

Implementing Safe & Together in Scotland: Creating Domestic Abuse-Informed Workforces, Services and Systems

Year One Learning Report - 2021/2022

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Introduction and aims of this report

In 2014, the City of Edinburgh Council became the first local authority in Scotland to begin embedding the Safe & Together Model, an internationally-recognised suite of tools and interventions designed to help child protection and other key professionals to become domestic abuse informed.

Over the following years, a growing number of local authorities across Scotland began exploring how they could begin to use the Safe & Together Model to help ensure that the workforces, services and systems they have in place locally are operating in a way that helps increase accountability for perpetrators as parents, reduces victim-blaming and improves outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse.

As of September 2022, just under 90% of local authority areas in Scotland have invested in some level of Safe & Together training for their staff.

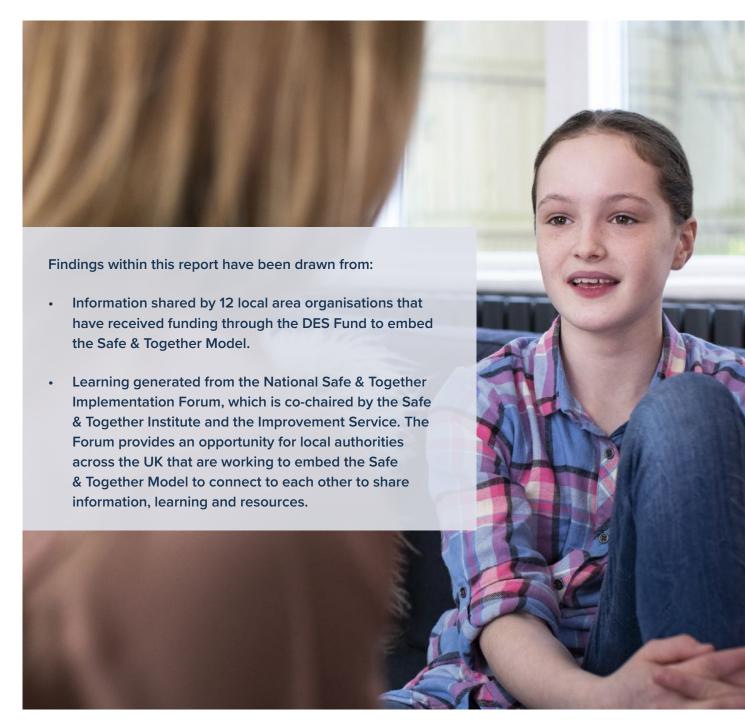
In October 2021, the Scottish Government made its most significant investment in the Safe & Together Model to date when it provided dedicated funding through the Delivering Equally

Safe (DES) Fund to support 12 organisations to progress activities to embed the Safe & Together model in their local areas between now and March 2025. At the same time, the Scottish Government provided funding to the Improvement Service to work alongside these 12 organisations to support them in their improvement journey, with a particular focus on generating learning on the impact that this work is having on the long-term ambition to create domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems in Scotland.

This report marks the first in a series that the Improvement Service will produce over the life of the DES Fund to highlight key learning about the activities that these 12 organisations are progressing to embed the Safe & Together Model, the impact this work is having and any enablers or barriers to embedding domestic abuse-informed practice and processes identified by those organisations.



Due to the early stage that several of the DES-funded projects are currently at in embedding the Safe & Together Model, and given the long-term nature of system change, the year one report primarily focuses on the preparatory activities that have taken place over the first 12 months and the emerging learning from this work. It is intended that future reports will build on this learning, with a particular focus on understanding the impact that implementing the Safe & Together Model in Scotland is having on creating domestic abuse-informed workforces, service and systems.





Overview of key findings

- DES Funding is supporting local areas to develop and embed domestic abuse-informed services and systems, by providing resources that allow organisations to roll out Safe & Together training and ongoing support required for workforce development.
- There has been substantial progress made in delivering training programmes across local areas funded through DES. In addition to delivering training, local areas have developed structures and mechanisms aimed at facilitating knowledge exchange and to provide ongoing support for practitioners to embed training into practice.
- There is emerging evidence of the positive impact that training and development are having on local workforces. For example, over 70% of professionals who attended Safe & Together training in the last 12 months reported makings improvements to how they undertake domestic abuse assessments, engagements and interviews and 65% reported making improvements to their interventions/case planning. However, several areas also identified that ongoing issues with

- staff recruitment, retention and wellbeing following the pandemic has negatively impacted the capacity for staff to attend training and engage with ongoing support to change practice.
- While workforce development is essential for creating long term system change, it is not in itself sufficient to create long term system change. Local authorities have identified this will require a robust strategic approach comprising; collective leadership, joined up working including the alignment of policies and processes, ongoing investment in people and systems and clear frameworks capable of measuring and evaluating the impact of change across all parts of the system. In some cases, DES funding has provided resources that have strengthened the strategic approach through the establishment of steering groups that will support planning and delivery.
- Local areas/partnership/implementation leads have reported finding support at national level from organisations such as the Safe & Together Institute invaluable in achieving wider system change.

Domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems

"Domestic abuse-informed practice can be defined as a perpetrator pattern, child-centred, survivor strengths-based approach to working with domestic abuse. It holds perpetrators to account whilst recognising the strengths of the non-offending partner to protect the safety and wellbeing of children, aiming to keep children and non-offending parents together and ultimately improve outcomes for adult and child survivors of domestic abuse."

(Safe & Together Institute)



Understanding the prevalence, nature and impact of domestic abuse in Scotland

Domestic abuse can be defined as a pattern of persistent and controlling behaviour by a partner or ex-partner which causes physical, sexual, financial and emotional harm to adult and child survivors.

While it is difficult to calculate the exact scale of domestic abuse in Scotland, Police Scotland statistics show that there were **65,251 incidents** of domestic abuse reported by the Police in 2020/21, of which over 80% involved a female victim and a male perpetrator. However, research repeatedly shows that the majority of domestic

abuse continues to go unreported with 1 in 3 women estimated to experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives² and 1 in 5 children in Scotland estimated to have experienced domestic abuse by the time they reach 18. More recent figures published by the Scottish Government's Justice Directorate³ report a 7% increase in crimes recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 to February 2022, compared to the year 2020-2021. In 2021-22, national homicide statistics for Scotland reported that over half (56% or 9 victims) of the 16 female victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner. ⁴

Domestic abuse is routinely the most common concern identified in Child Protection Case Conferences in Scotland.⁵ In 2021/22, 1,811 children were referred to the Reporter under the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 due to a "close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse" (SCRA 2022).⁶ Importantly, this figure does not include children referred on other grounds who may also have experienced domestic abuse. The 2021 Children's Social Work Statistics⁷ also cites domestic abuse as the most common concern, identified in 16% of 6,374 cases of Child Protection Case Conferences.

The impacts of domestic abuse are wide-ranging and can have a long-term impact on the lives of those affected. Experiencing domestic abuse can result in poorer outcomes for survivors, including physical and mental health problems, homelessness, reduced education and work opportunities, injuries and even death. Public Health Scotland identifies domestic abuse as an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that, without effective support, has the potential to result in poorer outcomes for a child, such as becoming involved with the care system.

In addition to the devastating impact of domestic abuse on the lives of families in Scotland, dealing with the consequences of domestic abuse places a significant burden on public services. Police Scotland report that managing incidences of domestic abuse is the greatest single demand on their time, with an average of one incident being reported to them every nine minutes.⁸ Estimates based on one study from 2004 suggested that domestic abuse could cost Scotland £2.3 billion while violence against women and girls costs Scotland £4 billion. Given the increase in reported cases of domestic abuse over recent years, it can be reasonably assumed that this figure has increased.

It is estimated that

1 in 5

children are affected by domestic abuse in Scotland.



16%* °

of concerns identified at Child Protection Case Conferences in 2020/21 were due to domestic abuse

*of 6374 concerns



In 2020/21, Police Scotland recorded

65,251

incidents of domestic abuse. This was the fifth year in a rown the figure has increased.



involved a female victim and a male perpertrator

children in Scotland estimated to have experienced domestic abuse by the time they reach 18.



Including unreported crime

1 in 3 women



are estimated to experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives

Key strategic drivers

Equally Safe

In 2014, the Scottish Government and COSLA published Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls.⁹ The strategy sets out an ambitious vision to create

"a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it."

The strategy recognises that domestic abuse can have significant consequences for women, children and young people's lives and notes in particular that "there is significant evidence of links between domestic abuse and emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children, and children themselves can see domestic abuse as 'coercive control' of the whole family environment, not just of their mother."

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Equally Safe sets out four key priorities for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, which include:

- Priority 1: Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls
- Priority 2: Women and girls thrive as equal citizens – socially, culturally, economically and politically
- Priority 3: Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people
- Priority 4: Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response

The provision of funding for local authority areas to embed domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems recognises the contribution of this programme of work to achieving these long-term Equally Safe priorities.



National Guidance for Child Protection

In 2021, the Scottish Government published updated National Guidance for Child Protection, which sets out the responsibilities and expectations for all workforces involved in the care and protection of children. recognises the impact of domestic abuse on the child and highlights that working with the non-abusing parent in a positive way is an effective approach to protecting children within the household and supporting their safety and wellbeing. The guidance specifically recognises the Safe & Together Model as a systematic response to domestic abuse that focuses on the protection of the child.

