

"Like a bird that has been freed from my cage,  
I can finally fly"



Social Impact Report 2015

# Ascent Advice and Counselling

For women and girls affected by domestic & sexual violence

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

The study shows that Ascent Advice and Counselling (A&C) has generated real social value for the people of London in the first 2 years of its operation, providing valuable services to thousands of women and girls affected by violence across every London borough. It also provides a platform for further learning to ensure all women and girls have the best possible support and clear choices and pathways to aid their safety, well-being and recovery

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## Findings

### Service Model:

- Delivering Pan-London advice and counselling services to women and girls affected by Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is effective in widening the reach of services.
- A partnership approach is an effective way of delivering specialist advice and counselling services to women and girls affected by all forms of violence.
- The hub and spoke model increases access for women and girls who need to move between borough boundaries for safety and other reasons and offers more choice around how and when they can access services irrespective of borough connection.
- Effective outcomes and high beneficiary satisfaction are largely due to the professionalism and expertise contained within the partnership.
- This partnership of specialist VAWG and BME organisations creates a vital additional resource at a borough level which enhances the borough's ability to respond effectively to all forms of VAWG.
- An approach to service delivery based on service user needs, enables more responsive services. Recovery is not a linear process and services users' experiences are all unique so it is vital that support is tailored according to need.

### Data collection/research recommendations:

- Systematic stakeholder consultation, especially with service users and ex-service users, should be integrated into monitoring and data collection methods as this provides the vital qualitative data needed to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of services.
- Data collection to show the number of women who are parents and the outcomes for them and their children would provide useful additional data which is currently absent.
- Further research on the impact of Ascent A&C services on the children of service users would be beneficial.
- Consideration should be given to the streamlining of data collection methods and the use of data collected. A focus on qualitative data over quantitative would enable greater flexibility of service delivery. Any new model should be widely shared to inform a more outcome-focused approach to data collection across services.

## Service Delivery recommendations:

- It is vital to ensure that routes into Ascent A&C are as clear and simple as possible for all service users and that these are well advertised.
- Collecting and sharing good practice across the partnership and beyond would encourage shared learning and foster continuous improvement.
- Extended delivery including greater evening access and childcare would increase accessibility and reduce isolation.
- Strategic integration of Pan-London services such as Ascent A&C to maximise effectiveness at a local level would be beneficial. The partnership is in a unique position to collect evidence of the implications of service reduction and to work closely with London Councils and borough strategic leads to identify the gaps and to lobby for more and complementary support services.

## Background

Ascent Advice and Counselling (Ascent A&C) is a Pan-London partnership funded by London Councils within the London Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Consortium.

The Ascent A&C partners bring considerable experience and expertise of working with women and girls affected by sexual and domestic violence, and in particular includes a number of organisations run by and for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women and girls. Solace Women's Aid, is the lead partner, responsible for project development and management, as well as for liaison with the funder, London Councils. The partners include:

- Ashiana Network (Ashiana)
- Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)
- Chinese Information and Advice Centre (CIAC)
- EACH Counselling and Support (EACH)
- Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)
- IMECE Women's Centre (IMECE)
- Jewish Women's Aid (JWA)
- Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS).
- The Nia Project (Nia)
- Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC)
- Rights of Women (ROW)
- Solace Women's Aid (Solace)
- Southall Black Sisters (SBS)
- Women and Girls Network (WGN)

Between April 2013 and March 2015 Ascent A&C provided free, confidential advice and counselling services in every London borough. The Partnership supported 24,206 women and girls who had experienced, or were at risk of, domestic and sexual violence, generating a Social Value of £26,992,554. This equates to £5.99 for every pound invested through improved outcomes for service users.

Two advice hubs provide a first point of contact, by phone and email. ‘Spokes’ in each London borough provide local services, including advice and support, group work, one to one counselling, financial support for women with No Recourse to Public Funds, legal support and advice and specialist services delivered by BME organisations in a variety of languages. Rights of Women (ROW) provide legal guides and training to professionals working with women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

This study considers the first 2 years of the Partnership from April 2013-2015. During this period the Partnership received £2,695,642 (£1,347,821 funding per annum) from London Councils. This was supplemented by around £1.39 million of resources from the Ascent A&C partners; £850,000 of rooms and space provided by other organisations who worked with the Partnership and around 13,000 hours of volunteer time.

## Methodology

Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology was used to assess the social value created by Ascent A&C. This involved an analysis of the project monitoring data for over 24,000 service users, as well as carrying out in-depth interviews and focus groups with over 50 service users who had used the full range of Ascent A&C services. Some service users were still accessing services, while others had ended support up to 20 months earlier. Partners were also interviewed as a group and other stakeholders were consulted by email or electronic survey.

Stakeholders described the outcomes they had experienced as a result of Ascent A&C, how these had been produced and how important they were to them. Their feedback was used to construct ‘chains of change’ and to define the outcomes. This was then combined with additional data from the consultation, monitoring databases and other studies to assess:

- How long each outcome would last and the extent to which it would decline over time
- The extent to which the outcome might have occurred without Ascent A&C
- The extent to which the outcome was created at the expense of other people/organisations
- How far other people or organisations contributed to the creation of each outcome.

Information from Global Value Exchange [www.globalvaluexchange.org](http://www.globalvaluexchange.org) and similar sources was then used to produce a final value for each outcome, using SROI methodology.

A Value Map was constructed from the data, showing a value for each outcome as well as a total value. This was then refined based on feedback from Ascent A&C partners to produce the net value of the impact over 5 years and the final version was used within the Report.

## Impact for service users

Service users identified three main outcomes from the services they received. The value of these is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. These were:

- Increased autonomy, independence and capability – **Value £10,463,254**
- Improved mental health and self-care - **Value £11,225,394**
- Better parenting and relationship with children - **Value £7,235,452.**

The vast majority (90%) of those women, who had left Ascent A&C services some time prior to the interviews, said their new confidence and agency had increased their resilience and they were better able to deal with life as a result of their support. Women who had experienced depression, stress and anxiety, as well as those with serious, diagnosed mental health issues, reported they were better able to manage their own stress/ mental health conditions, were more relaxed and had a better sense of self-worth. They were taking less medication; able to recognise when their condition became acute and to take appropriate action, leading to fewer episodes of illness. Women with children said Ascent A&C provision had improved their ability to parent effectively, which had been damaged or inhibited by the violence and abuse they had suffered. The support received had improved their confidence and communication skills and reduced the stresses and tensions within the family unit,

The diagram below summarises the chain of change which service users described as leading to these outcomes. The process of change differed from person to person, was complex and generally not linear. Changes which seemed negative in the short term generally led to positive outcomes in the longer term and these were broadly similar regardless of the provision which had been accessed, and the immediate outputs from it.



## Chain of Change for Service Users

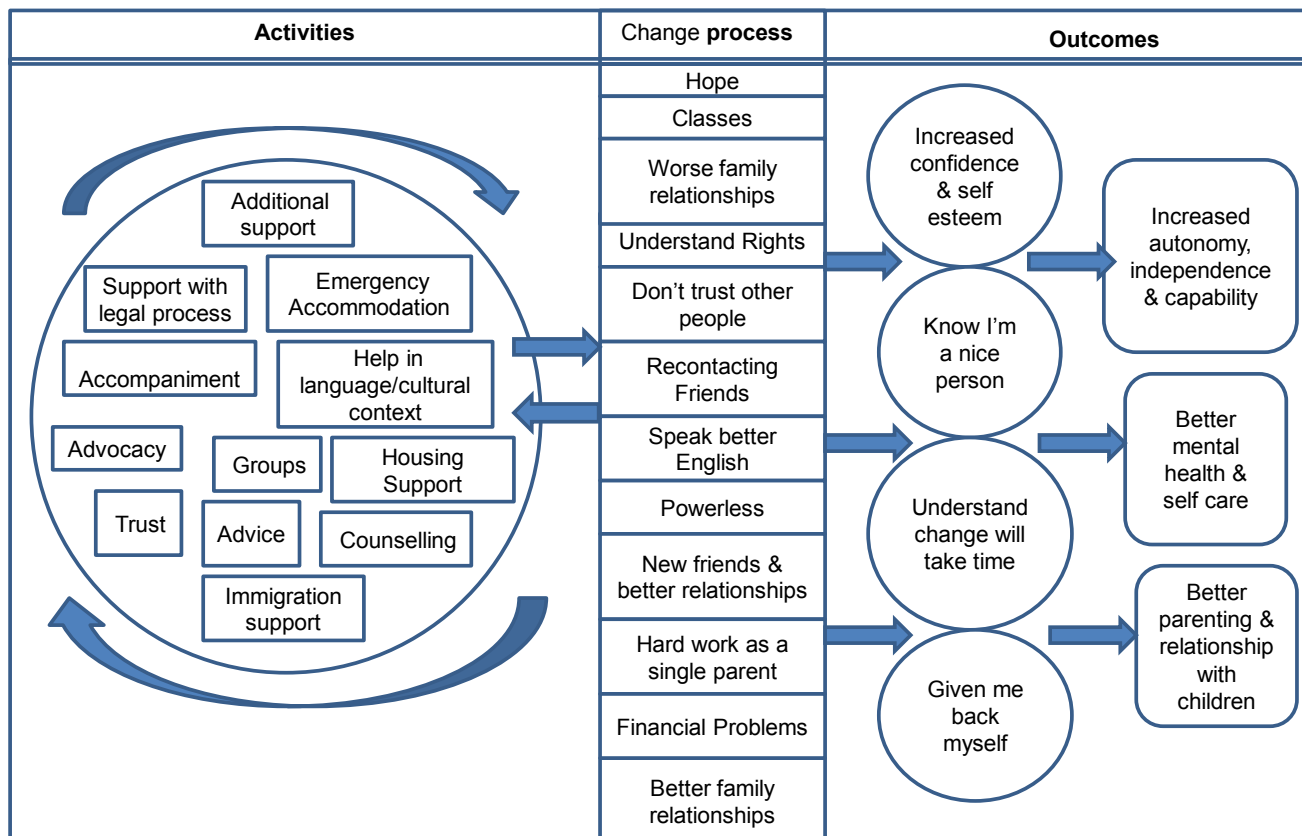


Diagram 1 Service user chain of change

The women interviewed learnt about the help Ascent A&C services offered through various routes, but not all had chosen to access help straightaway. Most of those interviewed had accessed the advice service along with other forms of help, such as counselling, casework and/or advocacy. For women with limited knowledge and experience of the UK cultural norms and criminal justice system (younger women born and educated in the UK, as well as those who had migrated into the country) the practical and legal advice Ascent A&C partners supplied was pivotal. The trusted relationships which women developed with the staff and volunteers was very important in achieving the outcomes, as was the specialist knowledge and expertise brought by the staff.

Women interviewed described their experiences of Ascent A&C as continuous journeys, rather than a string of different, disjointed services and attributed the outcomes they experienced to the organisation they had worked with most closely, even where they had clearly been supported by more than one Ascent A&C partner. The size and scope of the partnership enabled women to access the services required whilst remaining attached to the primary partner organisation. Women reported that Ascent workers had also effectively coordinated other services for them, such as help from the Police, solicitors, other counsellors, Social Services; local mental health services; Housing Associations and other housing providers; local faith groups and Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs). This was vital to

women's ability to navigate their way through the system as women described limited confidence, skills and knowledge of these processes.

Women whose support had recently ended were usually still in the process of recovery from the abuse and their circumstances had not always changed for the better. Even though women's safety had often improved, financial and personal issues, child contact with the perpetrator and immigration problems often remained unresolved. Some regretted that Ascent A&C support had ended, particularly those who had accessed counselling or 1-1 support. Despite this, most reported that their lives had been improved by Ascent A&C's help and support. They had learned to trust; were more relaxed; less isolated; spoke better English; could communicate better; had become stronger; knew where to get help and had their own home or a safe place to live. Many were excited by their new found independence and autonomy.

### Impact for the participants of Rights of Women (ROW) legal training

ROW training participants identified one main outcome from the training they received. The value of this is described below and within the report, using SROI methodology. This was:

- Increased ability to provide more effective legal advice to service users. **Value £70,514.**

Professionals trained by ROW said that the training, and particularly the high quality training materials, had enabled them to understand changes to legal processes that they then shared with their colleagues and volunteers. Trainees reported that as a result of the training they felt competent to deal with the most straightforward legal cases themselves and were able to identify and quickly refer women with more complex needs to appropriate, specialist legal help. This assistance was particularly useful at a time when options for access to affordable legal advice for service users had become severely limited.

### Impact for Volunteers

Volunteers identified two main outcomes from the services they received. The value of these is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. These were:

- Increased work skills leading to improved career prospects: **Value £134,308.**
- More fulfilled: **Value £53,288**

Volunteers in Ascent A&C partner organisations worked in a variety of roles: as volunteer advisors and counsellors; on the phone line; legal advice line and in administrative roles. Regardless of role, all those who responded reported similar outcomes. Volunteers said they had gained valuable, transferable knowledge and work skills as a result of being trained and trusted to carry out crucial, responsible roles within Ascent A&C partners' teams. They also said they had experienced personal changes as a result of volunteering, becoming less judgemental; understanding more about other cultures and people from different backgrounds and making new friends with similar values.

