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# An Evaluation of the ‘Us Too’ Project: People with Learning Disabilities Speaking Up on Domestic Abuse

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## Summary

This report is an independent external evaluation of the Association for Real Change's (ARC) 'Us Too' project. The project, funded by Comic Relief, provided training and advice around domestic abuse and women with learning disabilities. The evaluation draws on data collected from recipients of the training by ARC's Us Too Project Manager before and after training sessions as well as qualitative data from interviews and focus groups collected by the Manchester Metropolitan University evaluation team.

The findings of the evaluation suggest that:

- The women with learning disabilities who received the Us Too training appeared to develop greater understanding of what domestic abuse is and the different behaviours that could be defined as domestic abuse.
- Overall, the training was reported as being useful, well presented and thought provoking.
- The training being delivered by experts by experience was a real strength identified by trainees who considered this to be engaging and memorable.
- The facilitator was considered to be very knowledgeable and participants reported that their own knowledge and awareness of domestic abuse increased as a result of the training.
- Trainees reported that they learned a lot from the training not just directly in relation to issues around domestic abuse but also around working with people with learning disabilities. This knowledge was likely to give participants the confidence to work more effectively with people with learning disabilities and to be identify areas for improvement in their professional roles.
- Participants reported that their confidence had increased and that their working practices were likely to change as a direct result of the workshop.

- One commonly identified way that participants highlighted as a potential area for change was to make their organisations more inclusive by identifying ways that information, promotion of and access to domestic abuse services could be made more accessible.

## Background

The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act (2021:17) defines domestic abuse as: Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and b) The behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following-

- (a) Physical or sexual abuse;
- (b) Violent or threatening behaviour;
- (c) Controlling or coercive behaviour;
- (d) Economic abuse;
- (e) Psychological, emotional or other abuse

Globally, it is estimated nearly 30% of women experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime, with approximately 38% of all murders of women being committed by intimate partners (WHO, 2021). Studies in the UK reflect those internationally, reporting women and girls with disabilities are up to 50% more likely to experience domestic violence than women without (Brownridge, 2006; Rosen, 2006). In 2014, 15.7% of women with learning disabilities in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in the previous year (ONS, 2016). According to Public Health England's report 'Disability and Domestic abuse - risk, impacts and response' (2015), disabled people are 1.6 times more likely to be affected by violence than those without a disability, and disabled women and girls are three times more likely to experience gender based violence (sexual violence, rape, neglect and exploitation) compared to women without a disability. Unfortunately, these figures are likely to have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the UK's largest domestic abuse charity, 'Refuge' reporting a 950% increase of visits to their website and a rise of over 300% in visits to their National Domestic Abuse Helpline website in comparison to pre COVID-19 (Refuge, 2020).

There are a number of reasons why women and girls with a learning disability more likely to be abused than women without a disability. These reasons may include a possible lack of awareness or understanding of relationships (both sexual and non-sexual) and boundaries, and lack of recognition that they are being abused. A dependence on support and assistance, particularly with personal care can also create a power imbalance which can unduly influence ability to consent or report abuse. To exacerbate the situation, even when disclosures are made they are often not believed or acted on. Risk factors increasing the possibility of domestic abuse in people with learning disabilities include: mental health problems; being less skilled in 'self-protection'; barriers to reporting abuse; a traumatic childhood; witnessing mothers subjected to domestic abuse; and lack of healthy role-modelling relationships (Douglas and Harpur, 2016; Eastgate et al., 2011; Hoog, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2017). Additionally, people with learning disabilities are also at risk of "cuckooing" or "mate crime", where an individual deceives someone with learning disabilities into believing they are in an intimate relationship with them, quickly moving into their homes and taking control of their resources, before progressively exploiting and abusing them (Landman, 2014).

