

REPORT ON CONSULTATION WITH SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, JUNE 2002

1 Background

The Task Group for Domestic Violence in Devon has been asked to write a domestic violence strategy for the Devon Strategic Partnership by September 2002.

In order to develop appropriate services in the county it was important to hear the views of survivors of domestic abuse. Consequently a small working group met to devise a questionnaire which would tease out survivors thoughts on current service provision, gaps in service provision and future needs.

Advice on consultation of survivors was sought from Davina James-Hanman, Director of Greater London Authority Domestic Violence Forum who had recently undertaken with survivors capturing the views of 102 women.

The consultation was undertaken in two distinctive ways:

- I. A one month consultation period (16th April – 17th May 2002) of one to one consultation with women supported by skilled workers. This method of consultation enabled the views of women who had already come forward for support to be captured. Approximately 300 questionnaires were distributed through Domestic Violence Officers, Refuge and Outreach staff in Devon and Torquay, Health Visitors, School Nurses and Victim Support.
- II. A one week consultation period (27th – 31st May 2002) during a Media Awareness Campaign which advertised the issues of domestic violence over local radio, TV and local newspapers. Through this method of consultation we hoped to capture the views of men and women who had not yet come forward for support. Women's Aid Exeter supported the women's freephone helpline, and Mankind supported the men's freephone helpline.

2 RESPONSES

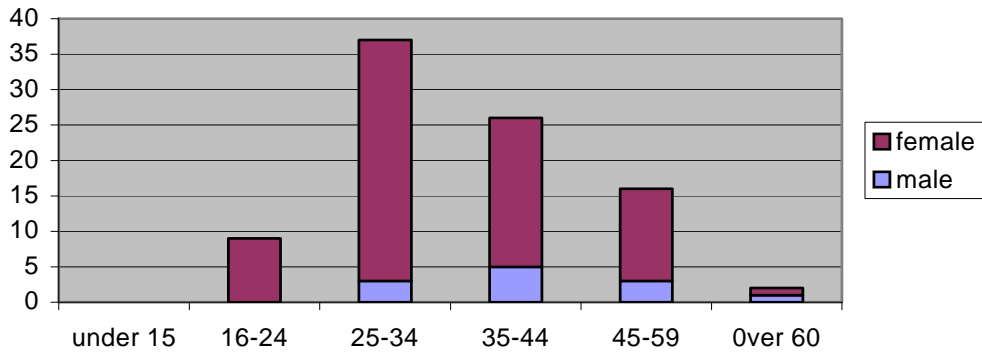
A total of 95 questionnaires were completed. 83 questionnaires through the 'one to one' consultation process. This is approximately a 32% response rate. 10 questionnaires were completed through the man's freephone 'telephone helpline' consultation process; 2 questionnaires were completed through the woman's helpline (although an equal number of women and men used the helpline).

As this was the first Devon-wide media campaign providing freephone response lines we had no way to gauge what the public response would be. It was also recognised that people ringing up, perhaps for the first time, would need skilled handling to meet their needs and would not be likely to want to work through a lengthy questionnaire.