An overview of other key drivers including national and international policies and legislation can be accessed at the end of this document.



Creating domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems

Both in Scotland and across the world, domestic abuse survivors, usually women, have traditionally been held responsible for the impact of that abuse on their child. Despite significant efforts in recent years to address this, research suggests there can still be a tendency for systems and services to focus on domestic abuse survivors' decision making, rather than the perpetrator's pattern of coercive control, as being the primary risk and safety concern for children.

Often there are expectations that domestic abuse survivors will show that they are protective by carrying out drastic actions that significantly impact the child and family functioning, such as moving home, ending the relationship or calling the police. Systems and services can fail to see the myriad other efforts that domestic abuse survivors undertake to keep their children safe and provide a stable, nurturing and healing environment. Conversely, there has been a lack of accountability for perpetrators in our systems, both as perpetrators of domestic abuse and for their role as fathers. This gender double standard of parenting reinforces gender stereotypes as it places the majority of parental responsibility with the mother.

Research suggests that creating domestic abuseinformed systems, services and workforces within local authorities across Scotland could help to:

- Partner with survivors and recognise their strengths and protective efforts;
- Place greater accountability on the perpetrator for their choices and their role within a family unit; and
- Improve outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

In addition, embedding domestic abuse-informed systems and services provides opportunities to develop systems that:

- Strengthen competencies in the child protection system;
- Improve cross-system collaboration; and
- Increase consistency of service delivery across Scotland.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this shift will help to achieve Scotland's vision of ensuring all women, children and young people are equally safe, and that children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected so that they are able to realise their full potential.

How does the Safe & Together Model help to create domestic abuse-informed services and systems?

The Safe & Together Model aims to help change how practitioners work with families impacted by domestic abuse. It is an internationally recognised suite of tools and interventions designed to help professionals in child and family serving systems become domestic abuse-informed.

Continuously refined through years of experience of implementing the model across the world, it is an evidence-based practice that can help improve competencies and cross-system collaboration.

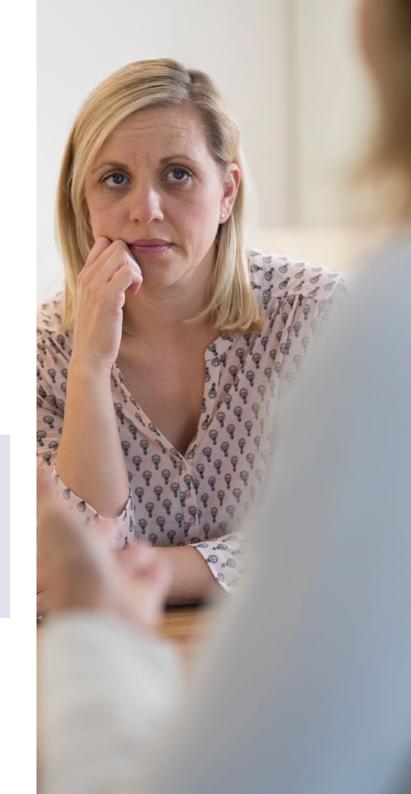
The Safe & Together Model, as a systems change framework, offers language, thinking and practices that help increase accountability for perpetrators as parents, reduce victim blaming and improve outcomes for children and families.

The model aims to address domestic abusedestructive practices by providing a set of principles and components that can guide domestic abuse-informed practice. These include:

- Keeping the child safe and together with the non-offending parent
- 2. Partnering with the non-offending parent as the default position
- 3. Intervening with the perpetrator to reduce risk and harm to the child

Safe & Together Training

There are a number of training packages being delivered by DES funded organisations:



Safe & Together Model Overview

This training provides participants with an introduction to, and overview of, the Safe & Together Model. The course provides participants with information about creating a domestic abuse-informed systems, the principles and components of the Safe & Together

Model and information about the framework behind competency-building in child and family serving systems around domestic abuse.

Safe & Together Model CORE Training

This training is designed to provide a skills-oriented foundation for domestic abuse-informed practice and create opportunities for professional behaviour change.

The course provides training focused on the following foundational practice areas:

assessment, interviewing, documentation and case planning.

CORE Training explores the importance of:

- Identifying the impact of domestic abuse on children and family functioning.
- Fact-based assessment of the perpetrators' behaviour patterns.
- Partnering with adult survivors of domestic abuse.
- Intervening with perpetrators.
- How domestic violence intersects with other issues like substance abuse and mental health.
- How intersectionalities like race, immigration status or a chronic illness impact the perpetrator's pattern of behaviour and the vulnerability of the survivor and the children.

Participants of the CORE Training will learn to use practice tools that can be implemented right away to improve assessment of risk, impact on children, survivor protective efforts and essential case decisions. Participants are encouraged to apply the concepts to their own current or past cases and explore how the Safe & Together Model could be implemented in their personal practice and in their agency or system.



