

SafeLives

Ending domestic abuse

Whole Lives Scotland Impact report



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Everything needs to shift so that the nature, effects and impacts can be seen, understood and shared much earlier on.

SURVIVOR, (National Survivor Survey, 2020)

Introduction

Domestic abuse is never a standalone issue. Women need tailored, expert support that acknowledges and addresses their whole experience.

Together we can end domestic abuse, for everyone, for good.

Back in 2017, we pulled together a small dataset which suggested that the route into specialist domestic abuse services in Scotland was long and uneven, varying widely depending on where in Scotland you lived, your age, your needs and your experience of abuse.

With generous support from the National Lottery Community Fund, in 2018 we were given the opportunity to look at this in greater detail, to uncover the barriers for those experiencing domestic abuse and to explore the ways they could be reduced.

Through this three-year Whole Lives programme we have had the privilege of working closely with a wide range of services, in both the voluntary and statutory sector. Crucially we have also had the opportunity to listen to the authentic voice of those with direct experience of domestic abuse. Together, this insight has highlighted the excellent array of support provision available up and down the country, offering much-

valued, often life-saving, services. However, it also illustrated that we must get better at opening up the routes into these services, so the pathway to support is quicker, and the response is more joined-up. The legacy of this programme will be the practical recommendations for services to work together more creatively and proactively to reduce the many barriers to support, as well as the power of listening to the authentic voice of women and girls in order to provide better and quicker outcomes.

-  **Suzanne Jacob**
CEO
-  **Lucy McDonald**
Head of SafeLives Scotland

What we set out to do

Whole Lives project outcomes

1

Survivors – both accessing services and those who are not – will know their voices are heard and improving the response to domestic abuse across Scotland.

3

Practitioners will have access to new evidence-based resources, tools and guidance enhancing their knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to provide a quality, consistent response to survivors.

2

Local area leads will receive intensive support in relation to improving practice, partnership working and using their own data and evidence effectively. As a result, they will be confident they are delivering best practice, ensuring that families are receiving the right resources at the right time.

4

Change-makers (at central, regional, and local levels) will feel the constructive pressure of living examples, a robust evidence base and the voices of survivors – showing how change can become a reality.

A note on Covid-19

Eighteen months into the project the Covid-19 pandemic began. Our frontline partners moved quickly to adapt, reporting increased demand for their services. Colleagues in local authorities and health boards were redeployed to support the pandemic response and critical work was rightly prioritised. It was immediately clear that our approach had to dramatically change.

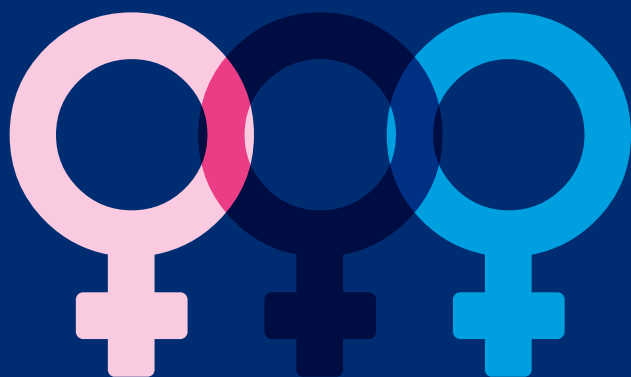
We looked at where we could be most helpful during this challenging time. We paused activities until our partners had capacity to engage. The team helped generate Covid-related domestic abuse guidance and contributed to the Safe at Home in Scotland forum for domestic abuse practitioners to share knowledge and support. Ultimately, delivery of the project moved largely online for its final year, bringing some new engagement opportunities... and a lot less train travel!

What we did

Local authority engagement

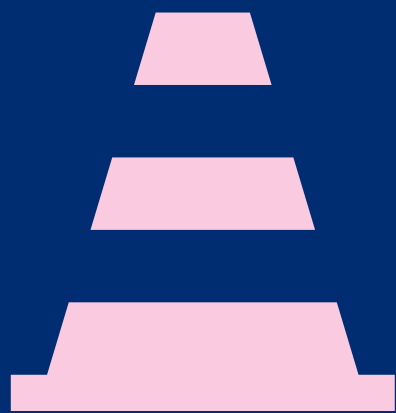
We mapped the activities and reach of **42 agencies** through on-site engagement meetings.