For Chenoweth (1996), women with learning disabilities are at greater risk of abuse due to practices such as overprotection, segregation, training to comply with requests from staff, and a presumption that they are asexual or promiscuous. Women with learning disabilities remain uneducated in awareness of domestic abuse and lack support from practitioners in how to maintain healthy relationships (Thiara et al., 2011). Whilst some women with learning disabilities may recognise abuse (Hollomotz, 2012), others may find it more difficult to identify coercive or manipulative behaviour (Dixon and Robb, 2016). Disability and domestic violence services have also been described as working in isolation of each other, putting women with learning disabilities at a greater risk (Thiara et al., 2011). Furthermore, women with learning disabilities are often excluded from risk assessments conducted by adult social care and the police, where it has been difficult to research how risk responses have been perceived by those being assessed (Langan, 2010; Dixon, 2012; Dixon and Robb, 2016). Arguably, the focus on risk has pushed practitioners to concentrate on achieving safe outcomes over promoting autonomy for people with learning disabilities (McLaughlin, 2008;

Seale et al., 2013; Hollomotz, 2014). However, Dixon and Robb (2016) argue there is no research, which assesses the risk within learning disability services by social workers.

Research highlights how the individual needs of women with learning disabilities are often ignored, causing them to feel marginalised, leading to internalised feelings of self-blame, worthlessness, low self-esteem and powerlessness (Prilleltensky and Gonick, 1996; Moane, 2003; Kagan and Burton, 2005). Despite the 2001 'Valuing People' strategy launched by the UK government, which was underpinned by the Human Rights Act 1998 (Ministry of Justice, 1998), and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Home Office, 1995), studies found women with learning disabilities still have feelings of self-blame, reporting wishing they had disclosed the abuse to support services earlier (Walter-Brice et al., 2012). Moreover, many women with learning disabilities reported experiencing secondary abuse from services that blamed them, failed to take action against the perpetrators (Walter-Brice et al., 2012), or felt punished by having children removed from their care despite reporting the abuse and separating from the perpetrator (McCarthy et al., 2017; Collings et al., 2020). The long-term psychological consequences for women with learning disabilities include depression, self-harm, lack of confidence, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Itzin, 2000; Mooney, 2000). As with the general population, abuse for women with learning disabilities typically worsens during pregnancy (Mezey and Bewley, 1997; McCarthy et al., 2017). Arguably, the lived experiences of these women have been silenced, meaning the extent of domestic abuse is unknown (Chenoweth, 1996).

Despite arguments from Lumley et al. (1998), Khemka (2000), and Khemka et al. (2005) that domestic abuse services should provide training and education for people with learning disabilities, their families and service providers to develop and evaluate effective interventions for abuse prevention training, this is still limited (Hickson et al., 2013). For Bowen and Swift (2019), people with learning disabilities must be educated during adolescence prior to engagement in intimate relationships, about the nature of healthy relationships, how to recognise problem behaviours and how to seek help safely. Additionally, support practitioners should be trained in detecting domestic abuse in adults with learning disabilities and be confident in signposting to support services (McCarthy et al., 2015; Bowen and Swift, 2019).

## Introduction to the Project

The Association for Real Change (ARC) were awarded funding from Comic Relief to carry out a project around people with learning disabilities speaking up on domestic abuse. The 'Us Too' project involved working with women and girls with a learning disability to raise their awareness of what domestic abuse and sexual violence is, to understand and recognise when it is happening and to know what to do to report or prevent it continuing. The project aimed to empower women and girls and give them the tools to put an end to any ongoing abuse and raise their awareness so that if they are abused in future, they feel confident to recognise and report it (see Figure 1). The project also involved working directly with anyone working in social care and/or women's crisis centres, by offering training that was led by experts by experience (women with a learning disability who had experienced domestic abuse) and shaping their policies (see Figure 2).

ARC's peer-led training commenced at the end of 2019 and continued into the Spring of 2021. In March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic all training stopped but since then, training has taken place online (using Zoom).

Figure 1: Aims of Peer Workshops

- By the end of the workshop learners will know about:
- ✓ The different kinds of relationship.
  - ✓ Good and bad relationships.
  - ✓ What makes a good boyfriend/girlfriend.
  - ✓ Good and bad rules for relationships.
  - ✓ What domestic abuse is.
  - ✓ How you know domestic abuse is happening.
  - ✓ What to do if domestic abuse is happening to you or a friend.
  - ✓ How to make yourself heard
  - ✓ What you need to do to get out of a bad relationship.