## Impact for all Ascent A&C partners

Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the Partnership. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Platform for more joint working and future partnership working. **Value £34,186**

Partner organisations said that the experience of establishing and developing the Partnership had been challenging but that, by delivering services together, they began to realise that they had shared, feminist principles and a shared mission. Partners had changed and adapted their views and positions and learned to listen to and mutually respect the voice and views of others. As a result, partners felt that plans and projects had increasingly incorporated all partners' views; they had become jointly accountable and developed shared principles and passion, enhancing their response to service users. The Partnership had helped make all the organisations more sustainable, providing a good basis for future joint working.

## Impact for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations

Ascent A&C partners from BME organisations identified one main outcome from the Partnership. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Specialist BME organisations are better able to preserve services under commissioning - **Value £208,000**

Ascent A&C partners from BME organisations identified that negotiations had led to improved communications between all partners resulting in a more equal dialogue, with partners feeling they had become valuable, trusted and respected. This had resulted in better processes, standards and structures in their own organisations as they became more accountable to the Partnership enabling them to secure long- term funding for their services. The Partnership had also given them better access to the other consortium members, leading to improved joint working. This had enabled them to continue to provide culturally specific domestic and sexual violence services led by and for BME communities.

## Impact for organisations working with the Ascent A&C partners.

Organisations working with Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the services they received. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Reduced pressure on other services. **Value £589,850**

Many organisations, including children's centres, housing providers and charities, working alongside Ascent A&C often provided rooms or space from where partners could deliver services. In return they reported that they received practical help and advice from the Ascent outreach workers who were located there. Respondents from these organisations said that Ascent A&C had improved support for their own service users and enabled the development of new working relationships and the sharing of

expertise. It had become easier for their staff to refer their clients to Ascent A&C for help and support and they had increased confidence in the services their clients received. The close working relationships which evolved across a variety of organisations across London fostered closer, cross-sector collaboration and the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise which have eased pressure on their own services.

## Impact for boroughs and commissioners

Commissioners and stakeholders from London boroughs working with Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the services they received. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Improved response to service users adding value to locally commissioned services -

**Value £3,453,516.**

Commissioners and stakeholders from London boroughs, reported that their relationships with Ascent A&C partner organisations had improved markedly over the lifetime of the project and they had seen a real commitment to make the service work. This had led to greatly enhanced services, particularly for women who move between boroughs and for those who were not previously able to access appropriate and effective help and support locally. As a result, commissioners and stakeholders from boroughs were able to provide much better services which respond more effectively to the needs of their residents.

Between April 2013 and March 2015 the Ascent Advice and Counselling service (Ascent A&C) supported 24,206 women who had experienced or were at risk of domestic and sexual violence across London, creating £26,992,554 of social value. This report explores how this was achieved and makes recommendations to maximise the future social value of Ascent A&C.

## The Ascent Advice and Counselling project

Ascent Advice and Counselling (Ascent A&C) is a partnership within the London Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Consortium, funded by London Councils under strand 2.2: 'Sexual and Domestic Violence, advice, outreach, drop-in and support for access to service.' It aims to 'increase the safety and aid recovery into independence of women and girls affected by sexual and domestic violence and abuse across London' by providing front-line services and holistic advice, counselling and support.

In 2011-12 members of the Ascent A&C partnership carried out a mapping exercise to identify need for domestic and sexual violence services, by borough, using reported incidents to the Police as well as information on existing service provision across London. This identified that:

- Women experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence moved frequently from place to place. Where they moved across borough boundaries, either through choice or in order to access accommodation or to stay safe, it became increasingly difficult for them to access services.
- Existing services in London were insufficient to meet the need.

This exercise subsequently informed the distribution of Ascent A&C services & the allocation of resources to Ascent A&C partners.

The Ascent A&C partners have considerable experience of working with women and girls affected by sexual and domestic violence, as well as considerable experience and expertise in working with Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) women and girls. Solace Women's Aid, as lead partner, is responsible for project development and management, as well as for liaison with the funder, London Councils.

The partners are:

- Ashiana Network (Ashiana)
- Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)
- Chinese Information and Advice Centre (CIAC)
- EACH Counselling and Support (EACH)
- Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)
- IMECE Women's Centre (IMECE)

- Jewish Women's Aid (JWA)
- Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS).
- The Nia Project (Nia)
- Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC)
- Rights of Women (ROW)
- Solace Women's Aid (Solace)
- Southall Black Sisters (SBS)
- Women and Girls Network (WGN)

Between April 2013 and March 2015, Ascent A&C provided free, confidential services in person, by phone and email:

- Carried out risk and need assessments and provided immediate and appropriate safety advice and support to women and girls aged 14 and over to make informed choices.
- Provided ongoing group work in all localities, to increase awareness of VAWG and its impact and to reduce isolation and increase self-confidence.
- Provided one to one counselling (up to 16 sessions per person) and group work to support women emotionally and therapeutically, enabling them to recover from the trauma they had experienced.
- Provided women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) with a place of safety and support whilst dealing with their status.
- Provided professionals and the women and girls they work with, with legal support and advice, in order to effectively use the protection afforded them by the law.
- Provided specialist services to BME women to ensure wider access to services

Services were delivered using a hub and spoke model, with 2 advice hubs: one in Ealing operated by WGN and the other in Islington operated by Solace Women's Aid. These provided a first point of contact by phone and email, immediate practical and emotional support and signposting to services. The hub also provided advice to professionals about Ascent and other services available to women and girls in need. All Ascent A&C partners provided local services through 'spokes' in the London boroughs, as well as help and advice to access other services from statutory and voluntary sector providers. Service users with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) were able to access limited assistance via emergency funds of approximately £27,000 per year administered by Southall Black Sisters. BME specialist organisations provided services in a number of languages, including: English, Hebrew, Turkish, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Farsi, Arabic, Kurdish, Dari, Pasto, Tamil, Cantonese and Mandarin. Rights of Women provided free and confidential legal advice and information via a dedicated London advice line and a website. They also provided legal guides and training to professionals working with women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

Between April 2013 and March 2015 Ascent A&C received £2,695,642.00 (£1,347,821 funding per annum) from London Councils. This was supplemented by around £1.39 million of additional resources from the Ascent A&C partners in the form of additional staff time for work with service users, management, project management and supervision time; time spent on monitoring and evaluation; Human Resources (HR), finance and administrative support; small capital items and Information Technology (IT) equipment and support. Additionally, £850,000 of rooms and space was provided by other organisations who worked closely with the partnership and around 13,000 hours of volunteer time.

This study considers the first 2 years of the Partnership from April 2013-2015.

## Measuring Social Value - methodology

This study used Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology to evaluate the social value created by the Ascent A&C partnership in the first 2 years of its operation.

SROI enables organisations to estimate value which is not captured in market prices and is based on to 7 generally accepted social accounting principles:

- Involve stakeholders. The people who are affected by project are best placed to say what the value of a project is for them and how it should be measured
- Understand what changes. Organisations must understand and be able to explain all the changes they create through their projects (positive and negative, intended and unintended) and should be able to evidence these.
- Value the things that matter. The analysis should be based on the outcomes which stakeholders themselves value and the relative importance of these to them
- Only include what is material. Only include information and evidence that gives a true and fair picture of the impact created.
- Do not over-claim. Only claim the value that the project activities are responsible for creating.
- Be transparent. Be accurate and honest in demonstrating the basis on which the analysis is constructed.
- Verify the result. Report to and discuss conclusions with stakeholders

### Stakeholders involvement

Ascent A&C partners identified a full list of stakeholders and agreed to consult those who were the most influential on and interested in the service.

The consultant and staff from partner organisations interviewed 35 service users by phone and collected the views of a further 33 women in 2 focus groups. The sample included women of different ages, backgrounds and abilities who had collectively used the full range of Ascent A&C services. Those who took part were at different stages of their involvement with Ascent A&C some were still accessing services, while others had ended support up to 20 months earlier.



This approach effectively captured the experience of service users accessing most Ascent A&C services. It was more challenging to explore the impact of the 2 advice hubs and the legal advice line because many calls are one-off. However, at least 23% of service users interviewed had used the hubs, enabling their contribution to creating social value to be recognised within this study.

Representatives from 10 Ascent partner organisations explored the outcomes the project has created for them and their organisations as a group. Other stakeholders were consulted by email and/or electronic survey.

All stakeholders were asked to list, explain and value the changes and outcomes they experienced as a result of their contact with Ascent A&C. Their responses were used to:

- Define outcomes for each stakeholder group;
- Construct chains of change to show how these were produced;
- Value each outcome, using resources such as Global Value Exchange <http://www.globalvaluexchange.org/>; the Troubled Families database: [http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/New Economy: The Troubled Families Cost Database, 2012](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/New Economy: The Troubled Families Cost Database, 2012); other UK government data or data generally available on line. All values were chosen as being for similar stakeholders and context and moderated by stakeholders' ratings on a 1-10 scale (with 10 being the highest) to show the importance that those who took part in the study attached to them.

Values were further modified using information from the stakeholders and other research to take account of:

- The changes/outcomes which would have happened anyway;
- The extent to which the value was created at the expense of other people or organisations;
- The extent to which other people or organisations had contributed to the change;
- How long the outcomes were expected to last and how much they expected it to decrease over this period.

This data was combined with quantitative and qualitative data collected through quarterly reporting over the 2 years. A Value Map was constructed from the data, showing a value for each outcome as well as a total value. This was then refined based on feedback from Ascent A&C partners to produce the net value of the impact over 5 years and the final version was used within the Report. The assumptions which underpin it have been separately checked to ensure the model is robust and the judgements involved in estimating the total social value are transparent and verifiable.

## Ascent Social Value in Context

This section of the report discusses the findings of this evaluation in the context of the results of other published studies to validate the findings and give a wider framework for the consideration of the social value of the project.

[Finding the Costs of Freedom](#) tracked 100 women who had accessed Solace domestic violence services over a 3 year period, 2011-14, immediately predating the start of Ascent A&C, interviewing them in 4 waves. It set out to find:

- The factors which support their long term settlement, how they interrelated and the points in the process that were particularly important.
- When obstacles to resettlement occurred and how they could be overcome.
- How community resources could best be developed and integrated to provide long term support to survivor's settlement and independence.

It described a similar process by which the service users interviewed experienced change. After seeking help women reported an initial expansion in their space for action (their ability to parent; sense of self; community; friends and family; help seeking; competence; wellbeing and safety and financial situation) followed by a period of challenges which limited space for action and then a new period of expansion towards the end of the study. It also confirms the findings of this study that:

- There is no single story of domestic abuse and no single formula for rebuilding lives.
- Separation from perpetrator does not, in itself, keep women safe.
- An individualised support package (a 'basket of support' in the 2014 study) comprising key workers, floating support, legal services and IDVAs is effective in enabling women to feel safe, work with other agencies and deal with legacy of abuse.

Finding the Costs of Freedom also listed a set of 'foundation stones' for building lives after domestic violence which are similar to the links in the chains of change described by women in this study.

- Having opportunities to explore domestic violence and its legacy through counselling and also with family and friends.
- Being and feeling safe.
- Being settled and able to make a new home.
- Improved health/ability to manage health conditions.

- Children in new schools, less anxious and able to make and see friends, safe child contact.
- (Re) entering employment and/or education and training.
- A tight trusted network of family and friends.
- Increased financial security.

Both studies found that recovery was a long and complex process. Most of those interviewed for this report said that they felt safer and many had new homes and said that they were settled, however, many had little contact with family and friends. Those who had left provision for some time had, however, begun to develop new networks and relationships, in many instances due to Ascent A&C partners' role in introducing women to each other and to local faith groups, women's groups and others. Only 4 women were working at the point at which they were interviewed, but almost half had previously worked: the majority had lost their job as a result of the abuse (2 had worked for the perpetrator) or because they were no longer able to work due to the effects of abuse. A significant number were unable to work because of their immigration status or because they spoke little or no English and 2 women were studying.

Domestic and sexual abuse services have been the subject of several SROI studies in the UK and Canada. Survivors Manchester completed an SROI report on the social value created by their service for male victims of sexual violence in 2014. A 2010 SROI measured and valued work by Women's groups in Northern Ireland and reports similar mental health, autonomy and resilience outcomes.

Most relevant are NEF's study on the Social Valuation of Refuge's services for Survivors of Domestic Abuse (May 2013) and Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary and community organisations November 2011 Women's Resource Centre.

The first of these, evaluates the full range of Refuge's services, including community outreach, IDVA, helpline and culturally specific services. It used similar methodology to this study and reported the following outcomes for service users produced by a similar, complex chain of change:

- Feeling safe.
- Improved physical health.
- Improved mental health.
- Reduced alcohol use.
- Reconnected with family/expanded network of friends.
- Confidence to participate/reduced stigma.
- Freedom from financial abuse.
- Access to benefits.

It also explores and values the outcomes for the children of service users, which was not possible in this study, and estimates of the social value Refuge creates for the State. Although we recognise that Ascent A&C must create value for the State we chose not to measure this as it was considered that it was unlikely to be material to the stakeholder group: even an operation on the scale of Ascent A&C is unlikely to make a real difference to the operation of Social, Health and Criminal Justice services.

Hidden Value explores the social value of the services provided by women's organisations, finds that these play an important role in the voluntary and community sector and advocates for continued funding for them. The research for this, carried out in 2009-10, coordinated by the Women's Resource Centre (WRC), took place in London and included 3 organisations which subsequently became Ascent A&C partners: Ashiana; RASASC and WGN.