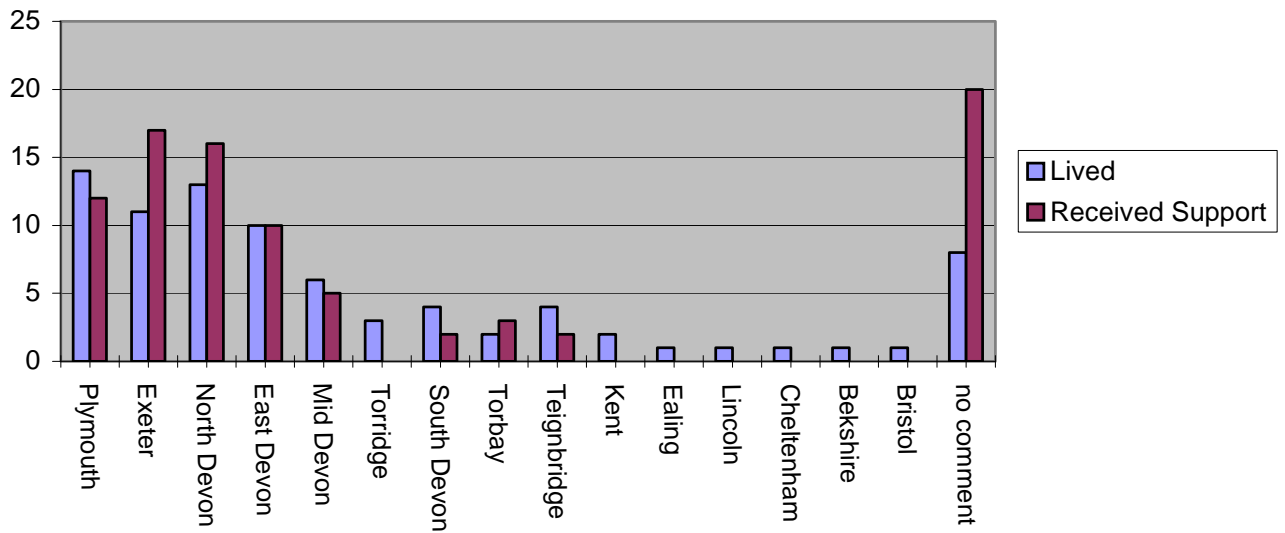
3 ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

3.1 Details of respondents

Age and Gender of Victims



Where Victims Live / Receive Support

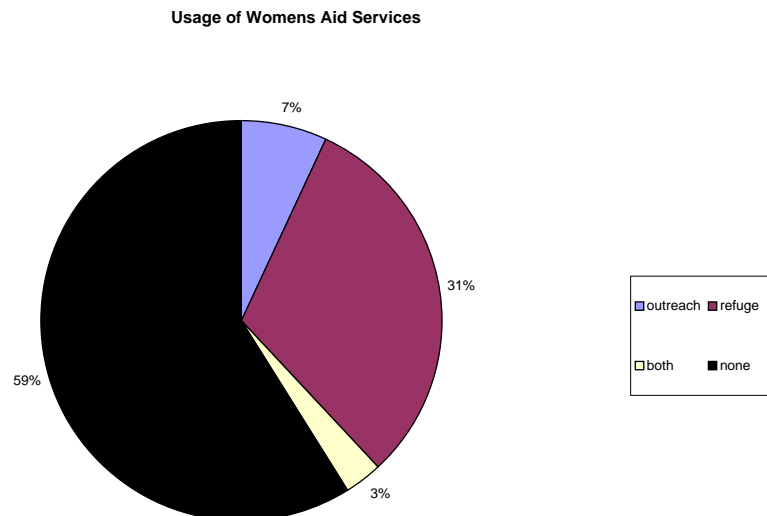


3.2 The agencies contacted by victims:

| Agency | % contacted | % satisfied |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Police | 87 | 71 |
| Solicitors | 67 | 72 |
| GP | 61 | 67 |
| Courts | 52 | 65 |
| Benefits Agency | 43 | 68 |
| Social Services | 42 | 45 |
| Women's Aid | 41 | 46 |
| Schools | 37 | 83 |
| Housing Dept | 33 | 42 |
| CPS | 32 | 50 |
| A & E | 31 | 79 |
| Other voluntary (Victim Support, Home Start, Samaritans, CAB) | 25 | 63 |
| Health Visitor | 24 | 74 |
| Housing Association | 18 | 47 |
| Probation | 12 | 45 |
| GP Nurse | 11 | 80 |
| Midwife | 7 | 57 |
| School Nurse | 3 | 67 |
| Speech Therapist | 1 | 100 |