We worked closely with **3 Violence Against Women Partnerships** in Scotland



We published **3 thematic reports** summarising our research findings from each area, and **1 report on the national survivor survey**

We focussed on barriers to service access for survivors with **mental health needs, learning disabilities and for young adults (16-25s)**



We ran

4



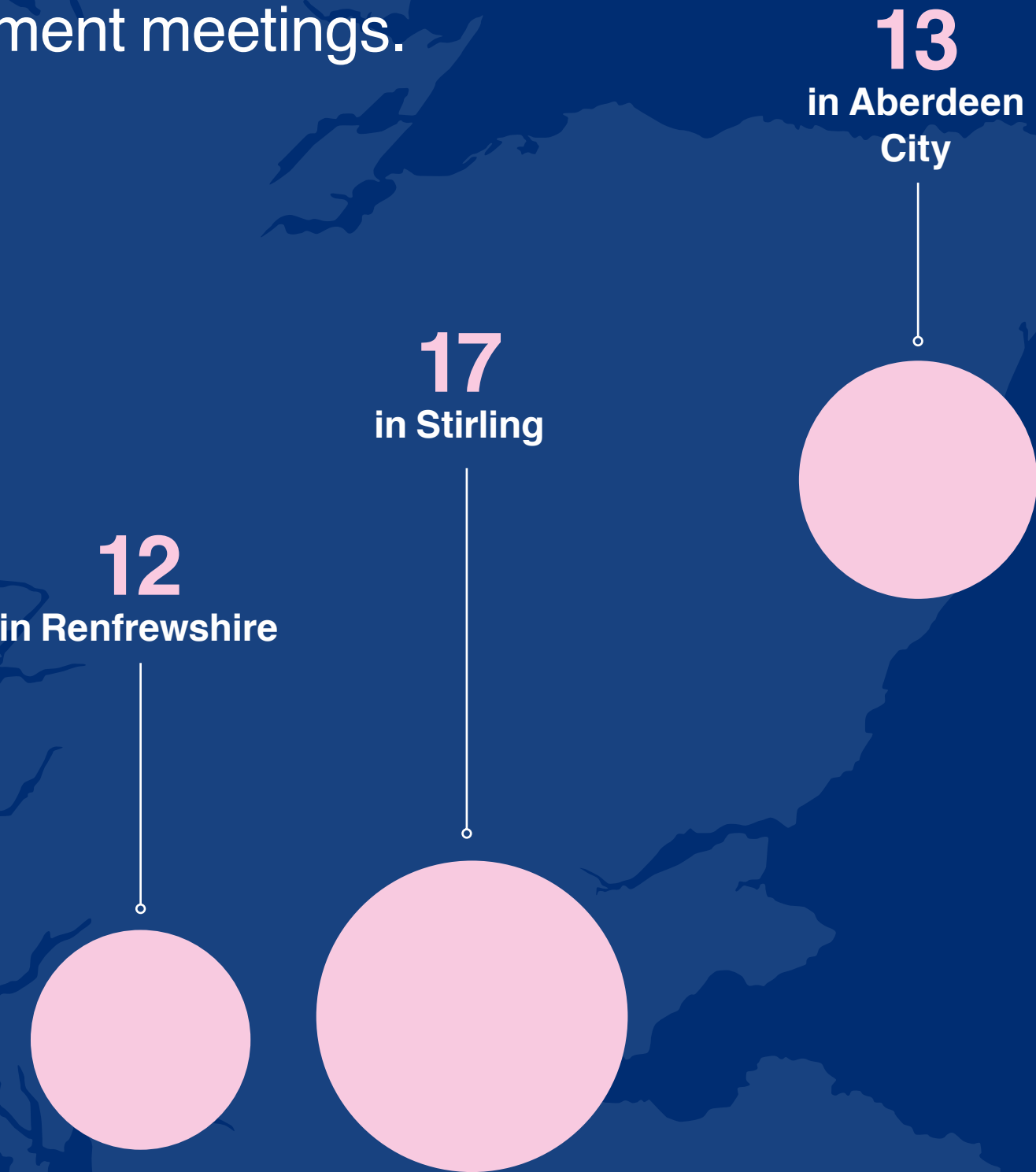
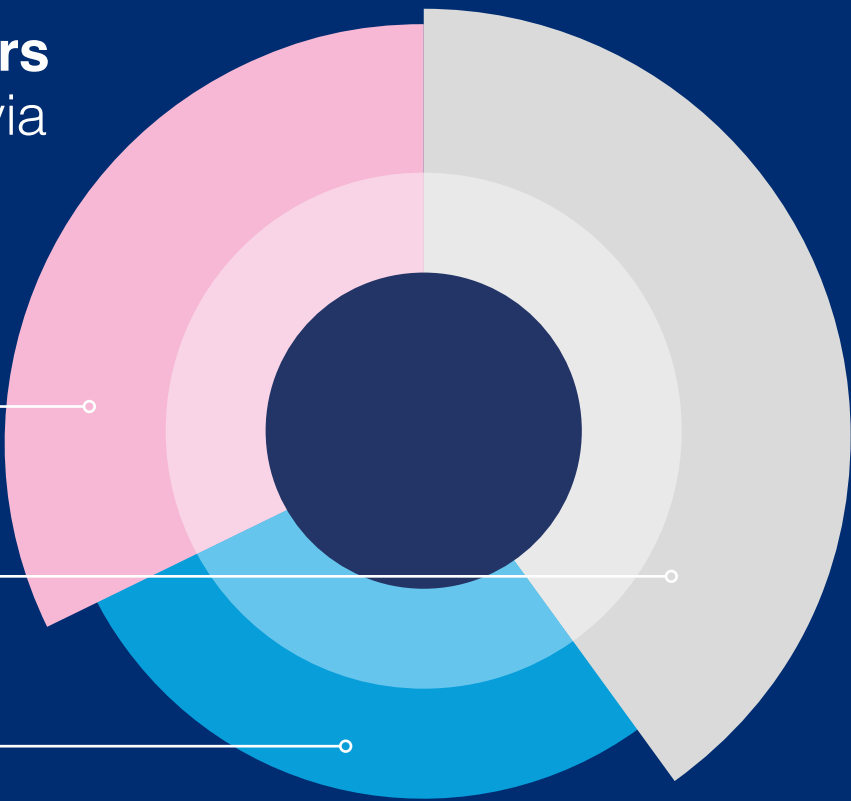
focus groups involving 31 professionals