Figure 2: Aims of Professional Workshops

<p><i>Professional Workshops:</i></p> <p><i>By the end of the workshop learners will know:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ What domestic abuse is.</li><li>✓ How you know domestic abuse is happening.</li><li>✓ The specific issues if you have a learning disability and/or autism.</li><li>✓ What to do if domestic abuse is happening to someone you support.</li><li>✓ How to make yourself heard.</li><li>✓ Your role in making it less likely.</li></ul>
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### Evaluation Aims

Manchester Metropolitan University were appointed by the Association for Real Change to carry out an independent external evaluation of the Us Too project. The evaluation aimed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent has the 'Us Too' project increased awareness of domestic abuse amongst:
  - a) Women with a learning disability
  - b) Professional support workers
  - c) Specialist practitioners
2. Can peer-led training improve service provision for supporting women and girls with a learning disability who experience domestic abuse?
3. To what extent do participants feel the project was beneficial?

In addition, due to the changing context in which the project was taking place, the evaluation team also briefly explored how the Covid-19 pandemic affected a) the experiences of domestic abuse amongst women with learning disabilities b) the ability of professional support workers and specialist practitioners to be able to support women with learning disabilities around domestic abuse.

## Evaluation Approach

The project evaluation explored the views and experiences of participants who have taken part in the training delivered as part of the 'Us Too' project. The evaluation was divided into two parts:

- Firstly, data was collected by the Us Too project worker immediately before and after the in-person training with women with learning disabilities and written evaluations were completed by professionals who took part in the in person and Zoom training sessions.
- Secondly, qualitative data was collected from interviews and focus groups with participants who took part in the training and from the women with learning disabilities who delivered the training sessions.

## Ethical Approval

Research ethics approval was sought and obtained from the Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care Research Ethics and Governance Committee at Manchester Metropolitan University.

## Participants

The Association for Real Change's project worker, Rod Landman, was responsible for running, delivering and facilitating the training sessions and as such held the contact details of potential interview and focus group participants. To facilitate recruitment, Rod Landman distributed a recruitment 'flyer' and/or the evaluation Participant Information Sheet requesting participants contact the researchers to take part in evaluation interviews or focus groups.

Participants who took part in the project were based in the SW of England. Covid-19 restrictions meant that travel to carry out data collection was not feasible so semi structured interviews and focus groups took place online using Zoom. Recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

The first part of the evaluation analysed data collected by ARC’s project worker from people who had taken part in the Us Too training. This included people who worked in a wide range of roles in social care, women with learning disabilities and specialist practitioners.

Participants who took part in the interviews and focus groups are shown below in Table One.

**Table One: Participants**

<b>Participant Job role</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Focus Group/Interview No.</b>
Domestic violence worker	Council	1
Counsellor	Counselling charity for people who have experienced abuse	1
Counsellor	Counselling charity for people who have experienced abuse	1
Child & family support worker	Domestic abuse refuge	1
Volunteer co-ordinator	Domestic abuse charity	2
Teaching assistant	SEN school	3
Teacher	SEN school	3
Public Servant	Government	4
Volunteer	ARC	5

### **Evaluation Findings: Post Training Evaluation**

Between October 2019 and March 2020, ‘Us Too’ Training was delivered to women with learning disabilities via day services, schools, and further education colleges. The Association for Real Change carried out their own internal evaluation of these sessions by asking the women to raise their hands if they agreed with the following statements before and after the training: ‘is it ok if your boyfriend or girlfriend hits you but says sorry and buys you chocolate to make up for it?’; ‘Is it ok if your boyfriend or girlfriend loves you so much they tell you what to do all the time?’; ‘Have you heard of domestic abuse?’; and ‘do you know what domestic abuse is?’. One hundred and ten participants took part in this part of the

evaluation; Table Two shows the percentage of participants with learning disabilities that answered yes to each question before and after the training.