3.3 Women using Women's Aid Services in Devon

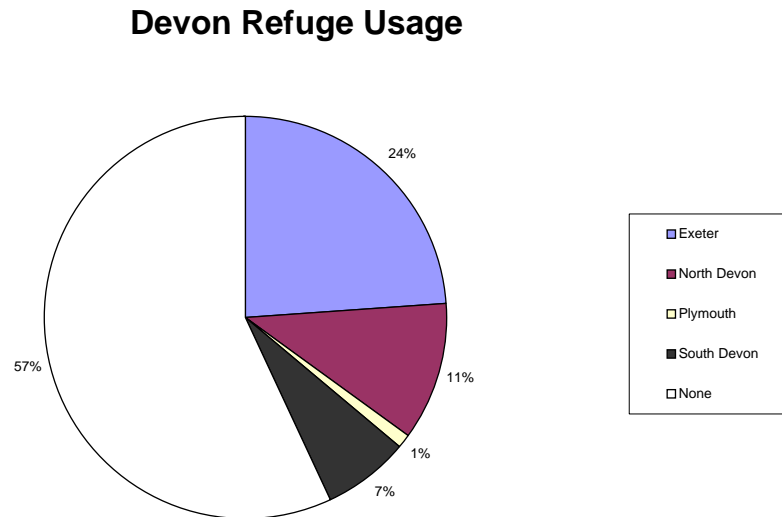
The pie chart below shows that 29% of women consulted had used/stayed in refuges in Devon, 9% had accessed outreach services and 9% had used both refuge and outreach



services in Devon. 57% of those consulted had not used either refuge or outreach support.

3.4 Devon Refuges used

The following pie chart shows the percentage of women respondents and which refuge service they accessed. This helps the reader identify that whilst 57% of respondents did not use a refuge in Devon, of those that did 24% used the Exeter refuge, 11% the North Devon refuge, 7% the South Devon refuge and 1% the Plymouth refuge. This is not representative of general usage of refuges in the county but more accurately reflects the



distribution emphasis of the consultation process itself.

3.5 Comments from women accessing Women's Aid Services

3.5.1 Positive comments

- ◆ Essential absolutely essential otherwise my children would be in care for the remainder of their childhood thus costing DCC millions of pounds and he would be imprisoned for murder
- ◆ They are excellent
- ◆ They were wonderful
- ◆ They help us on every level on a daily basis
- ◆ Workers and voluntary staff who support & listen to your needs. Give advice, help with completing any necessary forms. Someone to turn to when you're the lowest in your situation
- ◆ Able to discuss and relate to other women in similar situations to you
- ◆ ndwa its been very good and you get a lot of help and there's a lot of love
- ◆ They offered me support but I chose not to accept what they could offer me at the time
- ◆ friendly welcoming supportive Able to talk about problems and receive constructive help
- ◆ Introduced to solicitor
- ◆ Very caring on the phone
- ◆ Very helpful and gave lots of information about what I could do
- ◆ Helpline & face-to-face. They were the best help. They had lots of information. They didn't tell me what to do. My volunteer was so good at listening to me. She helped me to look at what choices I had & what I wanted to do. She never made me feel stupid
- ◆ Helpline was superb
- ◆ I used the helpline initially, then had face-to-face support. It was excellent. They were so supportive & just listened to me without judging. My volunteer helped me to help myself. She helped me look at what options I had and never told me what to do

- ◆ It was a lifeline. I was made very welcome. I knew support was on offer but it was not forced on me
- ◆ I came into the refuge with my son. I always got good support. I felt safer when the refuge got a night worker
- ◆ Refuge offered me a space the same day
- ◆ Safe, helpful, supportive. If it wasn't for the refuge I would have gone back
- ◆ Very helpful with everything and easy to talk to. Always there to help
- ◆ Outreach helped me to get out of my situation, listened to me and helped me to change my name. The refuge gave me support to start a new life and it was great being in a place of safety.
- ◆ I appreciated the way I was helped, specifically the way the worker helped me cope at the start and with help filling in forms etc. I find it hard in the refuge because I feel I'm in limbo and forgotten while I'm waiting to be housed
- ◆ The support enabled me to stay away, without it I would have gone back. I always felt safe in the refuge
- ◆ Came to refuge - worried about coming - but was welcomed and my reasons for leaving home were taken seriously

3.5.2 Less positive comments

- ◆ Expensive to live there. More TVs needed to reduce disputes. Stressful environment
- ◆ I only stayed a few days. I didn't like sharing a room with another mum & kids. I couldn't settle in a strange place I wanted to go back home. If there was an outreach service I would have used it, but I didn't know about this
- ◆ Good support but difficult physical environment to live in. Had access to a doctor & felt safe but get very depressed - hard to live with lots of people and feel swamped
- ◆ Refuge - accommodation (emergency) whilst fleeing domestic violence, though lack of privacy not a good thing
- ◆ the refuge was a lifeline but very overcrowded

3.6 Comments on the support received from the Police

The following illustrate that the majority of respondents were positive about the support they received from the police, whilst a minority expressed some specific concerns.