While the findings are not directly comparable, as the services reviewed went beyond Ascent A&C's sexual and domestic violence/abuse services, it finds similar outcomes: increased independence/autonomy; self-confidence and self-esteem; improved physical and mental health; increased economic independence; improvements in social interactions, personal wellbeing and emotional safety; suicide reduction and improved parenting. Similarly, it shows that specialist BME organisations have a unique reach within communities and enable people who may have little information about their rights and no access to mainstream support to access help.

Some organisations working alongside Ascent A&C partners have also and reported their social value. The Social Housing provider Viridian uses the HACT Wellbeing Evaluation Tool to measure how far their work increases a person's wellbeing. This is a methodology based on the analysis of the datasets of existing, national surveys, rather than stakeholder interviews and the outcomes and the value of those outcomes relate to a much wider group than the service users in this study.

Other recent research endorses the Ascent A&C approach and describes the changing context in which it has operated. In February 2015 Women's Aid produced 'Change that Lasts', which draws on 'Finding the Costs of Freedom', among other sources to propose a model for domestic abuse services set in the wider social and community context. This advocates an approach based on enabling women's own situation, resources and strategies. It restates the potential for damaging effects of abuse to persist long after the abusive relationship has ended and points out that short-term incident focused responses cannot even begin to deal with these. It reports that professional and agency responses are often inconsistent and ineffective because of the complexity of women's situations and needs, and describes how women can be enabled to recover from abuse and develop autonomy and resilience through women-defined advocacy. 'Change that Lasts' recommends a coordinated, holistic, person-centred approach by specialist and other agencies within wide geographic boundaries to enable women to build their personal and social capital and resilience. The model proposed has significant similarities to the way in which Ascent A&C works, in that it recommends:

- Disclosure and access to support in a wide range of locations.

- Understanding of the different routes survivors might take to freedom from abuse.
- Removal of barriers on the journey to safety and independence.
- Building on the individual strengths, promotes independence and reduces reliance on state resources.
- Providing support for a truly community coordinated response.
- Focus on outcomes for survivors not agencies.

## Impact and Values

The outcomes and the way in which they have been created and the values for each stakeholder are discussed throughout the report.

### Impact for service users

Service users identified three main outcomes from the services they received. The value of these is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. These were:

- Increased autonomy, independence and capability - **Value £10,463,254.23**
- Improved mental health and self-care - **Value ££11,225,394.33**
- Better parenting and relationship with children - **Value £7,235,452.01**

### Chains of change

The diagram (below) drawn by a service user shows the process is seldom, if ever linear. As one issue is addressed and solved another often presents itself.

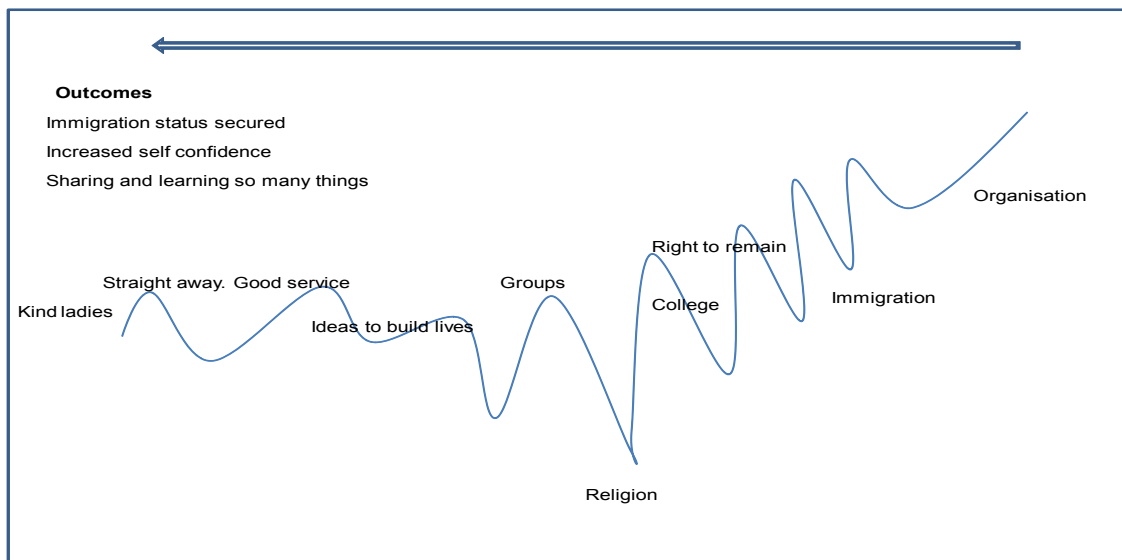


Diagram 2. Example of service user chain of change

In this example, (reading from right to left) initial problems with immigration after the woman left her husband were solved when she received the Right to Remain and she then started college. However, she still identified an issue with her religion and how she and the rest of her community viewed what had

happened to her. The group of friends she has made through Ascent A&C provision played a big part in stabilising her life (the flatter line at the left hand side) and in achieving the 3 outcomes she recorded.

The same exercise used with the other group, showed that, although women may have had different experiences, they had similar chains of change. Two fairly typical examples from this group are shown below.

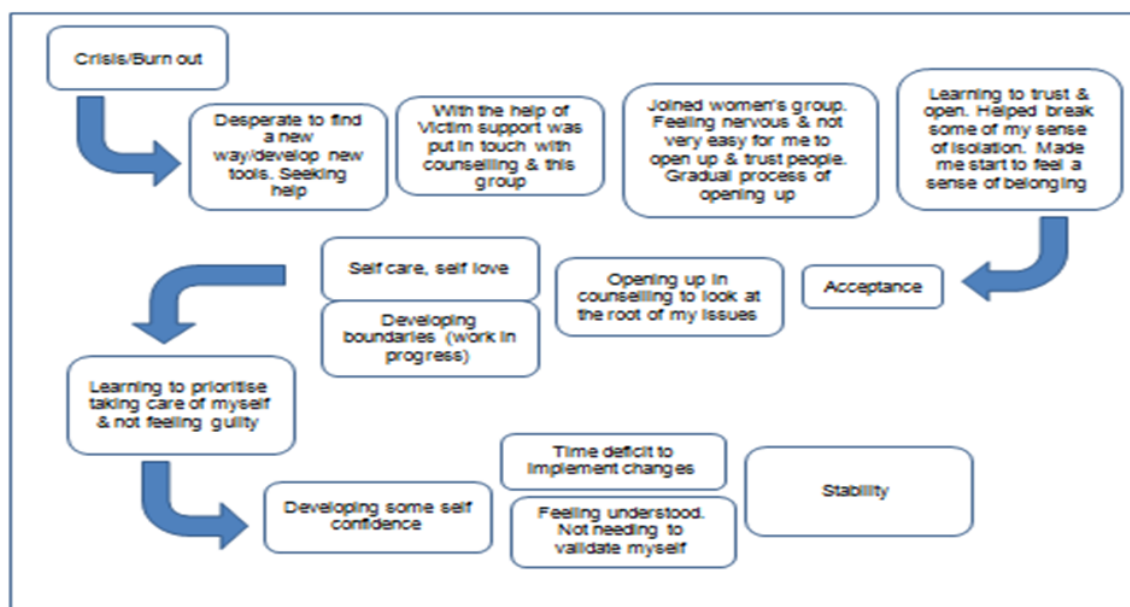
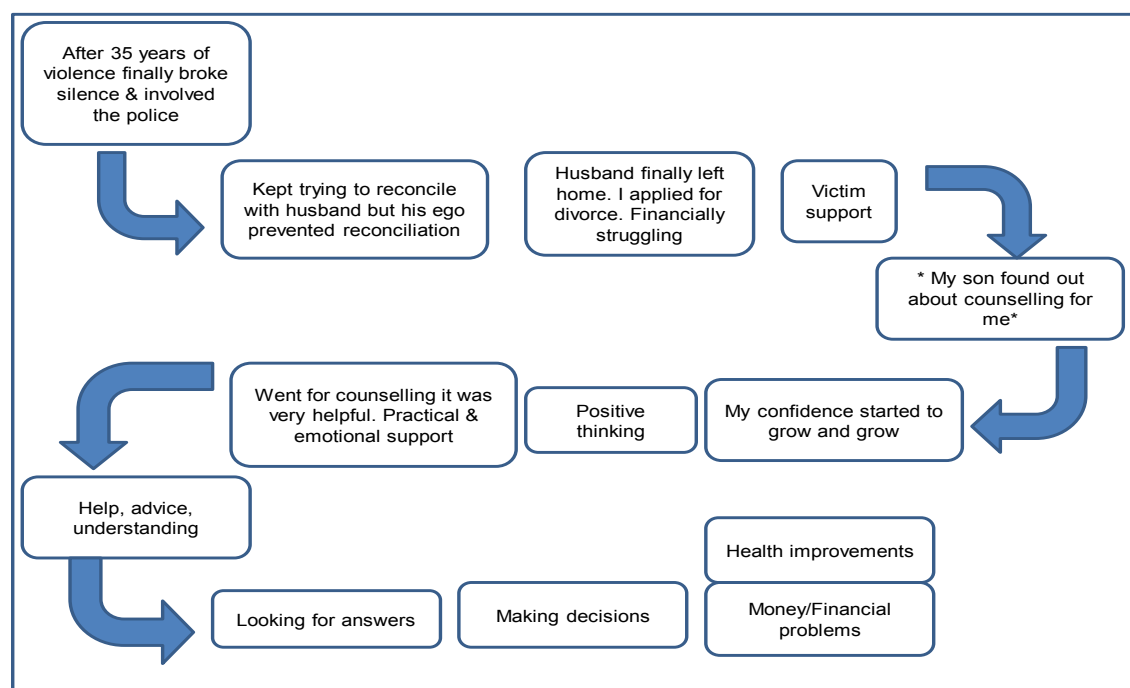


Diagram 3. Example of Service user chain of change



\* The point at which the woman began to work with the Ascent A&C partner

Diagram 4. Example of Service user chain of change

Combining these and other examples from the group work with the chains of change described by other service users produced the following composite chain of change.

## Chain of Change for Service Users

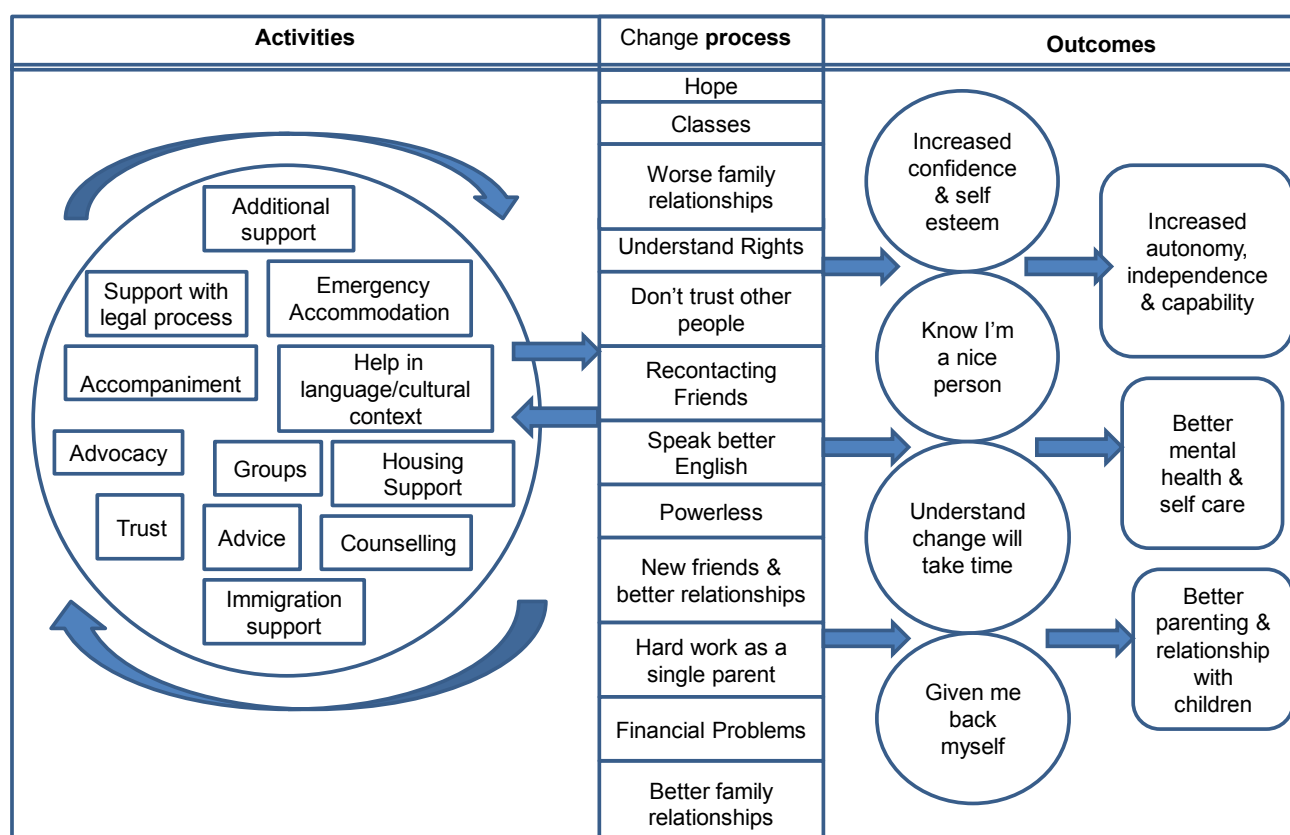


Diagram 5. Service User Chain of Change

The diagram above summarises the Chain of Change which service users described. Although the process of change differed from person to person the experiences they reported were similar. These are discussed in detail below.