We heard from 205 **multi-agency practitioners** in the areas we worked in via 3 online surveys

66 in Aberdeen City

82 in Renfrewshire

57 in Stirling



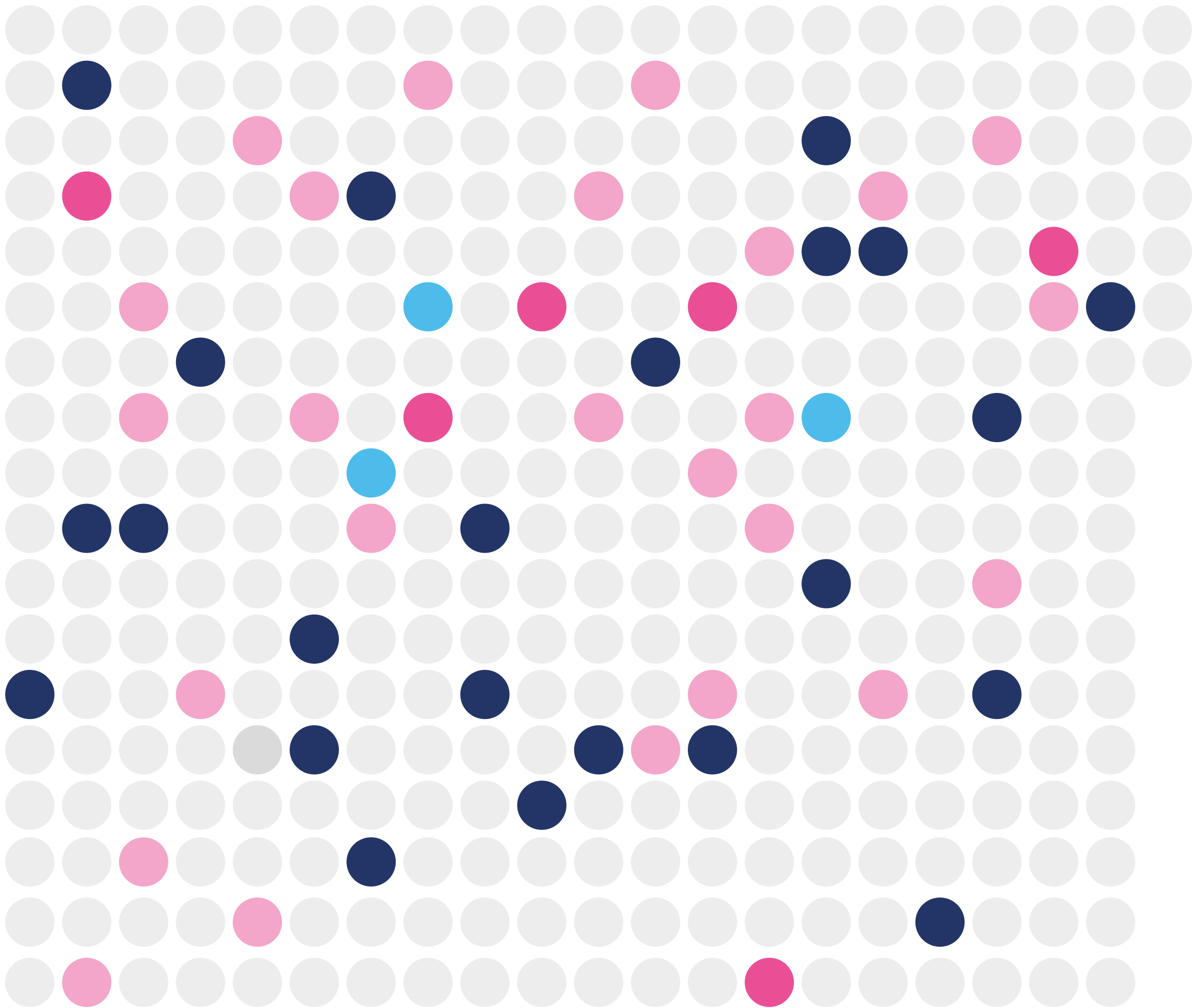
What we did

National Survivor Survey



I didn't really think it was domestic abuse at the time, I'm still a bit hesitant to use those words, there were no punches to report or bruises to hide. Maybe if I'd known that it doesn't have to be like that I'd have told someone. It was my first real relationship so I just thought that was the way.

SURVIVOR, (National Survivor Survey, 2020)



377

people across every local authority area in Scotland participated in our national survivor survey and other consultations, including:

- 23** survivors from a Scottish women's prison
- 3** survivors with learning disabilities through our Easy Read survey
- 25** young adults via an online survey in Aberdeen City
- 6** survivors with mental health needs at a focus group in Renfrewshire

What we learned

Our research findings

Hundreds of survivors answered our national survivor survey and told us that...

- ✓ **The impact of domestic abuse is multi-faceted.** A large proportion of survivors experience mental health needs due to domestic abuse, two thirds of our survey respondents, but limited numbers access specialist mental health support. Financial issues, poor physical health, employment issues and homelessness are common alongside domestic abuse.
- ✓ **Many survivors experience domestic abuse over a long period of time.** On average, survivors experienced abuse for five and a half years. This was longer when survivors had a disability. Survivors with children experienced abuse over longer periods which was linked to ongoing abuse through child contact arrangements.

- ✓ **Most survivors don't access specialist domestic abuse services.** Two thirds of survivors had never accessed a specialist domestic abuse service. The most common barriers to service access identified by survivors were not knowing about services, stigma-related feelings of shame or embarrassment, or not wanting to access support at the time.