3.6.1 Positive comments about the Police

- ◆ Police called to home on several occasions to deal with violent ex-partner and arrest.
- ◆ Helpful & supportive
- ◆ They were quick and helpful
- ◆ WPC offered advice on helplines
- ◆ Called "response" officers at time of incident - dealt with it by removing perpetrator and displayed a positive attitude.
- ◆ 999 call - Response to call good, two male PCs attend scene, felt their response was very good. Gave positive approach. DV officer very supportive & came to court
- ◆ Police & DVO kept in contact about court decisions/discussions being made.
- ◆ Police enabled me to make my escape to a safer place
- ◆ DV Unit. Good service, point of contact
- ◆ The after care from DV Unit has been excellent
- ◆ Took incident seriously
- ◆ Very nice officers
- ◆ Telephoned to report incident. I was referred to PC xx of DV Unit who immediately put me at ease and arranged to visit me. The support was and still is brilliant as you are reassured that you are not wasting anyone's time, and that your case is serious
- ◆ When reported the DVO have made follow up contact.
- ◆ Alarm installed at H/A, support and help from police DVO given.
- ◆ Police arrived quickly and were understanding. DVO supportive
- ◆ Police response was good but I did not want to prosecute partner.

- ◆ DVO very supportive and helpful but often busy with other people
- ◆ Especially the support offered by DVO
- ◆ Officers & DVO very supportive.
- ◆ Police were supportive. Glad to speak to DVO.
- ◆ Police attended quickly. DVO was supportive.
- ◆ Excellent help from DVO
- ◆ DVU wonderful people to talk to.
- ◆ Everything was fine - I really didn't expect so much support
- ◆ Very happy with the police, they were very good
- ◆ Police response officers followed by the DV unit and they were all fantastic
- ◆ The services were very good and helpful
- ◆ Emergency situation when abuser was in possession of a firearm. Positive, protective & courteous response. I was believed!
- ◆ Police set up a plan for me to escape safely with my children - via DV unit.
- ◆ I spoke to the DV officer who was helpful and told me clearly how I could protect myself but she didn't mention women's refuges.
- ◆ I walked into a police station after experiencing domestic violence - they were very helpful and put me in contact with EWA refuge.

3.6.2 Mixed handling from the Police

- ◆ Generally when called have been dealt with ok. However recently verbal threats to kill was made and offender wasn't arrested and blamed the ?. DV support - very happy with, couldn't go on without her
- ◆ Domestic Violence Officer in Bideford was excellent WPCs in Barnstaple were excellent BUT all male pcs sgts involved were hurtful, insensitive and a total waste of time. They further reinforced the negativity of the situation
- ◆ I rang the police and naval welfare. The naval welfare had no interest whatsoever but the police however have had ongoing contact which I feel has been a great help
- ◆ Ok - came very quickly. Did not like the hard way that they dealt with him.
- ◆ Police officers attended quickly. Domestic Violence Officer was supportive but not there all the time
- ◆ The last incident was dealt with very well on other occasions I have felt it was a waste of time
- ◆ Not the last time, because we both got arrested and I got cautioned and no action was taken against my partner even though I had injuries. However on the previous occasions they have been very helpful
- ◆ One of the officers was really helpful, he got us out. He was understanding, another officer was not.
- ◆ Sometimes was OK. Were not quick enough. One time they seemed in a hurry & were rough in the way they handled it. I was never given much information from the police.
- ◆ I had numerous calls to the Police to help in DV situations. The response depended upon who came out. I found it hard when I was pushed by people who had their own ideas and swamped me. I found it good when I was listened to and given options to go at my own pace