Table Two: Percentage of participants who answered 'yes' to each question before and after the training

Question	Before	After
Is it OK if your boyfriend or girlfriend hits you but says sorry and buys you chocolates to make up for it?	17%	8%
Is it OK if your boyfriend or girlfriend loves you so much they tell you what to do the whole time?	18%	12%
Have you heard of domestic abuse?	70%	88%
Do you know what domestic abuse is?	49%	87%

The findings show that the number of women with learning disabilities who thought it was okay for a partner to hit them if they bought chocolates after to make up for it significantly reduced after the training. Similarly, the number of participants who thought it was okay if a partner told them what to do the whole time dropped by 6% after the training. The number of participants who had heard of domestic abuse and said they knew what it is significantly increased after the training. Moreover, when participants were asked if they knew how to contact domestic abuse services locally, none knew how to prior to the training, whereas by the end of the training 100% reported they knew how to contact services. This suggests the training has improved awareness and understanding of domestic abuse in women with learning disabilities.

In June 2020, ten participants who worked as support workers completed the course evaluation feedback. Participants reported that they were already aware of available resources and therefore wouldn't change their working practices. Hearing the lived experiences from the speakers was reported as being useful, well presented, thought provoking and more engaging than other training courses. These responses can be seen in Table Three:

Table Three: Percentage of participants who responded to each question with 5 = very/completely, 1 = not at all

Question	5 Very/ completely	4	3	2	1 Not at all
How easy was it to join zoom training session?	50%	30%	20%		
How well were the outcomes explained at the beginning of the workshop	90%	10%			
How would you rate the Us Too Facilitator's knowledge and understanding of the subject?	90%	10%			
As a result of this session, has your knowledge and understanding of the subject increased?	30%	40%	20%		10%
As a direct result of this session, has your confidence in this area of your work increased?	40%	40%	10%		10%
As a direct result of this workshop, will your practice change?	30%	30%	30%		10%
As a result of this workshop, will you be able to support someone to have a better life?	70%	10%	20%		

In July 2002, four participants who were support workers in a supported living association responded to evaluation questions about the workshops. All reported it was easy to join the zoom call, and they understood the outcomes at the beginning of the event. All participants reported the facilitator as very knowledgeable and their own knowledge increased as a result of the training. Moreover, all participants' confidence has increased, their working practice will change and they will be able to support people to have a better life as a direct result of the workshop. When asked for further comments about their experiences, participants reported the speakers were excellent and they enjoyed the session. More varied stories and examples of other types of abuse was asked for from future sessions. These responses can be seen below in Table Four:

Table Four: Percentage of participants who responded to each question with 5 = very/completely, 1 = not at all

Question	5 Very/ completely	4	3	2	1 Not at all
How easy was it to join zoom training session?	25%	75%			
How well were the outcomes explained at the beginning of the event?	75%	25%			
How would you rate the Us Too Facilitator's knowledge and understanding of the subject?	100%				
As a result of this session, has your knowledge and understanding of the subject increased?	50%	50%			
As a direct result of this session, has your confidence in this area of your work increased?	50%	50%			
As a direct result of this workshop, will your practice change?	66.67%	33.3%			
As a result of this workshop, will you be able to support someone to have a better life?	100%				

Between 01/02/2021 to 11/03/2021, twenty participants from domestic abuse services and charities completed the course evaluation questionnaire. The majority reported they were very happy with the workshop. A small percentage felt they were not given adequate information prior to attending the session, and a minority felt the learning outcomes were not explained at the beginning of the workshop. These responses are shown below in Table Five:

Table Five: Percentage of participants who responded to each question with 5 = very/completely, 1 = not at all

Question	5 Very/ completel y	4	3	2	1 Not at all
Were you given adequate information in advance of this workshop about the content, its relevance to you and the reasons for attending?	60%	10%	20%	5%	5%
How easy was it to join zoom training session?	90%	10%			
How well were the learning outcomes explained at the beginning of the workshop	55%	30%	10%	5%	
How well did the trainer/facilitator communicate with you?	80%	20%			
How would you rate the Us Too Facilitator's knowledge and understanding of the subject?	90%	10%			
As a result of this workshop, has your knowledge and understanding of the subject increased?	50%	45%	5%		
As a result of this workshop, has your confidence in this area of your work increased?	40%	55%	5%		
As a direct result of this workshop, will your practice change?	45%	50%	5%		

Finally, the following narrative summarises feedback from all participants who attended the 'Us Too' training workshops. Most participants particularly liked that the experts by experience were relatable and shared their lived experiences with them. They were also happy with the delivery of the training and for professionals who work with women with learning disabilities it was useful to be able to understand how those who are abused feel. Some participants were unhappy the training was delivered via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and while some thought the length of the training was just right, another suggested it could be condensed into smaller chunks.