### Accessing services

Women generally accessed a particular element of help when they were in crisis or immediate need, but once in contact with an Ascent A&C partner, they could and did access the other elements of help and support. They came to know about the services on offer through a variety of routes: internet research; newspaper publicity; the recommendations of family, friends, community groups; Children's and Immigration Centres; One Stop Shops, Victim Support; the Police; Citizen's Advice Bureaux; Social Services; GPs and more. Several of those who had issues with UK residency had been referred by Doctors of the World. Interviewees explained how the referral system had worked for them and described the extent of the personalised and practical support that they had received.



*'It was hard to contact the service as I am a private person but the worker was experienced and she gave me hope. I didn't know what help was available out there until I rang and as a result I now feel more confident and better. Before I phoned [partner organisation] I was feeling sad and low and things were getting worse with my partner and the impact this was having on me and the kids. Once I decided to make the call things started to change. I spoke to someone who was helpful and experienced and knew what they were talking about. Being able to speak to someone outside of the situation was really helpful and to hear that I had rights and options'.*

*'The advice worker was there to talk to and she put me in touch with the right people such as legal and housing. She provided a listening ear, had experience and knowledge to give good, accurate advice. She was helpful and excellent. I also got referred to [partner organisation] Legal Team and this input had a really good effect. Going through a legal process and having court papers and orders seemed to have a big impact on my ex and he suddenly took it all more seriously. This gave me strength'*

For some, it took time, even after they knew that services were available, to decide to ask for help. The relationship they had developed with the worker/volunteer who had originally dealt with their case was described as really influential in encouraging them to eventually call back and seek help.

*'I called Social Services because I didn't know where to go and was referred to [partner organisation]. I felt comfortable to talk to [the] support worker. She listened and questioned. I told her really personal stuff. She recognised the seriousness of the situation, confirmed my thoughts and was patient, open and understanding. She followed up my call by text when I didn't get back in touch: that made all the difference. Also a neighbour was in a violent relationship and when the police called and I told them my situation, they told me to go for help. So I called back [the worker] who remembered me and calmed me down. She talked me through what to do, advised me, did a risk assessment (I was high risk) asked what I wanted to do... She pointed me in the right direction. [She] gave me an amazing, personal service. Really personal. I never actually met her but I felt I knew her. She gave me practical support. I felt believed and understood.'*

*'I was given numbers to find help by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). I have no immigration status so it was difficult to find help. ..I spoke to lots of people who couldn't help... I spoke to D. who understood (she was the only one who did). She was genuinely concerned for me and didn't just pass me on as the others had done. The police and council had found me emergency help but I had nowhere to go and no money... so I phoned the advice hub again and asked for D. who wasn't there. Because I trusted her G. put me in contact with her again. D. understood and found me a hostel place. She really tried, was realistic, kept her promise and phoned me back, even after work on Friday afternoon to make sure I was OK'*

In another case the gradual escalation of risk prompted one person to call back.

*'My cousin was supportive she let me stay there she told me about your service. She gave me the courage to call [partner organisation]. I called but I didn't give my name. I was scared that I will not have the courage, the courage to do this alone. After a few weeks I knew I didn't have a choice he was going to hurt me'*

A number of women were referred directly to Ascent A&C for counselling services;

*'I first contacted my GP regarding depression and once I spoke to her she mentioned that I am in an abusive relationship. I sought help from [partner organisation] and they helped me with counselling sessions. I also met an advice worker who told me about my options.'*

However, not all of these required immediate, urgent help.

*'I was recommended to [the advice hub] by a friend I knew from rehab who was supported by them. I checked out their provision on internet and contacted them on line. I was put in touch with A. She was the first person who seemed to understand.'*

Clearly there were a significant number of routes in to Ascent A&C services, which made access easy. However, some women suggested that greater publicity about the services available, and how to access them, would be beneficial in enabling even more women to access help.

### The way in which Ascent A&C services were used

In order to receive effective support, service users needed to access appropriate services, either simultaneously or sequentially, as their immediate support needs were met and new needs identified. Most service users interviewed had received advice plus additional help, often in the form of casework and/or advocacy (18,407 women). The Ascent A&C database statistics show the extent of the support provided during the 2 years:

- Emergency accommodation, safeguarding (9,214 women).
- Support with legal proceedings including criminal proceedings (6,314 women).
- Housing support (6,245 women).
- Support with immigration (321 women had their status resolved).
- Emotional support, help in language and cultural context, access support from other agencies (13,975 women).
- 25,936 counselling sessions to over 2,000 women (up to a maximum of 16 sessions per woman).

### Counselling

Women who had received counselling said it had helped them to achieve personal changes and many said it had been particularly effective when combined with advice.

*'The counsellor made the biggest difference in making the change happen as she was there every session and I was able to open up and trust her and get the support needed. Having the advice alongside this was really useful. I got on really well with my counsellor. I feel lucky because I had an advice worker and a counsellor to help me and it was all done quickly. The advice worker helped me with the move and I also got the right support through the process.'*

*'My counsellor told me 'You are too nervous' every time and asked me to relax and speak out my fear. I found it's very useful for me. The Social Worker also helped me to find the housing service as well as the social housing provider and tried to change the name of the tenancy to ensure my tenancy was right. She also successfully asked my social housing landlord to change the lock of my home to prevent my husband from coming back. This released me from the great fear of my husband coming back again.'*

*'Getting help from the counsellor has given me more inner strength and courage and I feel better. The counsellor... has helped highlight my own achievements and to see my inner strength to tackle the situation and feel less depressed. I think this has been a gradual process and is still ongoing as things are not fully resolved... I have had help to learn to trust my own instincts. It has been about finding inner resources to move forward bit by bit.'*

*'[My counsellor] supported me to move to part-time work and to make plans to travel. She suggested I used a piece of positive writing I had done as a mantra. I became more familiar with the counsellor and talked openly [about the rape]. She helped with installing new apps, talked through tools etc...she supported me through an arc of emotion.'*

## Group work

Group work was often effectively combined with 1-1 counselling and other activities.

*'They [the group] are helping me to move on in my life, they take me to so many events where I learn new things. Every Thursday when I attend the support group it helps to cheer me up. They are also helping me a lot in the support group. I got counselling from [them] and it was amazing. I got help for my immigration from [them]. [They] taught me how to deal with my problems. I got so much knowledge about politics and political parties from the support group. I learned about respecting sexuality, how to write songs and learned about changes in the laws and about the different types of drugs, in the support group. I did a street play which I have never done before. . I have the opportunity to laugh so much'*

Women in both groups described having opportunities to try new activities which fostered friendships and where they could develop and test their new found freedom and abilities. Indeed one of these workshops was delayed because one woman who wanted to take part had only that morning returned from a holiday abroad with friends she had met at the group; something she would never previously have done.

## Combining Ascent A&C services

Many service users resolved one problem and then moved on to access other services, both within and outside the partnership. One service user explained:

*'I considered them to be a very crucial intermediary for me to connect to the other mainstream services in the whole system...they helped me to link to the Police, law firm, the counsellor, Social Services and Victim Support, and applied for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession visa on my behalf of me to access the public funds. It helped me a lot to get welfare benefits to support my life. [They] referred me to the other services which also contributed to the changes. For example, Council's Social Service, Housing Service and Social Services also introduced me to a counsellor which helped me a lot. Their support on legal advice for my divorce case ultimately completed the autonomy I was pursuing. They introduced me and accompanied me to the law firm, and helped interpretation and every aspect between the law firm and me... They also gave me advice about housing and benefits and connected me with the housing sector which provided me more ideas about finding proper publicly-funded housing.'*

*'After coming to [partner organisation] they gave me counselling for my suicidal thoughts and they organised further mental health intervention for me.'*

*'[The caseworker] helped me find the housing service, the hostel where I live now, job centre, and [the partner organisation] as well.'*

Doctors of the World referred A to counselling and she was allocated a caseworker who discussed with her what had been raised by counselling and followed up on practical issues. A stated:

*'It was more than a contact: [it was] comfort, they cared about me, gave me hope, helped with transport and money...They provided help to understand and navigate the system and entitlements [and] made practical arrangements [with] housing. They told me about the support which was available, helped with system, followed up and kept in*

*contact with me and professionals also [referred me to the] food bank'. [The worker] became a trusted part of [my] life, so that I was no longer dependent on the people who were abusing me'.*

*'I was referred to the IDVA who I worked with and sorted out temporary accommodation so kids were moved away. [The worker] advocated on my behalf with the Housing Office, so I was allowed to reject one unsuitable place [as not sufficiently safe] because of what I'd experienced.'*

*'I was very worried about my legal case with my ex-husband. My English is not good, and it's always the big barrier for me to seek help. After I contacted [the partner] they helped me to find a law firm who could do my case. They accompanied me to the meetings with solicitors and interpreted for me. Moreover, based on their extensive casework experiences, the adviser suggested me that I did not have to attend the hearings with my GP's letters as evidence. It gave me quite a big relief from my fear to go through the legal proceedings and meet my ex-husband again.'*

Data monitoring shows that Ascent A&C assisted 13,975 women to access public services. Service users said their workers helped them contact and work with the Police, Lawyers, other counsellors, Social Services, local Mental Health services, Housing Associations and a variety of other agencies.

### Professionalism and trust

A common theme was the importance of the trusted relationships which women developed with the staff and volunteers who worked with them.

*'I feel lucky because I clicked with the counsellor and everything worked out well.'*

*'T [the worker] came to meet me at the...Community Centre over a 2 week period & completed the questionnaire and risk assessment. As I was at high risk, T took my case to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) last week. The Child Welfare Officer was overwhelmed by how organised I was, because of T's personal support. She calls every couple of weeks to see how I'm getting on and is supportive, giving me information about solicitors etc.; arranging a counsellor and children's counsellor... She pointed me in the right direction to local grants. She provided reassurance (although I'm still being harassed) and is there to listen and give an objective, outside opinion. I was anxious, stressed and worried. This has reduced because of T's support and encouragement. She helped me know I'm doing the right thing for my son.'*

Service users always described appropriate, professional relationships. However, for them these relationships were often deeply personal and often the only personal, in-depth relationship they had had with someone other than the abuser for some considerable time. This applied regardless of the services they accessed, with relationships with advice workers and group leaders described in the same way as counsellors and workers delivering 1-1 support.

### Flexibility of provision

The size and scope of the partnership meant provision was genuinely flexible with women accessing the services they needed, rather than being progressed through a standardised route. Easy access to workers who could supply ongoing advice and guidance was an important part of the support.

*'It's good to have support at the end of the phone and to be able to speak to an experienced worker who is positive and encouraging. The advice worker made a difference as she was positive, gave reliable information and was well-informed. Having the regular phone checking-in from the advice hub worker is very reassuring and convenient. Having someone there to talk to and providing help, having emotional support and someone knowledgeable to advise me made me feel less isolated and better informed.'*

For one woman, this easy, flexible access meant she could continue to work and pursue her career despite the abuse.

*'I was worried I'd lose my job and the help and support of G. helped me to keep working, scheduling police contacts and making appointments and calls to fit round work. She supported me to tell my manager and office manager and explain to them what was happening although I didn't want to. She spoke to housing for me, all so I could get on with what I was supposed to be doing...This meant that when I needed to take time off work after I moved in [to safe housing] ...because my managers knew the reasons they agreed I could work from home'.*

### Support for BME service users from BME organisations

For those with poor or no English providing support in other languages was essential

*'They speak my mother tongue, it makes me feel warm without isolation. They gave me lots of comfort during the process. Without their continuous support ...it's impossible for me to be guided to access the other services in the UK.'*

Feeling understood was important. Even women who spoke reasonable English valued support from someone who understood their cultural background and context and the way in which this affected their situation and decisions.

*'Also, I had problem with my family back at home, my advisor is from the same country. I don't think anyone else would understand my family matter except her since we are from same country'*

85 women were able to access accommodation and living expenses through the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPFs) financial assistance. Those interviewed described accessing a package of services of which NRPFs was often a part (no one identified it specifically) including: hostel accommodation, food banks, help to resolve their immigration status, making relationships with other women from the same community, gaining an understanding that domestic violence was not acceptable and that there was support to leave violent situations and gain legal redress.

*'[The worker] gave me information about solicitors. [Partner organisation] gave me a small grant for essentials, arranged counsellor and a children's counsellor. I haven't had to go looking for support. She pointed me in the right direction to local grants and put plans and systems in place.'*

*'They helped me to link to the police, law firm, the counsellor, the Social Services and Victim Support, and applied the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession visa on behalf of me to access the public funds. It helped me a lot to get welfare benefits to support my life. Instead of signposting like the other agency, [the worker] contacted these services/ organisations beforehand and they went with me. Without their company and translation in between, I don't think I have the knowledge and courage to go out of my home to seek any help. Furthermore, [the partner*

organisation] would let me know the purpose of each meeting and prepared a list of required documents in advance, and thus I could make things all done at once rather than travel several times.'

## Immigration Status

Some of those interviewed were clearly in the process of resolving their immigration status.

*'Also, because of my immigration problems I am still depressed but I have achieved the skills to manage this...I have a better understanding of my feelings. I now know that some of my behaviour was because of the trauma of domestic violence. I can afford to eat well; I was able to get aid for my case. The changes came about through my counselling and my attending the support group.'*

For several of those who had succeeded in gaining leave to remain, this was, in itself, a positive outcome.