3.6.3 Less positive comments about support from the Police

- ◆ On an odd occasion when '999' called 2 male PCs attended and inflamed situation. If one had been female this might have been calmer.
- ◆ They judged me looked down on me even a wpc was the same
- ◆ Wasn't given enough information, I felt that I had to push them to make a statement. Felt like they were treating what had happened as a small heated argument not years of abuse.
- ◆ DVU were not helpful. Especially when the perpetrator is a police officer.
- ◆ On a 999 call they didn't turn up as quick as I had thought & neighbour also did a 999 too. It took 15 mins. Male pc was only interested to see if I had been assaulted.
- ◆ One officer I feel did not listen to my needs
- ◆ Visited, took statement from offender then that was it, as the Police said that it was first offence despite the fact that statements have been taken for previous d v offence.
- ◆ Sometimes I have been left unsure of what action the police are going to take at the time.

- ◆ In refuge for 4 months. Dealt w/police in another area. Not informed when ex-partner released from prison.
- ◆ Police attended incident at my house and I was frightened by them & their attitude to me, they suggested I leave without the children.
- ◆ The fact that they asked me if I was going to press charges while he was stood behind me.
- ◆ Called in response to DV incident - violent partner said, "It's OK now" and police left taking his word. I was too afraid to say anything and felt at even greater risk when the police had gone.
- ◆ Rang 999 - told if I called them again I could be arrested. They were unsupportive and aggressive towards me.

3.7 % Victims accessing a helpline

The table below illustrates that the most often accessed Helplines were those provided by Women's Aid in Devon (39%). The next most accessed were the national Women's Aid Helpline number (26%) and the Samaritans (26%).

| Helpline | % used | % happy |
|-------------|--------|---------|
| WA Local | 39 | 73 |
| WA National | 26 | 100 |
| Samaritans | 26 | 90 |
| CAB | 8 | 72 |
| NHS Direct | 7 | 10 |
| Rape Crisis | 0 | 0 |
| NSPCC | 0 | 0 |
| Care Direct | 0 | 0 |

| Comments on Women's Aid National |
|--|
| Comments on Women's Aid National |
| Good service - good response. |
| National Helpline found me refuge space quickly. |
| I called for help to get me out of my situation - they got me to the refuge. |
| Put in touch with NDWA |

| Comments on Women's Aid Regional |
|--|
| Helpful. |
| I was helped to come to the refuge and get out of my situation. |
| I felt Womens' Aid were welcoming & friendly. Would have liked more information about basic facts but they were a lifesaver. |

| Comments on CAB |
|--|
| Very good. CAB financial problems. |
| Good information from local office. |
| CAB helped me to sort out legal information. |
| CAB were never there to answer my call. |
| Citizens Advice to ask how to go about getting a divorce and then to get no. of refuge |
| I was trying to get myself into a refuge and CAB didn't know how I did that. |

| Comments on Samaritans |
|--|
| OK. I wouldn't use Samaritans again. I was v emotional & she was trying to calm me. She didn't sound that friendly. |
| I found the Samaritans very helpful |
| Helpful at a bad time. |
| Samaritans helped me to call an ambulance. |
| Samaritans - also a lifesaver (like Women's Aid) but never mentioned Women's Aid - if they had done so it would have saved me from years of abuse. |

| Comments on NHS Direct |
|---|
| NHS Direct helped me with information and by listening. |

3.7.1 Men's response to helplines

Although the total number of male responses are statistically low, the majority of men supported the existence of a male helpline service.

3.8 What services would you like to see in Devon?

The table shows that the service that survivors would most like to see developed in Devon is counselling (69%), closely followed by support services for children (65%) and support groups (63%). Over half of the survivors wanted more options for housing (51%). Of the men who responded all expressed a wish for these three services in particular. Other wishes included a helpline, resettlement help, refuge and more housing options.

| Service | % wanting it |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Counselling | 69 |
| Support for children | 65 |
| Support Groups | 63 |
| More housing options | 57 |
| More housing provision | 51 |
| Drop in | 50 |
| More refuges | 50 |
| One stop helpline | 48 |
| Legal and financial help | 48 |
| Work with young people | 47 |
| Preventative work in schools | 46 |
| Outreach | 45 |
| Resettlement | 43 |
| Security advice and provision | 42 |
| Better witness protection | 42 |
| Safer ways of giving evidence | 37 |