## Summary of comments submitted on evaluation forms from participants

The comments submitted on the post-training evaluation forms fell into three categories of:

- Experiences
- Delivery
- Reflection

### Experiences

Feedback showed that there were a number of positive comments about the training. The three women who delivered the training were natural and it was brave of them to share their experiences and their thoughts about how support workers should respond. The three women who delivered the training were natural and it was brave of them to share their experiences and their thoughts about how support workers should respond. There were no reported experiences that the participants disliked. Feeding forward, participants commented that it would have been better in person but because of the pandemic, it was delivered on zoom.

### Delivery

Participants commented that it was good to see the women with learning disabilities have the confidence and capability to use online Apps to deliver distance learning and show others with disabilities it is possible. Participants highlighted good group work practice commenting that separating off into teams to discuss points was useful. The facilitator made it light-hearted and it was good that you could chat privately before returning back to a larger group. Other comments included that length was just right, voices were clear and language was simplified and that contact details were provided for support services to use in the future, ensuring support is person-centred

There were a couple of comments that participants had noted in terms of the video kept sticking so had to keep coming out of zoom and re-logging back in and that one participant was confused by the group work.

There were a number of comments in terms of improving the training including; male guest speakers would add greater depth to the training; being broken into smaller bite sized

videos to prevent some of the listeners 'drifting away' would have been useful; the video could have had subtitles to enable it to be watched on a commute and make it accessible to the people hard of hearing. One participant commented that they would have liked more information before that course and on a positive note, one participant noted that it would be good for others to watch as well to open their mind up.

## Reflection

In terms of reflecting on the training, there were a number of positive comments including; one participant commenting that it was useful and really interesting to see that despite us all being different, our needs whether we have learning disabilities or not are the same. Another individual said that it was good to get understanding of how it feels for the victims such as not knowing the abuse is wrong, not being listened to, not reporting abuse, being labelled, not knowing how to verbalise abuse is happening, and just wanting to be loved. Other positive comments included; It was good to learn more about autism; it was insightful to hear views about struggling to read facial expressions, made harder through mask wearing and that some people with learning disabilities are unable to access support having to go through an automated system and needs to be addressed again and simplified for women with learning disabilities.

On reflection, participants commented that they would like further training in own workplace to have more tools to change own working practice and hope that the training will be delivered to police and other statutory agencies to influence decision making at all levels.

## Qualitative Evaluation

Referring back to Table One, twelve participants took part in an interview or focus group (on Zoom) with one of the evaluation team to provide more in-depth feedback on their experiences of taking part in the 'Us Too' training. Across five interviews and/or focus groups, participants included the trainers themselves (women with a learning disability), employees from a range of social care roles and the teachers who supported the school

students who took part in the training (details of participants' roles can be seen in Table One).

Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Following thematic analysis of the transcripts, four themes were identified that highlight the most consequential aspects of the training:

1. Lived experience
2. Expanded knowledge
3. Improved confidence
4. Service accessibility

#### Lived Experience:

The 'lived experience' theme was identified due to all interview and focus group participants who received the training praising the trainers for sharing their experiences of domestic abuse.

"To speak about your personal experience of abuse and domestic violence on this sort of platform I thought was extraordinarily poignant and effective." (FG1)

"They obviously have had the experience of domestic violence, they were able to bring that up. I think that made our children realise, actually, they're similar to us, and they have, it does actually happen. It's not just like a story in a book." (FG3)

Participants described this as empowering and that the training kept them engaged more than they would have been if the training was delivered in a more traditional format. Furthermore, teachers reported it was extremely useful to pupils with learning disabilities as they were able to relate to the speakers and it also gave them aspirations that they might be able to have romantic relationships and employment in adulthood. Importantly, following this training session, three pupils disclosed abuse they had experienced at home, which allowed the school to be able to support them.