*'My immigration status has changed. I had no recourse to public funds. I was here on spouse visa. [The partner organisation] linked me in with solicitor who helped me get Leave to Remain'*

For women with limited knowledge and experience of the UK's cultural norms and criminal justice system the practical and legal advice the Ascent A&C partners supplied was a revelation.

*'They told me what my rights are. Before, whatever my family-in-law told me, I would accept. Like they always threaten to deport me or if I call police they will take my child away. I know now that none of those were right. Beside I know I can seek help now'*

This lack of knowledge around legal rights was equally prevalent in younger women born and educated in the UK as well as those who had migrated into the country.

## Suggestions for service improvement

While women were generally very enthusiastic about the support they had received from Ascent A&C, two who had reported otherwise good experiences described some negative outcomes of referrals to statutory agencies.

*'The only thing I would say here, and I don't want to make a big deal out of it but the advice worker told me to tell my GP and the police about the abuse that had happened as this would help me get legal aid. However, she didn't tell me that the GP would then inform Social Services as possible risk to the kids. This caused me a lot of anxiety but actually worked out fine in the end because the issues weren't about the kids and so nothing bad happened.'*

*'I was too scared to go to the police. I thought it would make things worse. They gave me advice. They told me why it was important to tell the police. The solicitor also gave me advice and supported me. The only thing that really unsettled me was I told them (the police) not to take further action as I was frightened it would escalate things. The officer said ok, but then they went to arrest him. I was terrified but I was told afterwards that they had to take action.'*

Others suggested additional services: more culturally based group work and English classes; a laughing session to reduce stress; an art class and a gym. Others thought that the timing of services, particularly

group work, was sometimes not ideal for those with children, as not all groups provided childcare. As a result they felt isolated/ unsupported during the school holidays. Other feedback and suggestions included a desire for longer-term support and more in-depth work from staff.

### Increased agency following Ascent A&C support

With expert guidance through the system, some women reported that they had been able to take rapid action which made quick and immediate improvements to their situation.

*'The other most important thing was it was so quick the support. Thanks to the MARAC referral ... and your supporting letter, all the agencies you linked in, the housing helped me straight away. You made sure I had a support worker in Cambridgeshire too. I didn't have to explain my story again and again to everyone. You understood me you understood that I couldn't go into a refuge with my two children. You made this change possible.'*

Women whose support had ended within 3 months of their interview described the difference it had made to their lives. At this stage, they were still generally in the process of recovering from the abuse and their circumstances have not always changed for the better. Even for those who thought their general situation had improved there were often major issues left unresolved.

*'I can't look to the future yet; I am worried about what the outcome of my immigration application will be. I am 8 months pregnant; I am worried about what it will be like to be a single mum. I am more isolated than before. I have to be careful and keep my place confidential. I have no friends. I have a lot of pain in my legs. It is a difficult period.'*

*'I have good and bad days. I'm fine today but nights are bad. I can't sleep. I'm struggling physically and mentally...I still feel judged by the Asian Community. I don't want counselling, I've spoken to too many people... I'm safe now'.*

*'I contacted [the advice hub] in the hope of getting somewhere to live, but because I am French and on a low income that wasn't possible – they tried but failed. My financial situation has prevented much change from happening due to not being able to access a refuge space. I had to return to the flat with changed locks but I can't really afford the rent on my own and I don't feel very safe there.'*

Even if their safety and overall situation had improved some service users still had regrets about how these changes had affected other areas of their lives.

*'I lived in London for 15 years. I had very long friendships. I do miss them. I have my extended family and network but they all have their own work and life commitments. I miss my 6 brothers and sisters. I do go and visit sometimes but I can't go often because of the perpetrator. It's not the same as knowing my sisters and brothers are nearby'.*

*'We have many problems with the house now as my husband, my adult son and I are in a tiny bedsit' (Woman who had previously been abused by in-laws)*

Many women had been left with financial problems:

*'I have financial problems. I am not with my husband anymore but still have the debts – his debts that I still have to deal with.'*



*'The only negative ...is that I now have financial problems as I had to move country to keep my children and be safe. Everything else is a true positive.'*

For those still dealing with immigration issues, these were compounded by the restrictions this places on them.

*'I have a disability but I need to work. The State is not allowing me to work. When I was able to work, my husband did not allow me to work because he would tell me I am not allowed to go out of the house alone'.*

*'I am facing financial problems every day and sometimes I do not have any money to buy my medications. Because of the State and the Immigration laws my life has become horrible now. I am being made to feel like I am not a human being. I have experienced abuse in my life from my brother and in-laws and now the State is abusing me'.*

Conversely, many women had been supported to claim benefits, including some who had never before had control of their own money and although the income they received was small, they considered this to be a real positive.

*'I am on welfare benefits now. At least I have my own money that I can manage. I am in my own space.'*

A number were disappointed that things had not worked out as they wished, particularly if perpetrators had not been convicted or had been granted contact and access to children. Ongoing court proceedings also posed problems.

*'Things aren't resolved because I need to facilitate the contact with our son. I fought for this to be supervised contact but he is challenging this through the court and so it is ongoing.'*

*'My life is ok and I feel better than I did when I first approached [the partner organisation] but things are still unresolved as my future is resting on the outcome of the court case at the end of the month.'*

*'The court case is dominating everything at the moment so I don't know what I'm doing, can't think and plan ahead. I will probably be fine after the court case, depending on the outcome.'*

*'Some things are worse as I have a court case looming at the end of May and don't know the outcome. This is a crucial case which will decide whether I can stay in the country or not and whether I keep my children so I can't really focus on anything else.'*

Several women said that they regretted that Ascent A&C support had ended, particularly those who had accessed counselling or 1-1 support and who considered that their support they had been limited by time, rather than need.

*'I had the impression that the help I could receive was limited to a certain number of meetings. I didn't feel ready to end 1-1 relations but I was under pressure to do so. The money ran out and it seemed like I wasn't assessed as being as needy as others because I had no children. There wasn't time to explore [my needs] fully.'*

Others realised that Ascent A&C support had to finish sometime but still missed it when it ended.

*'I missed their help when it ended. They made sure I was OK.'*



*'Just having someone to listen and believe me and offer help was invaluable. The only thing was the ending of counselling; that was difficult as sometimes I would like that support to still be there.'*

Despite these and other practical issues, the majority of women felt that their lives had been improved by the help and support they had received because they had learned to trust; were more relaxed; had become less isolated; had hope; had learned to speak better English; had better communications skills; were stronger; knew where to get help and had their own home or a safe place to live. They were better able to understand what had happened to them and put their experiences into context because of the support they had received.

*'[I] got a better understanding from the women at [the group]. I realised Domestic Abuse/Domestic Violence isn't just an African problem and it doesn't matter how educated you are, you can still experience it, which made me feel better. I felt we had things in common, realised that in this country there is a solution and places to go for help. That it's taken seriously in the UK and that women in the UK don't accept it'.*

*'It helped me process and get rid of the shame and guilt and to understand that it wasn't my fault'.*

*'My family-in-law also treat me better. They know that they cannot abuse me anymore since I know my rights in the UK.'*

### Longer term outcomes from Ascent A&C provision

This study included interviews with 21 people who had left Ascent A&C services some time ago, enabling us to explore the longer term effect of the support they had received. In these interviews 19 women, (90%) said that their life was better than before.

- **Increased self-esteem and self-confidence**

Ascent A&C data shows that 10,768 women reported that their self-esteem and self-confidence had improved by the end of support.

*'Things are so much better now. My self-esteem was very low and now I'm lots better, my safety has improved and I've learnt a lot. Things are much better. I'm more settled, safe, secure confident etc. I am settled in temporary accommodation in a self-contained flat. It's comfortable for me and my daughter'*

*'Though occasionally feeling solitary, most of the time I find my life much more productive and fruitful. I don't have to spend lots of time on meaningless quarrels and worries as before.'*

*'I am feeling more in control of my own life and moving forward with life away from an abusive situation to the situation where I am now.'*

- **New aspirations**

At the end of the support 9,629 people reported that they had confidence to rebuild their lives. Some of those who had left Ascent A&C some time before gave examples of how they had begun to do this, while others reported that they now had new aspirations and plans for the future:

*'It has increased my confidence to make decisions and plan for future, to look for work etc.'*

*'[Discussing the rape with the] worker changed my priorities and interests so I changed my university course, took a year out and went travelling alone.'*

*'I am living alone now. I am going to college and studying English.'*

*'I've increased confidence – I wasn't able to plan for the future but now I'm thinking of going back to school or university or doing a course and I'm getting promotion at work.'*

Several respondents commented that the support they had received had widened their horizons and led to new friendships and relationships.

*'I know what's going on in the world. I'm less isolated, more aware and more engaged in life.'*

*'We are together now but everything is going well. Better. I didn't have any experience of what life is really about. Before life for me was just marriage but thanks to [partner organisation] now it means so much more.'*

*'I have a much clearer focus.'*

*'It [my life] is so different that I am not able to compare it. I feel like I am a bird that has been freed from my cage, I can finally fly.'*

These changes, in turn, resulted in 3 significant outcomes.

### **Outcome 1. Increased autonomy, independence and capability**

This was the outcome most consistently reported by service users (21/35 interviewees and those who took part in the group work) and the most commonly recorded change on the database (14,481 women).

*'I'm not afraid to try new things now. At college etc. I sit at the front and ask questions - all the things I didn't do as a child.'*

*'I have qualifications and work experience and want to use them... I've started to think I need to be independent, work, look after myself. I just need to get my visa sorted, to stand on my feet.'*

*'I have less stress (caused by abuse) now just general business. No panic no worry. More confident'*

*'Now I am doing everything alone which sometimes is difficult to handle.'*

*'Things can be challenging but I can see things more clearly now.'*

As time went on and women progressed, there was evidence that their resilience had grown, although the extent to which this happened depended on each individual's starting point, her social and cultural conditioning and other factors, like her physical and mental health and ability to build new supportive networks. This is evidenced by the new confidence and agency they demonstrate and an improved ability to deal with life.

*'[I have] changed my reactions to my ex-partner's behaviour and have the strength and courage to challenge and move forward. The process has been slow and gradual... It has been about finding inner resources to move forward bit by bit.'*

*'Compared to my previous life when living together, I live much freer mentally and physically and feel more independent. Even though I am more disadvantaged materially I found my self-confidence might raise a little bit.... I could not even speak to my GP previously, but now I can talk to him.*

*'I have had a stable home for 6 months. I am volunteering for my church with asylum seekers and with the Open Door food bank. Helping new arrivals in the house taking them to GPs and pharmacies. Cooking together with others in the house (refuge). Going to the gym. I have a busy life'.*

*My life is much more organised it is much better. I am more peaceful. Yes there are things that I need to solve but nothing I can't do.*

*'I was living with my husband, now I am living alone. Independence. Now I live in my own flat and have my own money. It helps me to make decision not worrying of his permission.'*

## **Outcome 2. Improved mental health and self-care.**

Ascent A&C data shows that 7,353 women have reported a better level of mental health. Women who took part in this research included both those who have experienced depression, stress and anxiety and those with acute and enduring, diagnosed mental health issues. Both groups reported the same outcomes, stating that they are were better able to manage their own stress/mental health conditions, were more relaxed and had a better sense of self-worth and less stress. They were able to recognise when their condition became acute and to take appropriate action, leading to fewer episodes of illness. Several reported being less reliant on medication for managing their condition or better able to manage their medication.

*'I have found ways to cope with being low which has made a massive difference'.*

*'I have learned so many other skills to help myself to get out of my depression.'*

*'I am feeling happy and positive with life after so many years of feeling sad and stressed.'*

*'Caseworkers encouraged me and gave me lots of comfort when dealing with my case. They also tried to introduce me to more agencies where I can receive support from my home ethnic group... I felt more stable and secured emotionally and less depressed and anxious from that time on'*

*'I'm healthier. I've realised I'm normal. My depression has lifted a lot. I've been able to reduce my medication and I look healthy.'*

*'I still sometimes have anxiety etc. but I can recognise triggers and am able to deal with them'*

## **Outcome 3. Better parenting and relationship with children**

This was not an outcome which was anticipated at the start of the project and Ascent A&C did not directly collect data on the number of women who reported better parenting or improved relationships with their children. Instead the number of women who experience this outcome is calculated, based on the proportion of service users recorded as parents in Solace's records. We used this to estimate the number of women supported by Ascent A&C who were parents and then assumed that they had experienced the same percentage as our interviewees reported. This enabled us to estimate that around 7,013 women are better able to parent their children after accessing Ascent A&C support.

Respondents said their ability to parent effectively had been impaired by the abuse they had experienced, particularly by the control the abuser had exerted and the psychological problems they had experienced as a result. They were concerned that the children had witnessed the violence against them and some felt their children had been placed in the position of taking sides in the abusive relationship or manipulated to be unwittingly complicit in the abuse. Many women said that having children with the perpetrator had presented barriers to their seeking help or leaving the relationship. Workers had been able to overcome these concerns through a mixture of information, advice on options and personal support.