Safe & Together Supervisor and Manager Training

This Supervisor Training is designed to build upon prior training on Safe & Together Model CORE concepts and to provide a skills-oriented foundation to domestic abuse-informed supervisory practice. While the training is designed to increase knowledge, the goal is to change professional behaviour. Supervisors and managers learn key skills to help their workers apply a perpetrator pattern-based approach to casework. The training is organised into three critical supervisory skills:

- Assessing and supporting the quality of their workers' practice
- Decision making and worker guidance
- Managing worker safety

Trainer Certification Programme

This comprehensive program offers support, direction, mentoring, discovery, and a deep understanding of the Safe & Together Model.

Partner Agencies in the programme train their own staff to become Certified Trainers. The agencies have an ongoing relationship with the S&T Institute to implement the Model and embed and sustain long term systems change.

To date, Safe & Together training has been delivered in approximately 90% across Scotland, with 43 certified Safe & Together trainers currently in place across the country. In order to measure the impact of this training, the Safe & Together Institute require participants to complete evaluation surveys following all training courses. Key findings from these surveys over the last 12 months include:

- over 70% of respondents to S&T evaluation surveys reported makings changes to how they undertake domestic abuse assessments following training;
- over 70% of respondents made changes to how they undertake engagement/interviews;
- 63% of respondents made changes to how they undertake documentation;
- 65% made changes to their interventions/case planning; and
- 71% of respondents reported being 'enthusiastic' about applying CORE skills and principles to their practice.

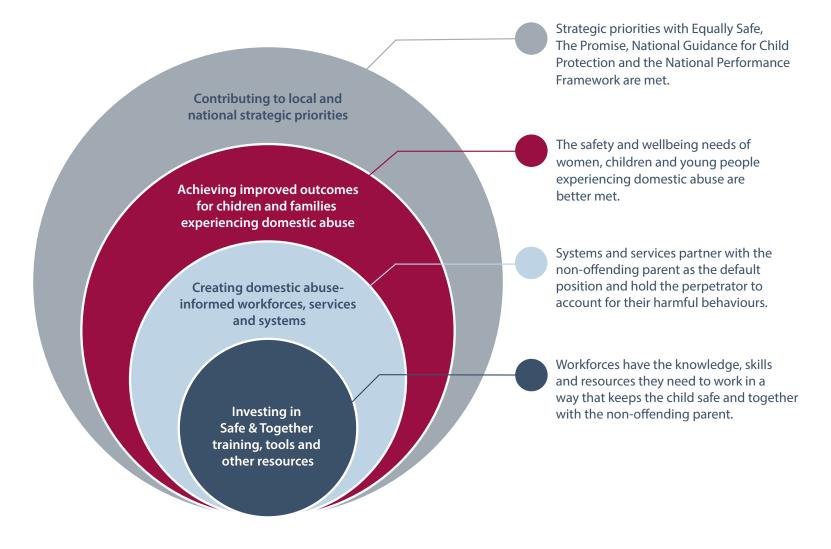


Safe & Together implementation

In addition to training packages, as a system change framework, the Safe & Together Institute also offers tailored support and resources for organisations to plan for full implementation of the model within their organisation or partnership.

One of the key tools available, and currently being used by a number of DES Funded organisations to facilitate discussions and planning for change at local level, is the **Domestic Abuse Informed Practice Self-Assessment Tool and Evaluation Framework**. Developed in collaboration with the Improvement Service, the tool offers a way for organisations to assess the extent to which their services and systems are operating in a domestic abuse-informed way. This tool contains a set of best practice indicators of domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems benchmarked against successful implementation of the Safe & Together Model globally and can help organisations identify areas of strength and areas for potential improvement. The results of the self-assessment can be used to determine whether additional research and evaluation activities are required to further develop an indicative picture of the system, or if the returned information is considered adequate, can go on to inform strategic decisions around implementation planning.

Fig: Embedding domestic abuse-informed workforces, systems and services



S&T have delivered training or have Certified Trainers in in 28 of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland - nearly 90% of Scotland.



43
S&T trainers in Scotland

There are

70%

of respondents to S&T
evaluation surveys reported
makings changes to how
they undertake domestic
abuse assessments,
engagements and
interviews following training



65%

made changes to their interventions/ case planning

Embedding domestic abuseinformed services and systems in Scotland: progress, enablers and barriers

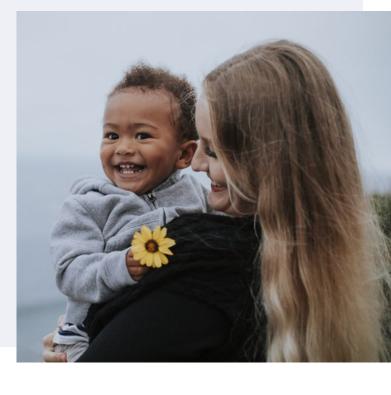
As local authority areas and partnerships across Scotland work towards embedding domestic abuse-informed services and systems, in many cases the process has begun with training the workforce.