3.9 Why victims of domestic violence do not approach support services?

The comments below reveal some of the barriers for victims of domestic abuse in coming forward for help:

- ◆ Did not know they (services) existed
- ◆ Didn't know such services existed then - perhaps not advertised
- ◆ Telling people about what has happened can be embarrassing
- ◆ Choice to keep it to herself. Was aware of other help though.
- ◆ Moved from different area.
- ◆ Didn't want to overload, get too much advice. I was happy dealing with the DV Unit
- ◆ I didn't think the problem was serious enough in comparison to other cases
- ◆ Was frightened of partner
- ◆ Things blow over - don't want to make a big issue of things
- ◆ Don't know how to do it
- ◆ Knowing the only way out would be to leave my home
- ◆ New to area - afraid.
- ◆ Fear of my husband finding out, building up courage. Wanted my GP to ask me.
- ◆ Was unaware of the response or help available.
- ◆ Fear, don't know the area, don't know what is available.
- ◆ No information available.
- ◆ Worry - self-doubt.
- ◆ Lack of confidence.
- ◆ Afraid to, and to admit I have a problem.
- ◆ Didn't feel that I had a problem.
- ◆ Lack of knowledge of that service.
- ◆ Not knowing what help I could get and where to get it from (Confidence).

Men specifically felt that agencies do not understand the particular needs facing male victims and their children.

3.10 How would you find it most helpful to receive information about services?

The most useful place for victims of domestic violence to receive information about services is at the Health Centre/GP surgery (60%), closely followed by the Citizens Advice Bureaux (55%) and through local media (newspapers/radio/tv) (51%). These three sources of information were identical to those chosen by male victims.

| Information provider | % |
|----------------------|----|
| Health centre/gp | 60 |
| CAB | 55 |
| Media | 51 |
| School | 34 |
| Benefits agency | 37 |
| Housing offices | 30 |
| Library | 33 |
| Community centre | 27 |
| Internet website | 25 |
| Police | 4 |

3.11 Most important services to victims

| Type of Service | % |
|-----------------|----|
| Police | 24 |
| Refuge | 21 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Housing | 15 |
| Support / Counselling for Children | 12 |
| Outreach | 12 |
| Legal | 9 |
| Drop in Centres | 6 |
| School Related Services | 3 |
| Services geared towards men | 3 |
| Social Service | 2 |
| Finance / Money | 2 |
| Witness Protection | 1 |
| Integrated Judicial Approach | 1 |
| Courses | 1 |
| Community Centres | 1 |
| Citizens Advice | 1 |

3.12 Survivors comments on how domestic violence might be prevented

This was considered a difficult question to answer but the comments below make for interesting reading. Comments have been grouped under relevant headings:

Awareness Raising

- ◆ I don't think that it can be prevented, but education has to be the answer also awareness of services.
- ◆ Public Awareness. Information available on domestic violence.
- ◆ It would help if people were made more aware of Domestic Violence and of the help available.
- ◆ More awareness of the support available through advertising etc
- ◆ More publicity & people in public life speaking out about it, saying how bad it is & that it should stop.

Education

- ◆ Educate children when they are young. Harsher penalties for perpetrators of Domestic Abuse.
- ◆ Support in School - prevention.
- ◆ More education, telling people that any form of abuse is not acceptable, more information about refuges. Police to be more aware and not treat cases as "domestics".
- ◆ Educate from early age within school. The use of alcohol or drugs. What affects the entire family. Communication often lacks between partners.
- ◆ Educating "males" from a young age and women/girls too.
- ◆ Perhaps if when little boys men were encouraged to talk about their feelings not bury them then things could be different. If there was not such a patriarchal world - a more even balance. Perhaps if men learnt to talk about their worries, their addictions
- ◆ More work with young people to prevent problems in later life.
- ◆ Work with young people to prevent domestic violence.
- ◆ Work with young people.
- ◆ Changing the way boys are taught to think about women.
- ◆ More talks in schools and quicker response from the police and a bit of understanding.