*'[The worker's] support and encouragement helped me know I'm doing the right thing for my son.'*

*As a result their relationship with their children, and their ability to parent well had improved.*

*'The children have better moods and behaviours. [I have] more quality time with the children and can build up a good role model for their life.'*

*'Better Relationship with My Children/ Better Parenting. Family atmosphere changed— warmer and happier with more expression of love.'*

*'I am free to do things for myself and my children'*

In a few cases women described their children's antipathy towards them as continuing even after their own relationship with the perpetrator had ended, particularly where contact had continued. However, they said that they were better able to cope with this and still parent the child despite it, because their own confidence and skills had improved. One interviewee had remained in touch with and had an excellent relationship with the perpetrators' now adult son, as they shared common interests and she recognised that he had had no part in the abuse. Another woman described in detail how her family life had changed.

*'As my husband left, I personally found my family environment has become warmer and happier bit by bit, gradually. There is more laughter in my family, which had never happened when my husband was still around and stuck with the gambling problem. Previously when I had quarrels with my husband, my children might not understand the causes of the conflicts at all and they decided to face it with disengagement. Even though they loved me, they pretended cold in behaviour and appearance. However, now they have better and more intimate relationship with me. They are not afraid of showing their love towards me. They smile more, laugh more, hug me more, and sometimes they even tease me, and I can understand their affection and humour more now. The better relationship between children and me is one of the influential factors for better parenting. The other one might be because the bad role model, their dad, is away. It made my words more trustworthy and my request and creditability would not be ruined by my husband's behaviour. The children thus become more well-behaved and self-disciplined.'*

Responses such as these, suggest that Ascent A&C also created positive outcomes for the children of service users.

*'I noticed the big change on my two boys in the past few months. In January this year, my eldest son's teacher noticed that he is a bit eccentric. He didn't play with other children and talked very little. We even discussed that we were going to seek other mental health support for him. However, two or three months later, it's amazing that he recovered and his mood gets better, and he restored the friendship with other children. His teacher also noticed that and commented that [eldest son's name] recovered and becomes happier now'.*

*'I find myself having a better relationship with [my son] and he is happy to help me in some easy work or leading his siblings following my instructions when I am busy. The situation is very similar to my second son. Previously sometimes he would not behave well and refuse to go to nursery. Now he feels much more secure and enjoy going to nursery. He cries less now than previously. I also noticed that he has better relationship with his elder brother. Previously when my husband was still at home, I was strong for the kids and protecting them...it was a bit difficult to get my sons into discipline because their father didn't behave well and has some bad habits. He was not a good role model at all.'*

Within the constraints of this study we did not attempt to value any outcomes for the children of these parents but clearly these outcomes could also be a significant element of the social value Ascent A&C creates.

## Impact for the participants of Rights of Women (ROW) legal training

ROW training participants identified one main outcome from the training they received. The value of this is described below and within the report, using SROI methodology. This was:

- Increased ability to provide more effective legal advice to service users. **Value £70,514.**

Participants highlighted their increased ability to provide more effective legal advice to service users; dealing with straightforward cases immediately & referring those most in need for specialist help. The outcomes for service users phoning the Rights of Women London Legal Advice line and using the website are included within the section relating to outcomes for service users. However, Rights of Women also provides training for other professionals and legal guides. This section examines the social value of this work and impact for professionals.

In the 2 years of the project Rights of Women (ROW) trained 488 individuals from voluntary and statutory organisations, Statistics from the database show that 441 of these identified a change in their understanding of beneficiaries needs and 388 demonstrated an increased understanding of risk factors and ways to mitigate risk. Post-training evaluation data held by ROW shows 94% of those who they trained were satisfied or very satisfied with the difference the training would make to their work and a similar percentage said their confidence in supporting women through the legal process and ability to advise them on legal and other options had also improved.

The trainees interviewed described the process by which the legal training then produces outcomes for them and their organisations.

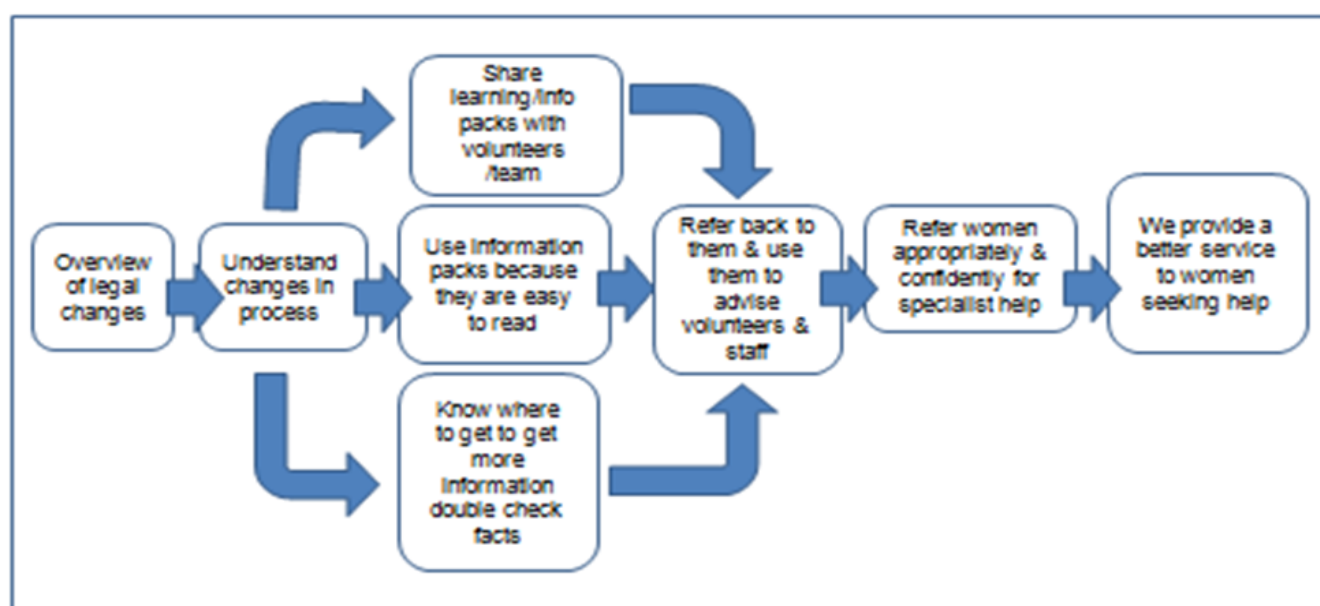


Diagram 6. ROW Trainee chain of change

ROW trainees reported that the training had enabled them to understand changes to legal processes and that the effectiveness of the training was increased by the visual nature of the learning materials. They said they had shared the learning from the training with their team/colleagues/volunteers and that the learning materials had both aided them in this sharing process and provided a valuable source of reference. This knowledge, combined with the confidence they had gained through the training, meant they felt more competent to deal with the most straightforward legal cases themselves and were able to identify and quickly refer women with more complex needs to appropriate, specialist legal help.

*'The information [from the training] is at hand, I don't have to refer to a domestic violence expert. I can give an overview about what people can do for themselves and share that information on the phone.'*

*'After the training I cascaded the information to 6 people in the core team and 6-7 volunteers. This made a difference to their work because they weren't fully on board with the changes. It was a good grounding, as we knew where to go to get information/ double check.'*

Interviewees said that they would probably have discovered the actual information for themselves through the internet or other research, but that they would only have done this when they needed to, not ahead of the issues arising. They thought they would probably not have shared it with colleagues and commented that ROW training was particularly effective in building their confidence to use what they had learnt and to share it with others.

*'My work head has been stimulated and I have wanted to describe and explain what I have learnt and been using, so this has caused it to become a bit more embedded.'*

*'Would ...possibly not have shared the learning so systematically.'*

*'The training gave us the information and knowledge to investigate further and know where to go to. We know other organisations which could help. [The team] became more confident to give advice. This means clients get correct advice in a timely manner'*

## Impact for Volunteers

Volunteers identified two main outcomes from the services they received. The value of these is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. These were:

- Increased work skills leading to improved career prospects: **Value £134,308.**
- More fulfilled: **Value £53,288**

The diagram below shows the process by which the volunteers who responded to our survey thought that these outcome had been created.

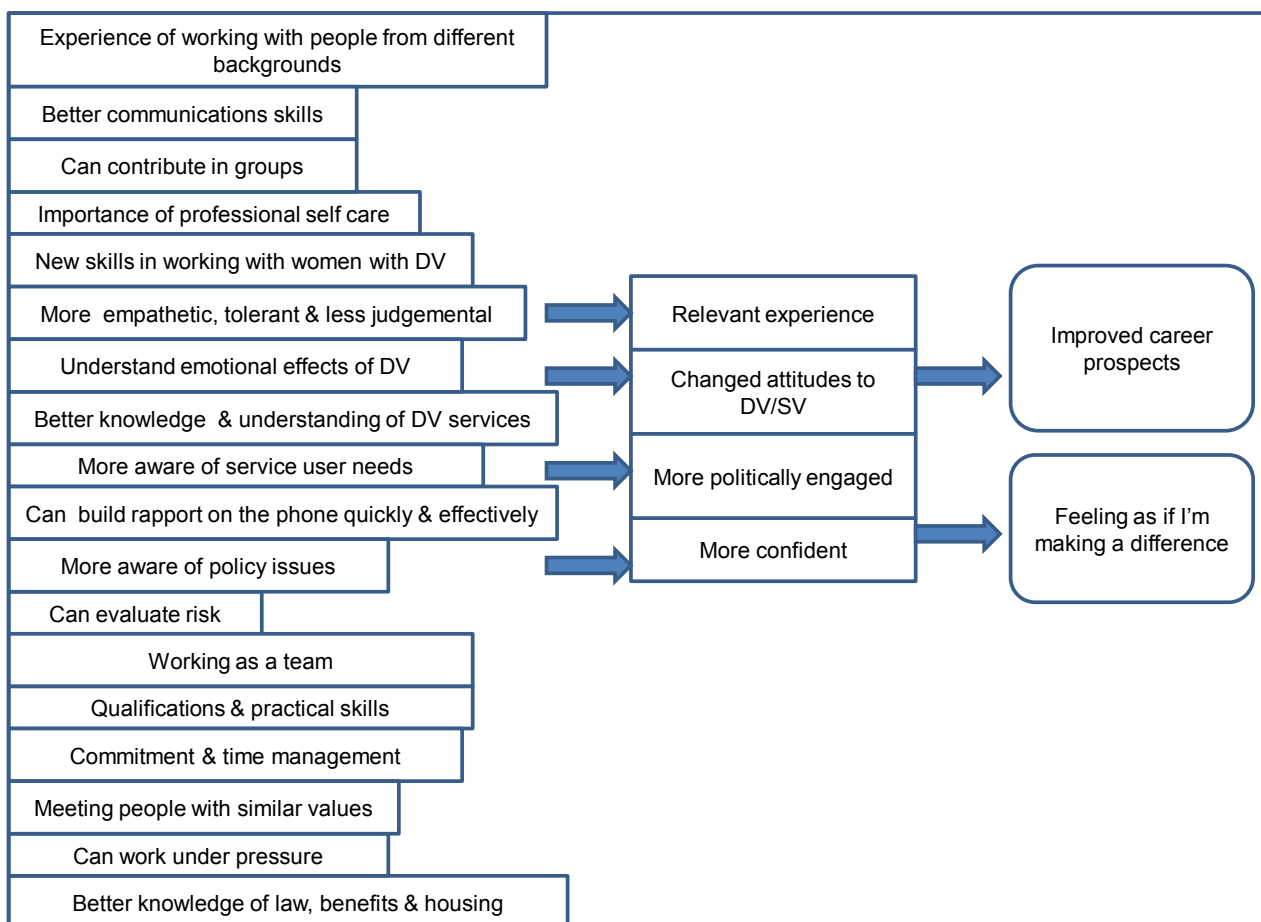


Diagram 7. Volunteers' chain of change

Approximately 13,000 volunteers worked in many roles in Ascent A&C, The sample who took part in this study acted as volunteer advisors, counsellors, phone line volunteers, legal advice line volunteers and administration volunteers.



Regardless of their role, they reported similar benefits as a result of volunteering. They said they had learnt how to operate and work within new processes and systems, to take referrals, operate the advice line and carry out risk assessments. Alongside this practical knowledge they had gained a better understanding of domestic and sexual violence, a knowledge of the benefits system and of counselling and other services. Volunteers also said they had developed new skills: listening, rapport building, team work and database operation.

*'I am more capable of dealing with an advice call.'*

*'This project allow me to contact with other charities working with the similar aims, contact statutory bodies such as housing office, which play an important role in case of domestic violence.'*

20 of the 22 volunteers who completed the questionnaire, reported positive changes. They said that these had been produced by the experience of working within the partners' teams and being trained and trusted to carry out crucial, responsible roles.

*'Taking [an] active part in the help line, risk assessments, creating safety plans, making referrals. Being active and taking responsibilities let me improve myself better in the area of domestic violence. Also, the team I worked with was very helpful and professional.'*

*'Brilliant training and supervision. The staff at [partner organisation] were extremely helpful and answered all my questions... I was able to shadow staff and treated exactly like staff--not just an intern.'*

*'Ascent gave me the opportunity to learn and enhance my knowledge and skills around domestic and sexual violence. Many organisations who work with vulnerable people do not give [a] chance to people who aren't qualified/ have a lot of experience.'*

Volunteers who responded said that they had experienced some sort of personal change as a result of volunteering too. They said that they had become less judgemental, understood more about other cultures and people from different backgrounds and had made new friends with similar values to their own and acquired significant transferable skills.