These organisations have chosen to adopt the Safe & Together Model's training, methodologies and best practice indicators as a framework for implementing change at an operational level but they also recognise the need for this training to be reinforced with support and resources for implementing knowledge into practice to create whole system, sustainable change.

In October 2021, the Scottish Government provided funding to 12 local area organisations across Scotland to support them to implement the Safe & Together Model to help create workforces, services and systems that better meet the needs of families affected by domestic abuse. These organisations include: Aberdeen City Council;

Argyll and Bute Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Partnership; Dumfries and Galloway Council; East Ayrshire HSCP; East & Mid Lothian PPC; Barnardo's Partnership; Highland Council; Moray WA Partnership; Shetland WA SCIO; North Lanarkshire Council; Perth and Kinross Council; and South Lanarkshire Council. The funding is designed to support some level of Safe & Together training to be embedded in 17 local authority areas over the life of the DES Fund.

These organisations are at different stages of embedding domestic abuse-informed workforces, service and systems due to a number of factors including levels of funding received, prior knowledge and engagement with the Safe &



Together Model, the capacity for the workforce to engage and the capacity for leadership to support strategic development.

The purpose of the year one learning report is not to assess the best use of investment but rather to highlight the different ways DES funding is being used to implement the Safe & Together Model across Scotland, to share emerging learning about the impact this work is having and to share information about any barriers and enablers reported by individuals and teams co-ordinating this programme of work locally.

This section of the report will highlight some of the ways that DES funding is being used to

support the embedding of domestic abuseinformed practice and processes across services and systems through the implementation of Safe & Together training and methodologies. It will also share emerging learning about the impact this work is having and report key factors that organisations have identified as supporting or challenging progress.

Workforce development

While the specific activities that each organisation has prioritised to implement the Safe & Together model varies, the focus has centred around workforce development. In particular, this has involved co-ordinating a programme of training and support to help develop a critical mass of social workers and other professionals and to provide support for them to embed the approach into their practice locally.

Progress and enablers

Since October 2021, organisations have made substantial progress in delivering against their workforce development plans, with Safe & Together training being targeted at a wide range of professionals that are likely to come into contact with families experiencing domestic abuse. These include professionals working within: adult and child social work; housing alcohol and drugs; justice; education; Police Scotland; NHS and Third Sector specialist services

Some of the early feedback on the impact of training includes practitioners reporting an increase in knowledge and skills in key areas including:

- Working with child survivors of domestic abuse
- Interventions and case planning focused on recognising the role of the perpetrator and the protective capacity of the survivor

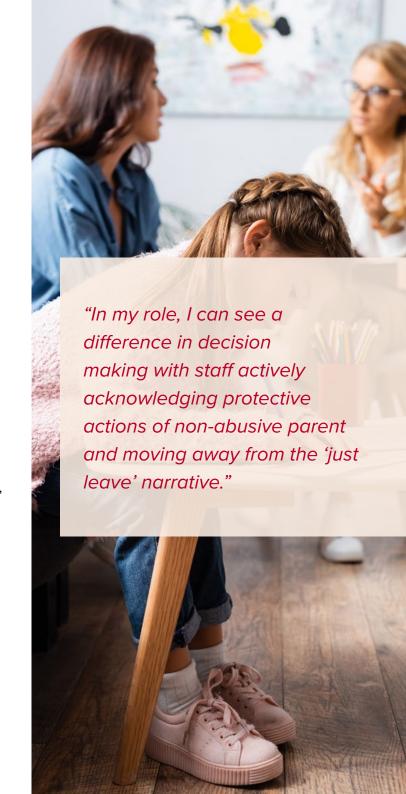
Quotes from local area professionals that have attended training:

"...thank you for giving us some spaces on the Safe and Together introduction course. It has been hugely insightful and has given us some tools that we can use in our questioning of reports and families in the hearing room. Almost every family we encounter has been exposed to domestic abuse on some level and how we view reports is very influential on our decision making."

"In my role, I can see a difference in decision making with staff actively acknowledging protective actions of non-abusive parent and moving away from the 'just leave' narrative."

"The improvements we're seeing to practice include: diversification in the approach to meetings – more consideration is given around the appropriateness of a victim having to attend a meeting when they are not the risk.

On an occasion where focused work has been



undertaken with dad, there was a marked improvement in the child's wellbeing as remarked by the child, mum and school"

"I thoroughly enjoyed the training and at the end of the 4th day I made a phone call to a perpetrator, I was able to use Safe and Together language in my call regarding his parenting and felt more confident."