- ✓ **Survivors tell multiple people, including professionals, about abuse but this does not always lead to referrals.** Survivors who never reached a specialist service had still disclosed to an average of three people or agencies. Half the survivors who did access a specialist service had self-referred despite disclosing to multiple agencies.

- ✓ **Disability and sexual orientation are linked to different experiences of abuse.** Minoritised survivors experienced abuse for longer lengths of time and identified different and additional barriers to service access.
- ✓ **Survivors told us more awareness of domestic abuse, in all its forms, is the biggest thing that could make a difference to service access.** Understanding non-physical forms of abuse, including psychological and economic, and how to identify them, is key to survivors. Everyone needs information on where services are and what they do, from friends to GPs, so victims and survivors can find out about help quickly.

- ✓ **Survivors who reach specialist services call it a 'lifeline', but fully funded provision needs to be a priority.** The practical and emotional support offered by specialist services was described as healing and empowering. However, services are inconsistently available, especially those for children and for survivors' recovery. Survivors said more funding for a broader range of services for the whole family, increased capacity and out of hours services would improve accessibility.



See the national survivor survey findings report for full detail and our recommendations.


Our research findings in Renfrewshire

Mental Health and Domestic Abuse



I attended a number of appointments with my GP regarding my deteriorating mental health, and I was never asked if I was being abused. The shame prevented me from disclosing, but perhaps the GP could have asked to provide me with that opportunity.