*'I understand how to empathise more with different clients.'*

*'I can contribute to groups. I have more confidence to participate and join in group discussions.'*

*'I have changed my attitudes to domestic violence. Before working here I was much more naive and a bit brainwashed by society, now my views have completely changed. I understand that there is only 1 person to blame in situations women have experienced; the perpetrator.'*

*'That sense of belonging, of sharing experiences of being part of a professional network and of being part of a powerful team.'*

This led to the following outcomes

### **Outcome 1. Increased work skills leading to improved career prospects**

This applied regardless of the volunteers' current employment status. Some respondents said they had found work as a result of skills and knowledge gained through volunteering, while others were not looking

for work or were already employed. Regardless of this, respondents reported that volunteering with Ascent A&C has given them new, valuable, transferable knowledge and skills and changed their attitudes too. One of the legal phone advisers said that volunteering had increased her awareness:

*'..Understanding of the 'emotional impact' upon callers as opposed to just the 'legal impact: Callers can become very upset given we are the first port of call for many or they have don't have anywhere else to turn to. [I am] taking that deeper understanding of the 'emotional impact' into my own practice. Learning to listen carefully to what the caller is saying as opposed to reading visual clues.'*

Arguably volunteers could have achieved this or a similar outcome through volunteering with another organisation. However, two respondents specifically addressed this point in their replies.

*'There are some things that I could not have learned without working on the advice line though, and the needs of the women who need this service is one of those things. Talking to women over the phone is an intimate and sometimes intense act and you learn a whole lot from every conversation.'*

*'I would have decided I wanted to stay working in this area of the voluntary sector but perhaps not as quickly. Being part of a project that handles direct service user and agency enquiries allows direct exposure to different cases and all the services we provide.'*

*'I had a previous experience in working in the domestic violence field, but Ascent gave me specific training and allowed me to acquire new expertise and abilities'*

For two respondents, volunteering had also given them the chance to explore what type of career they wanted to pursue.

*'[Partner organisation] gave me relevant experience which helped me get full time employment in this area'*

*'I decided that I definitely want to remain in this area of work after my volunteering time is over.' 'The role gave me the professional, hands on experience I needed. It opened my eyes to the challenges of working in the voluntary sector. '*

## Outcome 2. Being more fulfilled

Respondents reported that they thought that they had made a real difference to people's lives and, as a result, they felt more satisfied and rewarded. Key to this was the immediate, positive feedback that volunteers received from the women they worked with and the sense this gave them of doing something worthwhile:

*'The individual women that I have worked alongside within [partner organisation] have helped me. Their personal experience and industry knowledge has been instrumental in my personal and professional development.'*

*'That sense of belonging, or sharing experiences or being part of a professional network and of being part of a powerful team.'*

*'I have met wonderful people [partner's staff] who share the same views as me and have the same morals.'*

*'I feel as though I am able to help women with legal problems who have nowhere else to turn e.g. especially women who don't qualify for legal aid.'*

## Impact for Ascent A&C partners

Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the Partnership. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Platform for more joint working and future partnership working. **Value £34,186**

The 10 partners interviewed described a chain of change (below) which shows how this outcome had been produced. Partners identified that they had had to work through a number of challenges which extended beyond the official set-up period. It had taken some time for them to learn to work together and to value each other's contribution to the partnership. Individuals and organisations had had to overcome their suspicion of each other and the historic competition between them for contracts and services. This had been a difficult process particularly for organisations who felt that they had no option but to join the partnership or cease to exist

### Chain of Change for Partners

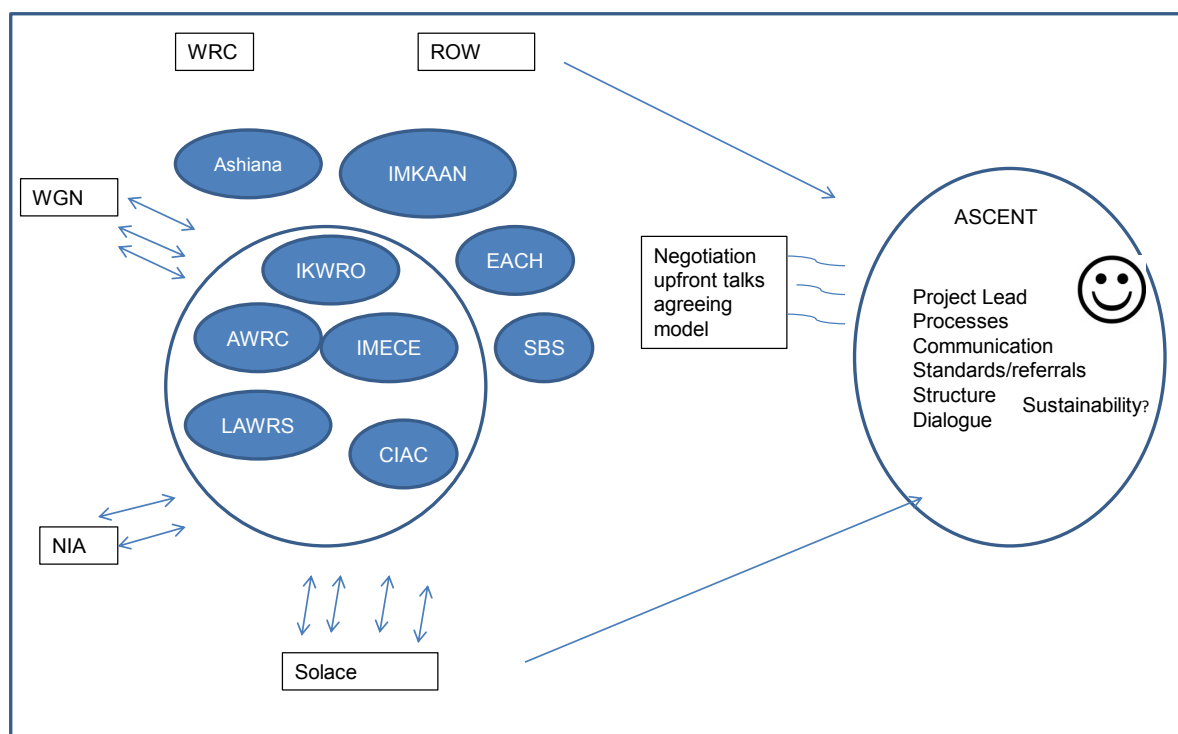


Diagram 8. Partner Organisations' chain of change

Building real trust in each other had been the key. As they worked together to establish and work within the partnership they gradually learned to trust both those they were working with and the services they represented. They said that the Project Manager had played a key role in this process by regularly bringing partners together and facilitating joint working: setting up and managing regular partnership

meetings, introducing common systems and continually focussing the group on working together towards a common goal.

*‘We turned vision into reality through hard work and regular meetings’.*

As time went on partners realised that they shared feminist principles and had a shared mission. This happened gradually, with organisations continually changing and adapting their views and positions. They learned to listen to and respect the voices and views of others, particularly the BME groups, and to incorporate everyone’s views into the partnership’s plans and projects. As a result, partners said that the way they worked individually had improved, as had the way they worked together. They identified as important changes:

- Better communications.
- Better systems, including referral systems.
- More systematic reporting and data monitoring
- Being able to provide support to women who have no recourse to public funds.
- A better spread of services, geographically, so that services were available across London.
- More embedded services in local boroughs.
- Being more involved with organisations and statutory services in each borough.
- More referrals because partners are more aware of services.
- Sharing/preserving each organisation’s unique and extensive experience under the Ascent A&C umbrella.
- Service users being supported while waiting to access help.
- Free advice from the Rights of Women legal advice line.
- More training, so that internal and external practitioners are skilled up.

Partners said the experience of establishing the Consortium and partnership had enabled them to achieve more than improved service delivery. They had also been able to:

- Secure funding
- Become accountable as a Consortium
- Trust each other
- Develop shared principles and passion

This meant partners had become more sustainable and provided a good basis and the energy and commitment for them to work together in future.

Evidence collected in the partner survey in September 2014 confirms that, at that point, similar, significant changes had taken place for some partners.

*'Our specialist surgeries have worked really well because we were already well connected in some local areas, some great contacts were also developed in new areas, allowing us to reach out to new women. We also continued to run specialist workshops which we have been able to improve after years of work with our community. We have been able to reach out to a great number of women who were unknown to the service at different community settings. Thanks to Ascent we have been able to improve our presence in some local areas and continue improving the quality of service that we offer.'*

*'The Hub is really busy and feedback from clients and professionals is that this makes accessing Ascent services really easy and straight forward. Advice spokes are busy and over target in all our boroughs.'*

*'We have noticed a shift in complexity of 1-2-1 cases and we now receive increasing number of referrals for medium and high risk cases.'*

Respondents to the survey also confirmed that Ascent A&C partners had become more connected with each other; better informed and more knowledgeable about London- wide structures and were now confident that women were getting the right service. Together they had been able to advance their charitable purposes, open doors, raise the profile of Ascent A&C and of VAWG services.

*'[We were] able to develop contacts locally and create more awareness about VAWG. Better communication between organisations delivering services. Being able to provide outreach to women who would remain unknown to our services otherwise. Being able to sit in more VAWG forums and present the case of migrant women.'*

*'Working in one stop shops has been successful, as the turn-out relatively is good. Also, it give the opportunity to work and network with other organizations. Working with Social Services has been successful as the number of referrals from social workers for one to one support increased.'*

## Impact for Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations

Ascent A&C partners from BME organisations identified one main outcome from the Partnership. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Specialist BME organisations are better able to preserve services under commissioning -

**Value £208,000**

BME Ascent A&C partners identified that there was an additional outcome for their organisations. They reported that, by being able to ally themselves with larger domestic and sexual violence organisations they had been able to continue to provide culturally specific domestic and sexual violence services to their own populations, which, they thought, would otherwise have disappeared.

Their Chain of Change (below) shows that they thought this had been achieved through this same process of gradually bringing partner organisations together.

## Chain of Change for BME organisations

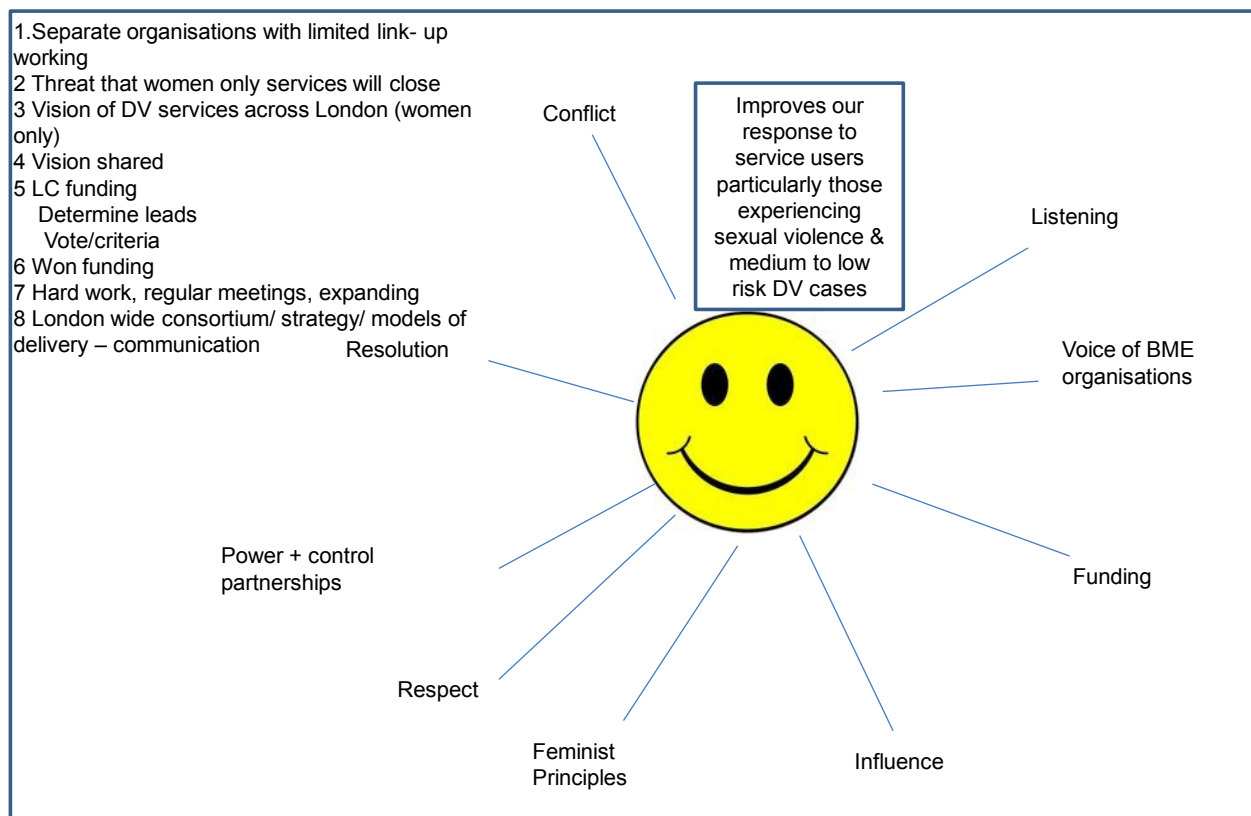


Diagram 9. BME partners' chain of change

Negotiation and up-front talks, which were not always easy or straightforward, had been followed by better communications and, eventually, a more equal dialogue achieved through hard work, regular meetings and good communication. As organisations became accountable to the partnership, this had resulted in better processes, standards and structures. Although difficult at the time, BME partners thought that this had eventually increased their long- term sustainability. They had become valuable, trusted and respected partners in Ascent A&C giving them valuable access to the other members and leading to more joint working and enabling them to secure long- term funding for their services. Therefore, not only were their organisations still in existence and delivering services, but they were much better placed to continue.