"Fantastic training which would be beneficial to anyone working with survivors, perpetrators or families in general. Has really challenged my practice and given me practical ways to improve how I work."

Barriers

Specific challenges that local areas have reported in delivering workforce development plans include:

- Not having resource to develop plans and co-ordinate delivery until later in the funding period;
- Difficulties in staff being able to engage with training due to high levels of staff absence, competing priorities and lack of organisational capacity; and
- The initial uptake of training can be low, due to limited understanding or awareness of the context and ambitions of working in a domestic abuse-informed way and individuals' roles to support this shift.

CASE STUDY

Aberdeen City Council

Aberdeen City Council delivered training to 145 individuals within the first 12 months of funding. The workforce development plan targeted Children and Families Social Work practitioners but also included Justice Social Work, NHS Grampian Midwifery and Education. The plan tailors training towards specific roles and remits and sets out pathways for different levels of training including overview days, core and more advanced programmes for certified trainers. The delivery of training has been developed in collaboration with line managers, focusing on adjusting workloads and freeing up time in advance to allow capacity for attendance and development activities. Communications from senior leadership in support of the training have helped to secure buy in from staff.

Supporting sustainable change locally

Local areas and strategic groups recognise the need to ensure that change is sustainable and that professionals are supported to use Safe & Together training, tools and resources to work in a domestic abuse-informed way locally.



Progress and enablers

Several of the organisations funded through DES have set up supportive structures to facilitate ongoing learning and development opportunities, share knowledge and experience and provide channels where challenges are listened to and can be collaboratively addressed.

Several local areas are using a "champions model" where individuals and/or small groups that have completed training can support with:

- Raising awareness across multi-agency teams and policy areas;
- Providing practical assistance for practitioners on a 1:1 or group basis;

- Delivering training into practice; and
- Strategic planning and leadership for embedding the model.

"What we recognised was that training is crucial to implementation but not the only aspect"

South Lanarkshire

Local areas recognise the value of raising the awareness of the importance of creating domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems to increase engagement, understanding and participation across services, agencies and leadership. Where dedicated resource has been made possible through funding, the capacity for delivering awareness-raising activity and resources has increased.



CASE STUDY

Moray Women's Aid Partnership

To support the rollout of the Safe & Together Model in Moray, the local multi-agency VAWG Partnership will begin hosting quarterly Practitioner's Forums.

These Forums will provide an opportunity for newly-trained practitioners to share learning and troubleshoot problems they may encounter with local implementation and to address regional specifics. Moray Women's Aid will attend each forum to ensure that any specialist questions regarding domestic abuse in general can be answered fully. The Equally Safe Development Coordinator, who is a member of the national Safe & Together Implementation Forum, will also attend each meeting in case there are any issues which may be best dealt with via national response and also to inform the Safe & Together Institute's ongoing work to localise their training materials.

Forum meetings will be informal to encourage full and frank discussion but also ensure that reliable sources of specialist information can be accessed by practitioners, as well as feeding back any relevant learning to the national Safe & Together Implementation Forum.

CASE STUDY

South Lanarkshire Council

South Lanarkshire's Safe & Together Steering Group has established a Safe & Together Champions group, made up of frontline staff from all partners who are trained in the Safe & Together Model. The Champions group meets quarterly and encourages more professionals to become Safe & Together Champions once they have completed their training.

The group is chaired on behalf of the Public Protection Team by either the Child Protection Committee's Development Officer or the Gender Based Violence Partnership Development Officer and aims to:

- a) support all staff across the multi-agency workforce within Children's Services to become more aware of the Safe & Together Model when working with families affected by domestic abuse in South Lanarkshire; and
- b) build staff's confidence in using the Safe & Together Model, ensuring they are confident in sharing their knowledge and experience of using the model with staff who are not trained in Safe and Together.



CASE STUDY

Barnardo's - Equally Safe Service in Partnership with Aberlour and Falkirk Council

To further support staff that have attended training, the partnership have established a Mentors Reflective Group facilitated by the Equally Safe Falkirk Development worker. The meeting provides opportunities to share practice, and build confidence in using the model through practice sessions and to keep up to date with resources and information from the Safe & Together Institiute. Mentors are from different agencies across Falkirk which provides an opportunity to develop closer working relationships whilst understanding different perspectives and experiences. An MS Teams Group has been set up to support the aims of this group and to Mentors to connect to each other and to share learning and resources. Implementation Forum.

CASE STUDY

Dumfries & Galloway Council

Dumfries & Galloway Council were successful in recruiting a Development Officer who has been in post since January 2022. So far, Dumfries & Galloway have focused on delivering awareness-raising activities, including:

- A 7-minute briefing document on Safe & Together available across the Children's Services Partnership as a multi-agency resource for managers to share and discuss with their teams; and
- A quarterly Safe & Together newsletter for social work staff and key partner agencies to share plans and activities for embedding the model.