Support for victims/survivors

- ◆ Better support network. My DVO is brilliant & gives up a lot of her time but she has too much work.
- ◆ Having someone to talk to knowing there was somewhere to go not enough women know there is somewhere to go.
- ◆ If women were taught the confidence to leave relationships that may be oriented towards domestic abuse. (counselling & mind building sessions).
- ◆ More sympathetic courts

- ◆ If more women felt able to report it. There should be real consequences for perpetrators.
- ◆ If women had more options available - to enable them to leave violent partners.
- ◆ More support groups
- ◆ Identifying problems & dealing with them (early intervention)

Support for Offender

- ◆ Better help for offender
- ◆ Offender behaviour programme.
- ◆ More help from Mediation Groups; More counselling for men/women (who abuse partners); longer sentences (to teach them a lesson); longer probation services; Victims to be able to have the right to know about their past (if one) from probation;
- ◆ Men who have been violent should all have to have counselling
- ◆ Awareness of warning signs, being able to stand up for yourself The abuser being made to attend counselling themselves
- ◆ I think offenders behaviour should be dealt with alongside the punishment for the crime.
- ◆ No alcohol; relationship counselling; help for male behaviour
- ◆ Work with men with "violence" problem.
- ◆ Support for ex-partner to stop his aggressive behaviour.
- ◆ man's Attitude to his wife / girlfriend
- ◆ Prison sentences or harsher sentences
- ◆ Education in the military to let my husband and others like him know it is unacceptable behaviour.
- ◆ Mental Health issues to be taken more seriously by doctors etc. (Issue of violent partner)

Housing

- ◆ More options to move if necessary

Alcohol

- ◆ Stop selling alcohol.

Courts

- ◆ Stronger sentences. I wish I knew what would stop it but instead I had 10 years of hell.
- ◆ Harsher sentences to abusers

Police

- ◆ If the Police took things more seriously and listened at the beginning.

Other

- ◆ I doubt anything will
- ◆ I can't see anything to prevent domestic violence they should stop violence on the tv and teaches need to be in more control of the kids
- ◆ Do not think it is preventable
- ◆ Can't think of any specific thing. Society is just this way now!
- ◆ No one thing specifically. 9 times out of 10 it just happens
- ◆ Don't get mixed up with the wrong man
- ◆ Don't know
- ◆ Hard to say - more marriage guidance - support offered.
- ◆ behavioural problem support groups
- ◆ management programmes for behaviour problems
- ◆ More counselling if relationship is in trouble.
- ◆ More family guidance
- ◆ Act of God
- ◆ I think it stems back to childhood a lot of the time, so that could be a good place to start

- ◆ Get rid of men.
- ◆ Exterminate men! (Slowly)
- ◆ Earlier intervention when problems arise
- ◆ People presenting problems to professionals before they become too bad.

Men responding to this question felt that there were two main themes for prevention: mediation/family counselling and gender neutral education in schools.

4 Summary

The information captured through the experiences of 95 people in Devon who have had direct experience of domestic violence and in most cases have accessed different support services is useful in informing decisions for the development of future services.

Of immediate importance is the overwhelming desire for further outreach services (in the form of counselling and support groups) and services/support for children.

Information on existing/soon to be developed services should be advertised/publicised within GP surgeries, Citizen Advice Bureaux and through the local media.

Despite the evidence of much good practice amongst agencies the qualitative comments/statements suggest that there is still room for improvement; it seems that inappropriate attitude and responses from individuals can tarnish good practice. In recognising that it is almost impossible to affect the responses of all individuals in the short term, there appears to be a need for further training and awareness raising amongst agencies and the general public about Devon's intolerance towards domestic violence.

This consultation exercise is the first in a series to be conducted over the period of the strategy's implementation. As well as obtaining the views of survivors (in this case mostly women) it would be valuable to undertake further consultation with perpetrators (a view supported by Probation perpetrator programme Officers), children and young people and supporting agencies.

As well as receiving this invaluable information from survivors of domestic violence it is essential that their views and the consequent actions of the Task Group on Domestic Violence in Devon be fed back to everyone who participated. Expectations may have been raised through the process and a response from the Task Group on its intended actions, as a result, should be fed back to all those who participated.