"I found it very inspirational and very, very brave of them as well, which is empowering in itself that they have the ability to just be so open and honest and there was that real human connection, you know it just felt authentic." (FG1)

## Expanded knowledge

The 'Expanded knowledge' theme was identified as many participants reported learning a lot. This covered a range of learning including the girls with learning disabilities learning more about how to find help:

“They all developed the knowledge that they could speak to somebody and to find a safe person to speak to, and not to keep it inside, you know, and there’s services out there to support them.” (FG3)

Expanded knowledge also included social care or specialist services professionals learning more about learning disabilities and autism, how to spot signs of domestic abuse in women or girls with learning disabilities, and how to access support services. The training had an important role in increasing the understanding of domestic abuse and the services, which was reported from all three groups (see tables 3-5). Moreover, this also tied into the themes 'improved confidence' and 'service accessibility'.

“One of the things I found outstanding was that...lack of information that people don’t prepare them...to have a sexual relationship...and therefore recognising whether a relationship is healthy.” (FG1)

“What I wanted them to learn was what a healthy and what a nasty relationship looks like. What a toxic and what a healthy relationship looks like.” (FG5)

## Improved confidence

By learning about domestic abuse in women with learning disabilities, participants were able to feel more comfortable supporting clients and co-workers (as highlighted in tables 3-5 for all participants). Similarly, by expanding their knowledge, participants were able to see that the organisations they worked for or with could be improved by being more accessible to women with learning disabilities. The training has enabled practitioners to improve the quality of their responses to people with learning disabilities who are disclosing domestic abuse due to their increased confidence.

“I’m actually working with somebody who has learning disabilities over the telephone, which I found really sort of challenging, but having done the training...I do feel more, say, more confident, and more able to be useful to this client.” (FG1)

The training also enabled women with learning disabilities to come forward and disclose the abuse through their new confidence in understanding what domestic abuse is.

“It made me stronger being with a group of great women who’ve actually made me stronger, as a group of women who are brave enough to come forward.” (FG5)

### Service accessibility

‘Service accessibility’ was created as a theme due to many participants realising their services were not accessible to women with learning disabilities. Consequently, the training led to many organisations beginning to make changes to be more inclusive. One participant reported that the training had resulted in a more open dialogue within the service to acknowledge the need to real service change.

“...I’m in discussions with our managers and our well-being group because I feel we could do a lot better. We could definitely do a lot better.” (FG2)

An increase in acknowledgement for the need for inter-agency working and how this extends to social policy reform importantly, for some was an additional outcome in terms of service accessibility.

“It’s affected our sort of interactions with government departments and...how we want to go about our policy work...included within our work to the Home Office that you need to start recording this and in terms of sort of police data.” (FG4)

A final, but a core outcome for schools was the ability for some young women with learning disabilities to be enabled to self-disclose and to know that their voices will be heard by those the young women were disclosing to.

“We had a few disclosures from our girls, and then we were able to work with them afterwards, you know. Two or three things came out that we had no idea about.”  
(FG3)

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Referring back to the research questions presented on page nine, this evaluation aimed to answer the following questions:

To what extent has the 'Us Too' project increased awareness of domestic abuse amongst:

- a) Women with a learning disability
- b) Professional support workers
- c) Specialist practitioners

This evaluation has highlighted the increased awareness of all the groups of participants that took part in the training. This has been demonstrated for women with learning disabilities, some of whom have disclosed domestic abuse as a result of the training. It is also clear from the evaluation data that both professional support workers and specialist practitioners have also benefitted from the training in terms of having an understanding of the lived experience of individuals with learning disabilities who may be subject to abuse. This was due to the nature of the training, the sessions being facilitated by facilitators with learning disabilities and also due to the group work experience. All of these factors really enhanced the participants' experiences of the training which is emphasised in their evaluations.

Overall, participants found that they had expanded knowledge of domestic abuse no matter what their baseline understanding of domestic abuse was prior to completing the training. All participants made comments around the improved confidence they had in understanding the dynamics of abuse and also how people with learning disabilities are part of a marginalised community where the impact and effects of domestic abuse are increased.

[Can peer-led training improve service provision for supporting women and girls with a learning disability who experience domestic abuse?](#)

The theme around service accessibility highlighted the training had heightened practitioner awareness that some services were not as accessible to individuals with learning disabilities as they could potentially be. The need for inter-agency working to support access to services

was also seen as an important mechanism to improve service provision; communication being the key to such a improvement in service provision.