SURVIVOR, (National Survivor Survey, 2020)

 **See the Renfrewshire research report for more detail on our findings and recommendations.**



We looked at local support for survivors with mental health needs and found that...

- ✔ **Multi-agency professionals need greater awareness of the link between mental health needs and domestic abuse.** GPs must be equipped to identify and enquire about domestic abuse when responding to survivors’ mental health problems.
- ✔ **Survivors with multiple needs including mental health problems feel bounced around services.** Survivors seeking mental health support encounter barriers such as service thresholds and capacity. Professionals highlight the challenges getting the right provision in place when survivors have multiple support needs.
- ✔ **There is a gap in provision for survivors with lower level and trauma-related mental health needs.** Domestic abuse services support a substantial proportion of survivors who have mental health needs, often without any mental health training.
- ✔ **Survivors with mental health needs would benefit from more flexibility in referral pathways between domestic abuse and mental health services.** The intersection between domestic abuse and mental health, and the complexity of need of some survivors, mean greater collaboration would be helpful. Professionals need the right information about local service options for survivors to make appropriate referrals.


Our research findings in Stirling

Learning Disability and Domestic Abuse

We looked at local support for survivors with learning disabilities and found that...

- ✓ **A lack of enquiry about domestic abuse is a barrier to identifying all victims of domestic abuse but is compounded when a victim has a learning disability.** Learning disability services often do not have policies in place to support enquiry when appropriate. Other services need more resources to facilitate communication about abuse with survivors who have learning disabilities.
- ✓ **Professional awareness of the dynamics of relationship abuse for survivors with learning disabilities is often low.** They also need clear information on what different agencies offer individuals with learning disabilities and how to access them when abuse is identified.

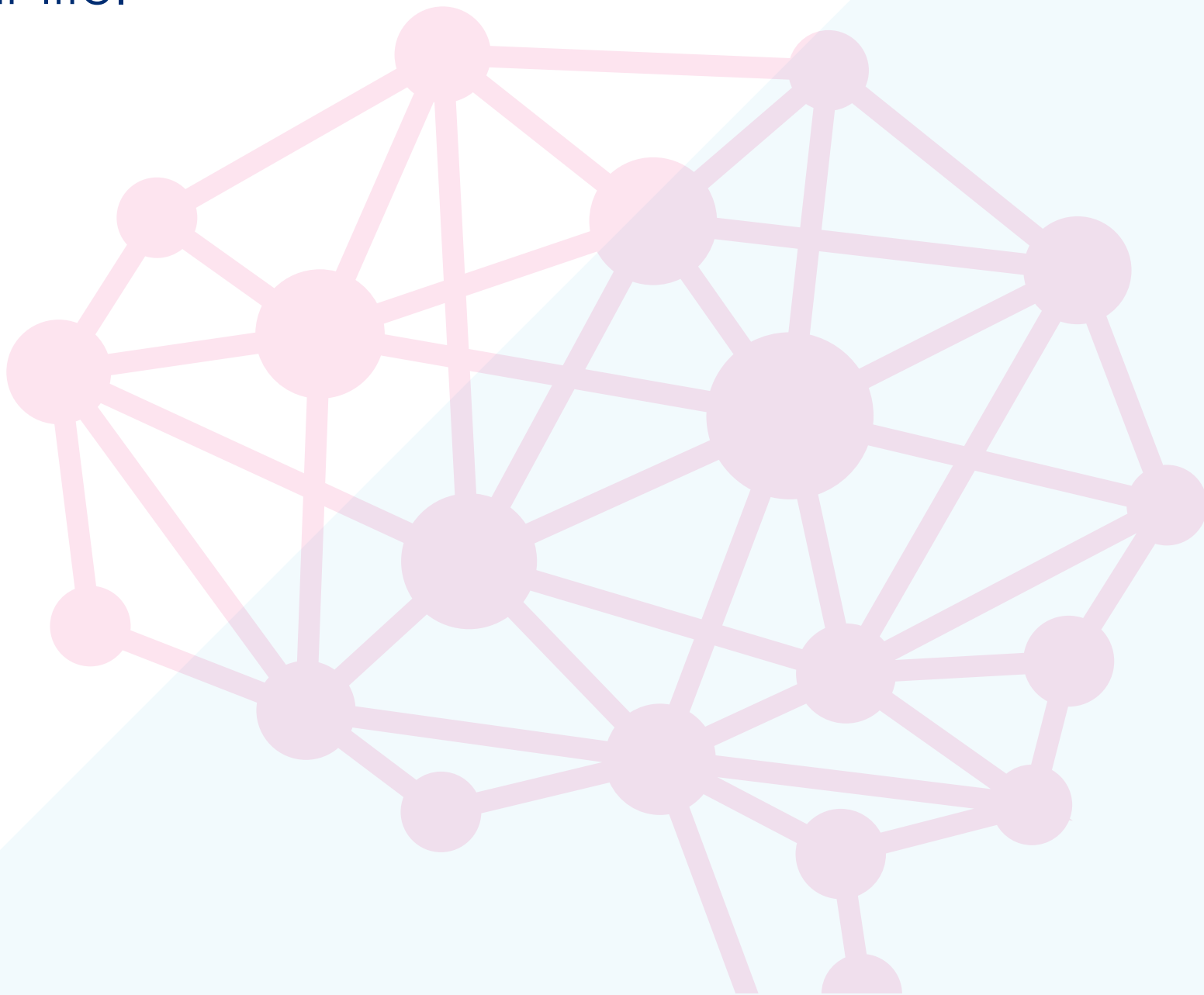
- ✓ **Domestic abuse services work with survivors with mild and/or undiagnosed learning disabilities who do not meet the thresholds for statutory support.** They often do so with a lack of specific training and provide a high level of flexible, person-centred support.
- ✓ **Bespoke work for survivors with learning disabilities sees agencies creating their own resources and joint working arrangements.** This can result in duplicated efforts across already stretched services due to a lack of formalised joint working arrangements for this client group.

