursue a degree apprenticeship in user experience and user research. Because of my work with Changemakers, I understood the importance of learning from individual experiences to improve a product or service, and I was able to draw on my own experiences with SafeLives to successfully pass the interview and get the job. **Being a Changemaker drastically changed what I wanted to do in the future.** I now want to become a professional researcher and hope to one day work with a social enterprise or charity organisation such as SafeLives.

Being a member of Changemakers has also given me the opportunity to develop a number of skills that I find useful in every aspect of my life. Planning and assisting with research has helped my professional career, as well as teaching me how to speak to people from a range of backgrounds, with a range of experiences. Sharing my ideas in team calls and presenting our insights to external stakeholders has improved my communication skills and built my confidence with public speaking. Furthermore, I have developed my teamwork and organisational skills through working on a variety of topics during the three years I have volunteered with SafeLives. I love that, as a Changemaker, not only did SafeLives help us share our voices on important issues; they also helped us develop our individual skills to be well-rounded people and young professionals.

I am passionate about ending domestic abuse, for everyone, for good and I am grateful to Changemakers for giving me the opportunity to work with amazing people and create meaningful change. When I see how sharing my voice has influenced national campaigns, services and laws surrounding domestic abuse, I feel powerful and proud of what we have achieved. The variety of projects we have worked on has introduced me to issues I was previously unaware of, increasing my understanding of what is happening in the domestic abuse sector and the work that is still needed. I am looking forward to being part of YPAV (Young Persons Authentic Voice) so we can continue to amplify young voices on topics that matter and improve understanding and services within the domestic abuse sector.

Thank you to everyone who has made the years I have spent as a Changemaker so incredible. I appreciate every single person who made me feel listened to and valued. I cannot wait to work with them again and expand our young person network in the future!

ELLIE'S REFLECTIONS

When I was asked to join the Sound of Silence project, I was feeling very ignored and silenced by society. Joining SOS changed that and made me feel like I had a voice and a platform where I could share how I felt about things. It also allowed me to help give a voice back to other young people who also felt silenced.

SOS has helped me to develop new skills and improve existing ones, for example it has helped me develop my networking skills, this has been done through inviting me to events with different organisations and different members of staff and also attending online meetings with other young people like the changemakers. They have also helped me improve my public speaking skills by asking me to read speeches both online and in person to large numbers of people.

Being involved in this project has boosted my confidence massively. Throughout the project I have had so many amazing and enriching conversations with people like the police and different organisations. If it wasn't for working on this project and having the support from the SafeLives team, then I wouldn't have had the confidence to have those conversations.

I have been taught so many amazing things throughout SOS, one of the main things is to never give up on something that you believe in. Another huge thing Sound of Silence has taught me is how to approach different conversations and different workshops and the many resources you can use to help you. For example the changemakers came up with the Listening Rooms resource, which is a great resource to use with young people. Lastly, Sound of Silence has taught me to not view the world as black and white but to instead view the world as grey because sometimes things aren't always as straightforward as we might think.

Sound Of silence has been one of the best things I have ever done. I will forever be grateful to the SafeLives team for inviting me to join this amazing project. SOS has changed my life in so many ways, it has allowed me to have important and needed conversations with the people around me about domestic abuse and has inspired me to one day have my own domestic abuse organisation.



Impact on SafeLives

MEASURING
IMPACT

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

WORKING SAFELY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TAKES A RELATIONSHIP-LED AND PERSON-CENTRED YOUTH WORK MODEL –

We have broadened our wider Authentic Voice work to integrate a relationship-led and person-centred youth work model into our risk-led approach. We have ensured from the outset of the project that all direct work with young people is facilitated and supervised by staff with the relevant skills, knowledge, experience and training to work with young people safely. We recruited a Young Person's Authentic Voice Coordinator to lead this work.

IT TAKES TIME, FLEXIBILITY AND A SLOWER PACE WHEN WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE –

Young people can have big ideas on what they would like to happen next in a project, and work with energy and enthusiasm. But it is essential that we are realistic with the young people about the next stages and how we communicate the boundaries of funding, staff capacity, strategic direction and stakeholder management, as well as what is in our gift to change, at any point. One of our main principles of authentic voice work is cause no harm so our planning and preparation is careful to include diverse success markers and what different forms impact could take.