## Impact for organisations working with the Ascent A&C partners

Organisations working with Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the services they received. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Reduced pressure on other services. **Value £589,850**

Responses from borough-based organisations which work with the Ascent A&C, including those which host Ascent A&C services, show that these services ease the pressure of dealing with women who have experienced domestic and sexual abuse on their own services. Their views of how this was achieved are summarised in the following chain of change.

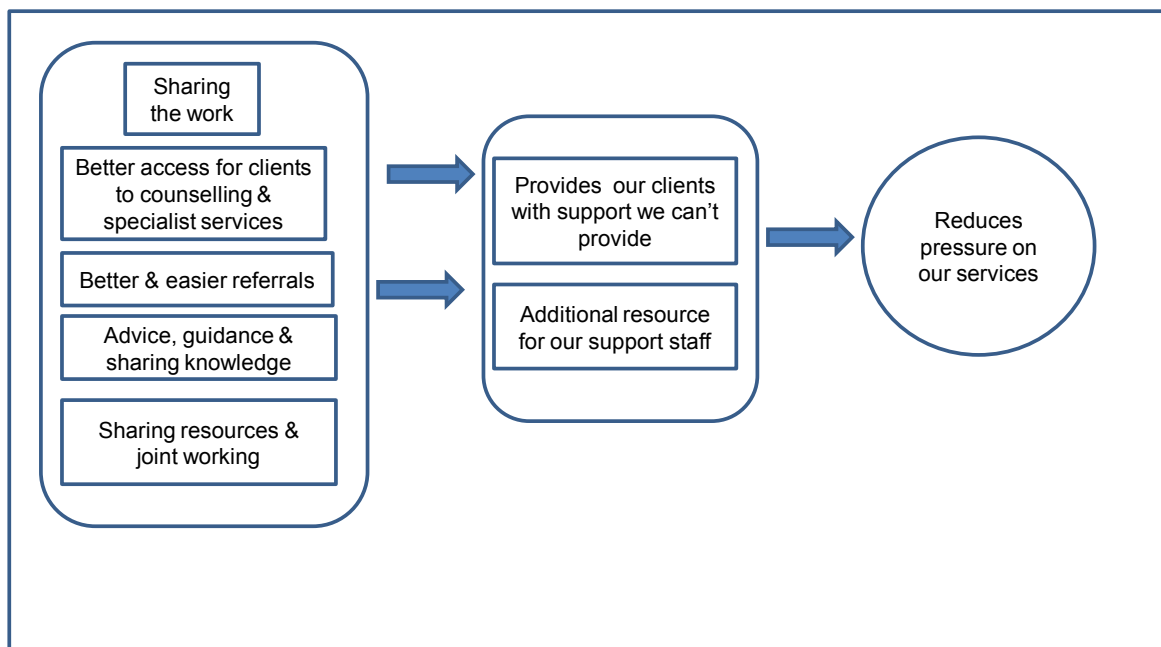


Diagram 10. Chain of change for organisations working with Ascent A&C partners

Some organisations working with Ascent A&C partners had shared their own resources with Ascent A&C services, usually by providing rooms or space for Ascent A&C partners to work in. They said that they had, in return, received practical help, and advice from the outreach workers who delivered Ascent A&C services from these bases. As a result, working relationships with Ascent A&C partners and borough-based organisations' access to Ascent A&C services had improved. Ascent A&C partners had provided advice and guidance to their staff, often informally, and shared their knowledge and expertise with them, sometimes advising on individual cases. This had made it easier for staff in other organisations to identify clients experiencing or at risk of sexual or domestic violence and to make referrals.



*'The local delivery of counselling by Ascent and the partnership within Ascent means we don't have to work out which organisation can best meet an individual's needs, as the Advice Hub can do that for us!'*

*'I don't know of any other organisation within the borough that has the resources to set up and run a programme of workshops such as Ascent have been able to provide.'*

Overall provision had been expanded and organisations became increasingly confident about the quality of the services that those they referred would receive.

*'This support... helps me because it shares the work & provides specialist support that I/we may not be best placed to provide.'*

'The Ascent project has increased the resources our clients could tap into and reduced the pressure on us. [There is a] reduction of pressures in providing practical support on our side, [on] our advice work and other internal support we have in the organisation.'

## Impact for boroughs and commissioners

Commissioners and stakeholders from London boroughs working with Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the services they received. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Improved response to service users adding value to locally commissioned services - **Value £3,453,516.**

Ascent A&C worked with all 32 London Boroughs and in the City of London. Responses from officials working for boroughs and commissioners identified changes to the services provided as a result of Ascent A&C which were very similar to those identified by other organisations working with the partnership and by service users themselves. However, despite the common starting point, the chain of change and outcome for boroughs and commissioners is significantly different.

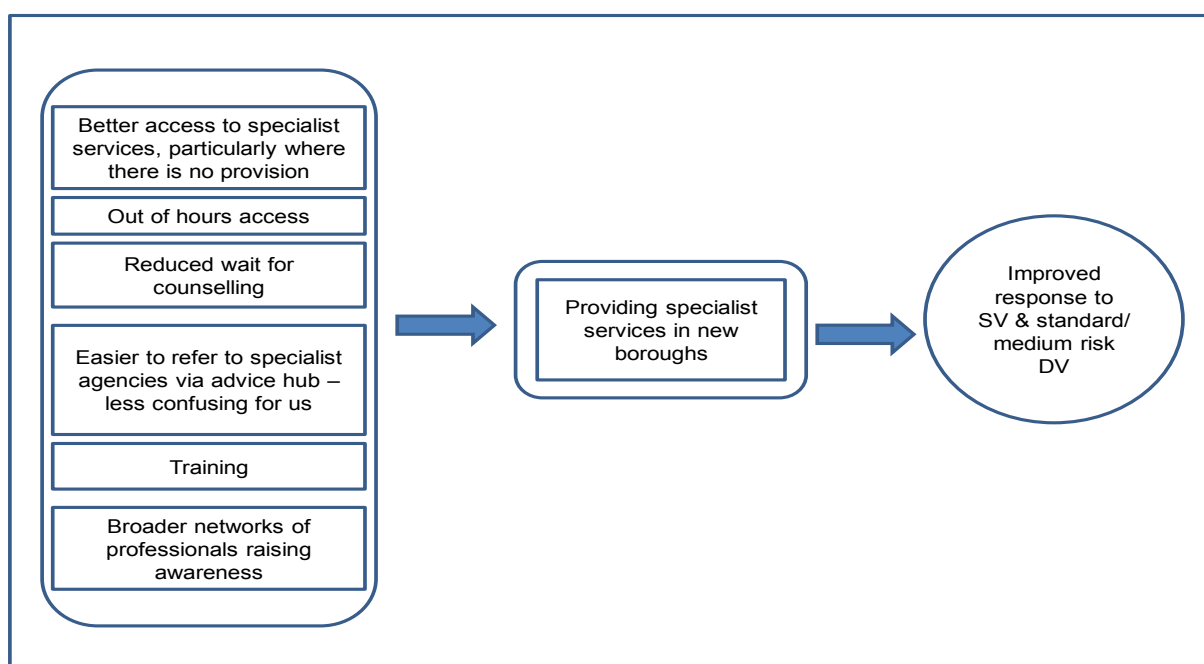


Diagram 11. Chain of change for boroughs and commissioners

Respondents reported that Ascent A&C had improved access to services for borough residents and that this, combined with the changes to Ascent A&C partners ways of working, had resulted in the commissioners and boroughs being able to respond much better to the needs of those residents.

*‘The change over the last 2 years has been really positive. Our relationships with Ascent partners were not very good at the start of the project ,however, with continued commitment from both sides to improve this, we now have a very good working relationship and have seen some really positive developments in the borough’*

Stakeholders reported that these services had been particularly valuable for women who have to move

from borough to borough to stay safe, access accommodation or find help and had helped new and different groups of women who were not previously able to access support. It had also resulted in positive, practical changes:

*'Improved communication between partners of local and pan London services. Shared consideration of what the local needs are. Ascent partners joining our practitioner forum and working collaboratively with our existing in-borough services'.*

Taken together this had resulted in the boroughs having broader, more inclusive services, with a wider scope than previously:

*'A response is provided to standard - medium risk [domestic abuse] cases and there is an improved response for sexual violence.'*

*'[There is] much better access to specialist counselling - there was no provision at all in the borough previously and this service has been very well used.'*

*'[There is] an easier referral route to specialist organisations via the advice hub - which is less confusing for both professionals and service users'*

*'A greater range of specialist organisations - particularly BMER agencies [are] available to local women'*

*'Enhanced access to specialist services e.g., support for women at risk of harmful practices'*

Responses make it clear that this went beyond simply delivering services under contract and that Ascent A&C has created significant added value for boroughs and commissioners. While some of this might, of course, have been derived from an alternative contractor, the fact that Ascent A&C has been re-commissioned for a further 2 year period suggests that the social value that has been generated by this particular partnership has been recognised.

## Total social value of the Ascent A&C partnership

Information from Global Value Exchange [www.globalvaluexchange.org](http://www.globalvaluexchange.org) and similar sources was used to produce a final value for each outcome, using SROI methodology. The total social value of the Ascent A&C partnership over the 5 years from March 2013 is estimated at £26,992,553.79. Around £5.99 of social value is generated for every pound invested. Most of this is social value for service users, although there is also a considerable value generated for the organisations working with Ascent A&C partners, boroughs and Commissioners. A Value Map was constructed from the data, showing a value for each outcome as well as a total value. This was then refined based on feedback from Ascent A&C partners to produce the net value of the impact over 5 years and the final version was used within the Report. Testing the assumptions used in modelling social value in these particularly sensitive areas gives a range of social values. Using different but still realistic assumptions, the range of values is between £4.37 and £6.61).

## Findings and recommendations

Over the course of 2 years Ascent A&C has produced significant social value primarily in the form of outcomes for the women and girls supported; the additional capacity produced for organisations working with the Partnership; the reduced burden on other agencies and the added value created for boroughs and commissioners. Stakeholder views, in particular the views of service users, have also produced recommendations for future monitoring and data collection, ways in which Ascent A&C could increase its social value further and for the future of Pan-London services.

### Service Model

- Delivering Pan-London advice and counselling services to women and girls affected by Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is effective in widening the reach of services.
- A partnership approach is an effective way of delivering specialist advice and counselling services to women and girls affected by all forms of violence. The Partnership approach enables a high quality, consistent standard of delivery across London, enhancing services to women and girls.
- The hub and spoke model increases access for women and girls who need to move between borough boundaries for safety and other reasons and offers more choice around how and when they can access services irrespective of borough connection.
- Effective outcomes and high beneficiary satisfaction are largely due to the professionalism and expertise contained within the Partnership.
- This Partnership of specialist VAWG and BME organisations creates a vital additional resource at a borough level which enhances the borough's ability to respond effectively to all forms of VAWG.
- An approach to service delivery based on service user needs, enables more responsive services. Recovery is not a linear process and services users' experiences are all unique so it is vital that support is tailored according to need.

### Recommendations for data collection and monitoring

The process by which service users experienced change over the first 2 years of the project is well documented in the data collected by partners. This, and the willingness of women to be interviewed, has resulted in a robust modelling of the social value of the 'Autonomy and Independence' and 'Improved Mental Health' outcomes for service users. There is, however, less evidence on which to model and estimate the social value of some of the other outcomes experienced by other stakeholders and changes to data collection and monitoring would enable these to be assessed more accurately in future.

- Systematic stakeholder consultation, especially with service users and ex-service users, should be integrated into monitoring and data collection methods as this provides the vital qualitative data needed to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of services.

- Data collection to show the number of women who are parents and the outcomes for them and their children would provide useful additional data which is currently absent.
- Further research on the impact of Ascent A&C services on the children of service users would be beneficial.
- Consideration should be given to the streamlining of data collection methods and the use of data collected. A focus on qualitative data over quantitative would enable greater flexibility of service delivery. Any new model should be widely shared to inform a more outcome-focused approach to data collection across services.

This study has laid foundations for Ascent A&C partners to adopt this approach, as it trained a group of partners' staff to conduct interviews with service users and closely involved partners in the process of developing chains of change and valuation. This model could be further embedded across the Partnership.

### Recommendations for Service Delivery

- It is vital to ensure that routes into Ascent A&C are as clear and simple as possible for all service users and that these are well advertised.
- Collecting and sharing good practice across the Partnership and beyond would encourage shared learning and foster continuous improvement.
- Extended delivery including greater evening access and childcare would increase accessibility and reduce isolation.
- Strategic integration of Pan-London services such as Ascent A&C to maximise effectiveness at a local level would be beneficial. The Partnership is in a unique position to collect evidence of the implications of service reduction and to work closely with London Councils and borough strategic leads to identify the gaps and to lobby for more and complementary support services.

This study clearly shows the value of Ascent A&C services. It demonstrates that the 'hub and spoke' delivery model has enhanced existing VAWG provision, improved the quality of services and access to those services for some of the most marginalised women and girls in London. It contains valuable lessons about ways in which Violence against Women and Girls services can be delivered effectively across London and highlights the value of specialist services working holistically in a genuine partnership to both the women they work with and to London as a whole.