#### To what extent do participants feel the project was beneficial?

Overall, the training received was perceived from a positive perspective. This was highlighted on the evaluation forms where participants made comments on their experience of the training, the method of delivery of the training, including the facilitators having lived experience and in their subsequent reflections on the training. Participants had a number of useful comments in relation to how the training could be supplemented, all of which were positive.

#### To what extent has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on a) the experiences of domestic abuse amongst women with learning disabilities b) the ability of professional support workers and specialist practitioners to be able to support women with learning disabilities around domestic abuse.

It was clear that the swift move to online learning after the first national lockdown did mean the mode of delivery for the training did need to change. This however, was not reflected in the evaluation in terms of participants have a less positive impression of the training nor of the outcomes of the training being less effective.

One of the biggest limitations that the project saw was the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent lock-downs. The researchers had planned to conduct face-to-face focus groups and interviews, but these were to go online, as was the Us-Too training. Many agencies closed for some of the pandemic or worked with a skeleton staff and schools/ colleges closed at least twice during the pandemic. This has a significant impact on the recruitment of participants to the study. However, a strength of the project was the ability of the research team and participants to respond and adapt very quickly to working online and setting up focus groups and interviews using teams and zoom, which still elicited the rich data that was equivalent to that of a face to face methodology.

## Conclusion

In the main, the experience of participants who received the training was a positive one. There are a number of 'best practice' issues that emerged from the work. Firstly, the need for individuals with learning disabilities to be informed of the availability of domestic abuse services to enable people from this marginalised group to gain support at the earliest instance. The acknowledgement by practitioners that a more inter-agency, 'joint up' approach is needed when enabling people with learning disabilities to access domestic abuse support was also a core finding.

A real success of this training was the young people coming forward to disclose domestic abuse as a direct result of the training. There was a clear need for the training in terms of awareness raising of the issue of domestic abuse prevalence and how to access services for people with learning disabilities, by people with learning disabilities.

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## Appendix One: Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Group Schedules

### People with learning disabilities

- Can you explain to me in your words what domestic abuse is?
- Can you tell me about the workshop that you went to about domestic violence (n.b. make sure to use the terminology that was used in workshops).
- What were the main things that you can remember about the workshop?
- Do you think it is important to learn about domestic abuse? Why?
- Do you think it was useful to go to the workshop? Why?
- Did you learn anything new?
- If you thought you were being abused, do you know how to find people who can help?
- Do you know any groups or organisation that can help?
- If you know someone else needed help because they were being abused, what would you do? Who would you ask?

### Support Professionals / teachers

- Can you tell me about the workshop that you went to about domestic violence?
- What has been your experience of supporting women with learning disabilities in relation to domestic abuse?
- Do you know of any changes for any individuals that have happened as a result of the workshop?
- Do you think it was useful to go to the workshop? Why?
- To what extent do you see supporting women who might be at risk as part of your role? Did the workshop change your perception?
- Have you been approached by any women who have attended the workshop to tell you they are/ have been abused?
- In your experience, have more women with learning disabilities approached you about domestic abuse during the covid-19 outbreak?
- How relevant did you find the training given the change in circumstances for most people due to Covid-19?

### Specialist Services

- Prior to attending the workshop, what was your understanding of the prevalence of domestic abuse for women with learning disabilities?
- Prior to attending the workshop can you describe what your understanding was of the experience of domestic abuse for women with learning disabilities?
- How accessible for women with learning disabilities do you think your service is? (examples?)
- Are counsellors trained in supporting people with learning disabilities? (examples?) Do you have members of staff who are experienced in communicating with people with learning disabilities?
- What were the key points you learned at the training about the impact of domestic abuse for women with learning disabilities?

- Do you know of any changes in terms of policy, guidance or practice for your agency that have happened as a result of the workshop?
- Do you think it was useful to go to the workshop? Why?
- Have you seen an increase in referrals during the Covid-19 pandemic?
  - a) If no, do you think that represents the actual situation?
  - b) If yes, can you tell us about the experiences women with learning disabilities are reporting during the Covid-19 outbreak? Are there any differences to pre Covid-19 referrals?



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