Following the distribution of their summer newsletter, Dumfries & Galloway reported seeing an uptake of sign-ups for training from across services and agencies.

Barriers

Specific challenges that local areas have identified in supporting sustainable change at the local level include:

- Limited capacity across the workforce to engage with support such as practitioner forums and awareness-raising activities;
- Limited capacity to develop and co-ordinate these activities where dedicated funding has not been made available to do this; and
- Limited engagement and support from senior leaders and middle managers within organisations to embed this work.

Local governance structures to support implementation

The majority of local areas who have received DES funding have set-up multi-agency steering and project groups to provide leadership, develop strategic and sustainable implementation plans and to ensure links are established across different policy and practice areas. Others are using the increased capacity following funding to develop these structures and to develop the tools and resources required for them to function meaningfully and effectively. Examples of this include: developing terms of reference for the group; agreeing reporting structures; reviewing/developing action plans; and considering how they will evaluate the impact of planned activities.



Progress and enablers

CASE STUDY

East and Midlothian Public Protection Committee

East Lothian and Midlothian work closely together to share learning and to develop an approach for implementing training into practice. Each have well established, multiagency implementation groups chaired by Child Services Leads that regularly connect to review progress and to develop shared tools and resources. Implementation Groups supported the development and delivery of workforce training programmes and are now considering how to further implement training into practice.

CASE STUDY

Perth & Kinross Council

A Steering Group for implementation comprising third sector and statutory colleagues has been established. The group includes leads from the Adult Protection Committee, the Child Protection Committee and the VAW Partnership who will engage with senior officers and elected members.

Where dedicated resource is in place, local areas have reported that this has allowed progress to be made and has created opportunities to review and strengthen strategic plans for the long-term sustainable implementation of domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems.

CASE STUDY

Highland Council

A full-time Programme Co-ordinator was appointed in July 2022. This role sits between Highland's Child Protection Committee and VAWG Partnership, allowing a collaborative approach to working with multi-agency partners. This has supported the development of a strategic, long-term work plan that captures the requirements of different stakeholders across the system, and the supporting structures needed to ensure that domestic abuse-informed workforces. systems and services can be embedded in the Highlands in a sustainable way. The work plan also includes a series of self-assessment and evaluation milestones to accurately track and report progress and evaluate the impact of activities on families affected by domestic abuse.

Barriers

Specific challenges that organisations have identified in developing local governance structures to support this work include:

- A lack of shared understanding across all key partners/agencies about what domestic abuse-informed services and systems look like in the context of their work and the roles that different partners can play in supporting this shift. It was noted that existing guidance and the Safe & Together self-assessment focuses on best practice for social work practitioners but doesn't clearly describe what domestic abuse-informed practice means in different contexts and settings; and
- Limited capacity to develop implementation plans that include long-term system change, in part due to the short-term nature of funding.

Self-assessment and evaluation

Most organisations that have been funded through DES have expressed an intention to collect evidence to help track and measure their progress in embedding domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems and to better understand the impact of domestic abuse-informed practice and policy on families affected by domestic abuse.

To help support this work, in the first year of funding, the IS has supported four local areas

CASE STUDY

North Lanarkshire Council

North Lanarkshire's Safe & Together Steering Group undertook a supported self-assessment survey with the purpose of understanding to what extent workforces, services and systems that interact with families affected by domestic abuse are working in a domestic abuse-informed way through aligning with the key principles of Safe & Together.

An online survey based on the Self-Assessment Toolkit was developed and distributed across multiagency partners. Responses were analysed and collated into a high-level findings report that was shared with the local Safe & Together Steering Group and used to help inform further discussion about next steps.

The report drew out overarching themes including:

- Training and development ongoing needs;
- Communication and engagement;
- Embedding learning into practice; and
- Partnership working.

Discussions provided context around the results and suggestions about how to develop the local approach at both operational and strategic levels. Further development sessions will focus on how to take this learning forward.

to complete a self-assessment based on the Domestic Abuse-Informed Systems and Practice: Self Assessment Toolkit and Evaluation Framework and have facilitated discussions with strategic groups to support planning for embedding domestic abuse-informed services and systems.

The IS has also developed an online form that can be used to collect quantitative data that can help measure the impact of domestic abuse-informed practice and policy on families affected by domestic abuse. A list of quality indicators around practice and leadership and a list of suggested data sets that can help to measure the impact of improvement activities on practice, processes and families affected by domestic abuse is included in the toolkit.