 **See the Stirling research report for more detail on our findings and recommendations.**



Finding the support is easy. Recognising that YOU need it is very difficult (it doesn't happen to me). Taking the first step after admitting it is you, is also very hard (shame, fear, etc). Once in the service, trust is hard as you don't trust anyone. Once you realise you can trust them, it saves your life.

SURVIVOR,
(National Survivor Survey, 2020)



Our research findings in Aberdeen City

Young Adults and Domestic Abuse



[The service] support literally saved my life and I would not be here today without their understanding and help. Practical and emotional support. Invaluable service. I am forever grateful that [they] helped me to turn my life around when I had nothing and no hope left.

SURVIVOR, (National Survivor Survey, 2020)

 **See the Aberdeen City research report for more detail on our findings and recommendations.**

We explored the experiences of 16–25-year-olds and found that...

- ✔ **Young adults can have different perceptions of relationship abuse and help-seeking patterns.** Terms such as ‘toxic’ are more widely used to describe abusive relationships than ‘domestic abuse’. Young adults may be less likely to consider some controlling behaviours as abusive, such as technology-related monitoring. They are more likely to seek advice from friends than family or professionals and often do not know what domestic abuse services do.
- ✔ **Practitioners consider awareness of abuse the biggest factor in whether young adults access specialist services.** Young adults may not define their experiences as domestic abuse and they may not know what specialist services offer.

- ✔ **Awareness-raising with a focus on younger people’s specific needs is key to enabling service access.** Proactive outreach to build relationships with young adults and age-appropriate engagement methods could build their understanding of the support available as well as their trust in it.
- ✔ **Professionals have different views on whether dedicated, age-specific provision for younger victims is essential.** Many do feel well-resourced, age-focussed workers integrated within existing services could best engage younger survivors.



Our reach

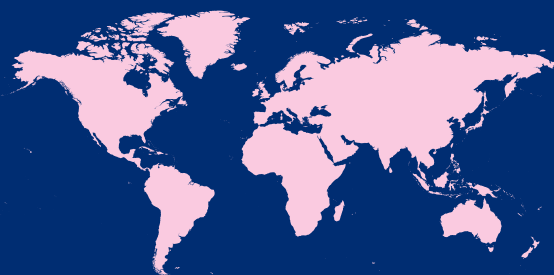
Learning in action

Whole Lives research has been used...