IT HAS BEEN IMPORTANT TO MANAGE YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY ARE SHARING THEIR AUTHENTIC VOICE –

Young people's schedules, priorities and availability can change rapidly, which occasionally made it necessary for us to work in a highly responsive way in order to keep to project timelines as they had been organised; for example we needed to reschedule the Changemaker residential as a few of the Changemakers found themselves committed to unanticipated school events.

IT HAS BEEN ENERGISING TO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE –

SafeLives is a second-tier charity. Our colleagues work mainly with professionals. We are therefore a step removed from the frontline. Staff have therefore found it incredibly eye opening and energising hearing from young people directly, reminding us all why we do the work we do. It has fundamentally changed how we work with young people.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR IN-PERSON EVENTS, WHEN WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO LIVE ACROSS THE UK, CAN BE COMPLICATED, CHALLENGING AND COSTLY –

For example National Rail guidance is that young people need to be 16 years or older to travel independently; therefore, we would need to provide a chaperone for anyone under 16, although, we understand that all young people are different and have different levels of experience and confidence with national travel. Our key consideration is safe delivery of in person events, so we need to ensure that we can provide support with travel, for any young person, should they or their parents/carers request it.

THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING EXTENDS BEYOND THE YOUNG PEOPLE WE ARE WORKING WITH; WE NEED TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR PARENTS/CARERS AND THEIR EDUCATION PROVIDER –

A lot of the external events that Changemakers have been invited to take part in, have been organised for during the school day, or the event has been in the evening, but at some distance away so that national travel is required. As young people will need to take time from school to attend such events, we therefore need to have buy in and support for Changemaker work from parents/carers and education providers.

AS THE CHANGEMAKERS HAVE BECOME MORE VISIBLE WITHIN SAFELIVES AND AS THEY HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR INTEREST IN WORKING WITH DIFFERENT TEAMS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION, THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO WORK WITH THE CHANGEMAKERS AND THEREFORE MORE DEMANDS ON THEIR TIME –

It is essential that our Young Person's Authentic Voice Coordinator manages these demands, and that they introduce new team members to the Changemakers in a way that works for the Changemakers, as opposed to the organisation's needs.

HOW WE'VE CHANGED

While the SOS funding has come to an end, we have made an organisational commitment to continue prioritising the voices of young people and building the learning from SOS into all of our Safe Young Lives work. We have secured continuation funding from another grant-making trust (who wish to remain anonymous) to enable us to embed the Changemakers and their voice right across our practice advice, our training offer, and our influencing.

SOS has fundamentally changed the way we work with and include the voices of young people, and we have now transitioned to a payment and remuneration model for young people which has parity with the model in place for adult pioneers. While SafeLives already offered some form of reimbursement to young people engaged in co-creation, this new model means an increase in what we pay young people for their time. It also provides a framework for how we do this safely and responsibly, identifying any financial risks that may exist around individual young people and their wider family network, as well as ensuring we are compliant with legislation.

Though the SOS funding has now ended, the Changemakers have been clear that their passion for the work and for driving change has not. They will continue to work with SafeLives, alongside other young people, to positively influence the Department for Education into 2024 when new RSE guidance is

due to be published. In the coming months, some of the Changemakers will also be working on a piece of research with SafeLives and the Violence, Health and Society consortium (VISION), who are exploring the age young people are legally recognised as experiencing abuse. The Changemakers will be involved in co-designing and facilitating a workshop to gather the views of young people with lived experience of adolescent DA on the gaps in research and knowledge in this area. They will then feed into VISION's analysis of this workshop and the resulting priorities for future research.

Changemakers will also begin to work with other teams across the organisation, including the Incubator – a think tank for innovation within SafeLives. The next focus of the Incubator will be on the Black young girls' experience of domestic abuse, and will involve the learning from the DA and intersectionality theme from SOS.

Over the past three year, SafeLives has changed the way we work. We hold learning, skills and expertise we could not have guessed at, valuable new relationships across the youth sector, and a whole new approach to working with young people, made possible by the young people who shared their expertise and continue to contribute to our operations and priorities right across the organisation. This shift in approach is the legacy of SOS and the Changemakers.

“Too often young people are made to feel that their voice is not important because they are too naïve or inexperienced, but working with Changemakers has shown me that a young person’s voice can be one of the most powerful tools to inspire change. I am thankful so far for my journey with Changemakers and hope to continue this work with even more young people to end domestic abuse for everyone, and for good.”

CHANGEMAKER

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