- ✓ By domestic abuse organisations as evidence to support funding bids
- ✓ To influence policy development at a national and local authority level
- ✓ By national strategic organisations, as a research model integrated into new delivery plans
- ✓ To underpin training programmes for professionals, both within SafeLives and external organisations
- ✓ Through our membership of the Scottish Government *Experts by Experience Forum*, as well as the Scottish Government & Scottish Commission for Learning Disabilities *LD & GBV Steering Group*

Who has heard about our findings

An international audience at the **2021 European Conference on Domestic Violence**



1,069

unique visitors to the **Whole Lives project webpage** in the last year

362

subscribers to the **SafeLives Scottish newsletter**



28,000

SafeLives **Twitter followers** during our '16 Days, 16 Facts' campaign



60

professionals from across the DA sector at the **Safe at Home in Scotland network**

120+

webinar attendees, including

- 25** DA practitioners in Scotland
- 60** Scottish policy and strategic leads
- 45** SafeLives staff and associates from across the UK

45

professionals at the **Improvement Service & National Violence Against Women Network's Learning Disability & Gender Based Violence event**

65


professionals attending the **Improvement Service & Scottish Government's multi-agency deep dive events**



Our outputs

Supporting practice in Scotland

The following outputs were created, or are in the process of being created, as a direct result of the research we carried out. They stem from what practitioners and survivors told us and the recommendations we provided to each local area. We intend these evidence-based resources to be widely available to facilitate specialist services access for survivors.

 See the Whole Lives Scotland webpage for information on accessing these resources.

Mental Health and Domestic Abuse

A one day training course for domestic abuse professionals

Mental Health and Domestic Abuse

Guidance for domestic abuse professionals

The DASH & Learning Disability

Guidance for professionals

Talking Mat Risk Assessment

A tool for working with victims/survivors with communication needs

Domestic Abuse Policy & Workplace Toolkit

To support organisations to develop robust domestic abuse policies

Easy Read Posters about Gender Based Violence

Easy Read intake resources for GBV services

Accessible information to support communication about services with survivors

Learning Disability & Domestic Abuse Referral Pathway

Example of a bespoke local area pathway designed to facilitate identification and support of survivors with a learning disability

Co-created awareness-raising resources for young adults

Understanding relationships and help seeking

Domestic Abuse Champions Guidance

Information about implementing a Champions model across universal and non-domestic abuse services



All professionals need to be informed about how to work with those affected by domestic abuse, and the perpetrators. It is not a specialist area of work – it is the bread and butter for everyone who works with families in all capacities. It is not a standalone issue – people need to understand how it relates to all other areas of people’s lives in complex ways.

SURVIVOR, (National Survivor Survey, 2020)

A lasting legacy

The Authentic Voice Panel

To truly transform the response to domestic abuse we must place survivor voice and lived experience at the heart and start of everything we do. SafeLives has an Authentic Voice strategy which sets out our commitment to centring the unmediated voice of those with lived experience through all our research, projects, and practice.

This was a priority for Whole Lives Scotland, reflected in our outcomes set at the beginning of the project. We knew that to comprehensively embed authentic voice it would need to be more than just one ‘thing’, but rather an approach that would encompass the diverse experience of survivors in Scotland. Initially this took the form of involving local co-creation groups in our research activities. Our work, such as the national survivor survey materials, was sense-checked by SafeLives Pioneers (experts by

experience). We wanted to do more, however, and this led to the creation of the Authentic Voice Panel.


Before recruiting we created several tools, such as a member’s handbook and risk checklists to ensure the process was trauma informed and as useful as possible. By reaching out to our frontline partners to recruit potential members we were able to ensure that any accessibility, safety, and risk issues were considered, and we provided extensive information to both services and survivors pre-interview.

Co-facilitated by a domestic abuse expert with extensive experience working in the VAWG sector, our 10-woman strong Authentic Voice Panel represents the breadth of diversity and experience of Scottish survivors. The Panel brings insight spanning topics such as service access, mental health, rurality, children and culture.

In the short time since its inception, the Authentic Voice Panel has actively contributed to a wide range of work, including supporting both SafeLives and external organisations to review their policies, procedures and outputs through a survivor lens, ensuring victims’ voices are heard and listened to. Following the conclusion of Whole Lives Scotland, the panel will continue to carry out it’s essential work via further secured funding.

Agencies who have consulted with the AV Panel

- ✓ Social Security Scotland
- ✓ Police Scotland
- ✓ The Improvement Service
- ✓ Scottish Government
- ✓ Inspiring Scotland



I felt comfort from them. They understood and listened and made me realise the abusive relationship wasn’t normal and I had something to fight for. My son and my life.

SURVIVOR, (National Survivor Survey, 2020)

The Authentic Voice Panel

Words from a member of the Authentic Voice Panel...

“I wanted to become a part of the Authentic Voice Panel as I feel that no one is better equipped than someone with experience of domestic abuse, to be able to give a real-life point of view on things that survivors experience during and after leaving an abusive relationship. By taking part and being involved in this panel I am helping to make our voice heard and if my voice can help change things for others, I know that my struggle was not in vain.

I’ve really enjoyed being part of the group, it has allowed me to make connections with all kinds of different people and being able to listen to other opinions and perceptions of situations that perhaps I would have been closed off to previously. We have become a real team even though our meetings so far have been via zoom! It’s reassuring to know that together we can help make a difference, to help shape and change responses and let others understand the impact that domestic abuse can have on someone’s life.

I feel that my voice is heard, and I bring a different point of view. As a working-class woman, my experience is different from others on the panel; we come from all walks of life but share one common goal; to make a difference to the lives of people who are affected with domestic abuse. I feel so proud to be a part of that.

One of the main benefits of taking part for me is that it reiterates that abuse can happen to anyone; being part of the team and having this common bond and the fire in our bellies to make a real change. I would never have crossed paths with many of the women on this panel, but I am so glad I have; it has opened my mind so much and changed my perception and understanding of domestic abuse.

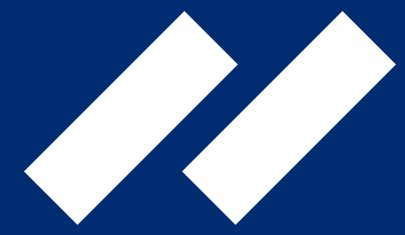
I’ve been involved in quite a few projects with the AV Panel and can honestly say I have enjoyed every one of them! The engaging with media course was a complete eye opener for me; I learned how to frame principles and how to work

on the message I want to deliver, how to present myself to the media both on a televised interview and on a recorded broadcast. The experience was invaluable and has really given me the confidence to have my voice heard and do media work in the future. I also really enjoyed being part of an academic research project, learning about how data is received and whittled down to gather statistics.

The last thing that I would like to add is that I feel so humbled and honoured to be part of the Authentic Voice Panel. Together our voices are being heard and speaking from experience can help mould and change things for the future.”

What our stakeholders say

The impact of Whole Lives



We have been able to contribute to the research to ensure the voice of survivors runs through it and impacts their experience and experiences of others.”

The impact of Whole Lives



I was always kept up to date and really valued the discussion groups as it helped identify gaps within our area. Since this time, we have two Community Safety Nurses in post who attend ... to offer direct mental health support to staff and service users.



We have been able to access vital funding through Circle funding. This has been an absolute lifeline to people we work with in enabling them to recover from financial abuse, increase their capacity for safety and move on from abuse.



The impact will be long lasting and inform future practice in this area.



The learning from Whole Lives Scotland has been invaluable to Scotland's Violence Against Women sector. The findings from SafeLives' National Survivor Survey has helped to shape local and national discussions on the pathways of support that need to be in place in local communities across Scotland to help ensure that all women and children who have experienced domestic abuse receive the support they need, at the time they need it. The learning from the work in Renfrewshire, Stirling and Aberdeen City has been particularly powerful in highlighting the additional barriers that survivors of domestic abuse who have multiple and/ or complex needs are likely experience in accessing support and the importance of ensuring that a whole system, person-centred approach is taken to supporting women moving forward, with professionals across all sectors having a key role to play in enabling this to happen.



I have used them (thematic reports) in my own reflective practice to consider the needs and agency response to people experiencing domestic abuse, and will continue use them to challenge, where appropriate, agency response to survivors with learning disabilities.



We have been able to correlate our findings with SafeLives, have an open discission space on why that might differ or align, and receive direct input and knowledge into our ... project, widening the reach and improving outcomes of the project itself and all its stakeholders.



We were able to use them (thematic reports) in our funding bids.



We have also benefited from SafeLives tech appeal, and our advocacy partners were able to receive phones and data giving them a safe way to access services.

Over the course of the Whole Lives project

38

services in Scotland benefitted from accessing the **NatWest Circle fund**

12

accessed phones and tablets through the **Vodafone Tech Appeal**.



Ending domestic abuse

Thank you to our funder, the National Lottery Community Fund. Thanks to all our expert partners and colleagues, working both locally and nationally, who supported and participated in this work. We are also grateful for the insight and guidance provided from the Scottish Advisory Group. Most importantly, thank you to the Authentic Voice Panel and victims and survivors of domestic abuse who took part in Whole Lives Scotland. Your story matters and we will all keep working to make sure your voice is heard – together we can make a difference.



Email: Scotland@safelives.org.uk
Scottish registered charity number: SC048291