Progress and enablers

At the National Safe & Together Implementation Forums, local areas have shared their plans to use case file audits in different ways to collect information and evidence of change. These include:

- Collecting a sample of case files pre and post training and noting any changes across language, terminology and outcomes; and
- Reviews categorised into thematic areas (aligned to Safe & Together principles, E.g., working with perpetrators) with Champions providing guidance for practitioners around opportunities to embed Safe & Together principles into practice through using specific tools and resources.

Several local areas have developed templates and processes for multi-agency case file reviews based on national resources available for self-evaluation (most notably the Care Inspectorate Guidance) and have built in questions/indicators from the Self-Assessment Toolkit to collect evidence of the application of Safe & Together principles. This will help to assess whether using Safe & Together knowledge, tools and resources may have helped to manage these cases in a domestic abuse-informed way.

CASE STUDY

Shetland Women's Aid (SCIO) Partnership

Having the part time, co-ordinator post funded by DES supported the development of an achievable business plan and an agenda for the partnership.

A key stage in the plan was undertaking the self-assessment which helped to identify how far services and systems were operating in a domestic abuse-informed way and where the Safe and Together Model could improve the response to domestic abuse across Shetland. The involvement of senior stakeholders and leaders in the self-assessment exercise helped to raise awareness and understanding of the programme and its ambitions.

The partnership now also have dedicated working group with representatives from Public Protection, Rape Crisis, and Women's Aid who together with the SDAP co-ordinator are taking a joined-up approach to publicity and awareness raising in the local community to give a strong, united approach to ending all forms of Violence against Women and Girls.

Other local areas are conducting evaluations specific to the work underway locally, with a number including the perspectives of people accessing associated support services to



understand their experiences. Local areas plan on including this in future evaluations.

Several local areas have indicated they would like to meaningfully work with people with lived experience of domestic abuse to help them to evaluate the impact of embedding domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems.

Barriers

Specific challenges that organisations have identified in evaluating the progress they are making in embedding domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems and the impact this is having include:

- Insufficient time and resources to undertake evaluation activities;
- Not having mutual information and data sharing systems and evaluation frameworks to measure service and system change; and
- A misalignment between DES Fund-related outcomes versus outcomes related to longterm systems change, i.e., progress reports for DES focus on training and do not place this work within the context of system change, when evidence highlights that training is only one aspect of what is required to create robust and meaningful system change.

CASE STUDY

East Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP)

The pan-Ayrshire Lead Officer is co-ordinating a range of evaluation exercises to identify learning needs, barriers to cultural and practice change and readiness to change. These include:

Using the Domestic Abuse-Informed Practice Self-Assessment toolkit to present a snapshot of the culture across East Ayrshire.

Safe & Together related questions have been incorporated into the regular case review activities already undertaken on a multiagency basis.

Informal liaison with frontline practitioners and management to understand impact of training and development, identify challenges and develop quality assurance methods

Understanding lived experiences of women and children who have accessed support services, findings from which will be used to understand the impact of these services on the lives of families affected by domestic abuse.

The development of a quality assurance framework to ensure evaluation activities remain relevant and appropriate.

These, and other development activities form part of East Ayrshire's Implementation Plan, which is under the scrutiny of and ratified by East Ayrshire's VAW Partnership chaired by Chief Social Worker & Head of Children's Health, Care and Justice Service.

CASE STUDY

Argyll & Bute Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership

In addition to undertaking an organisational self-assessment, Argyll & Bute have commissioned research to understand the lived experience of women who have access support services for domestic abuse, and of staff who are delivering them. Research will be undertaken before and after key elements of training have been delivered to identify the impact on service delivery. It is hoped that this will also provide insights into specific experiences of women accessing services in remote and rural locations.

Key findings

The implementation of domestic abuse-informed services and systems is still generally at an early stage within DES-funded organisations and across local areas, who have mostly focused on delivering Safe & Together training and additional support to embed changes into practice where possible.

The following section provides an overview of emerging learning about key factors that are supporting local areas to make progress, as well as those that are presenting challenges.



Enablers

Dedicated resources to embed the Safe & Together Model

- DES funding has primarily supported local areas to roll out training to their workforces, with many areas reporting they would be unable to afford the cost of this valuable training otherwise.
- In some cases, DES funding has also allowed recruitment of dedicated resource to support embedding training into practice, increase awareness and engagement and to support planning to further embed domestic abuseinformed service and systems. Several organisations highlighted that they would prioritise dedicated resources to support this programme of work in future funding.

National support

 Local areas have highlighted that support through the National Safe & Together Implementation Forum is integral to supporting local authorities to embed this model. Specifically, partners noted that they valued having regular opportunities to connect to and learn from peers.

Capacity building: facilitation and planning

- Having access to dedicated support to help facilitate discussions within local strategic meetings.
- Local areas highlighted the value of practical support to co-ordinate self-assessments.

"The Implementation Forum is achieving a critical role in bringing local areas together to share experience and learning. As well a great source of learning, it's inspiring and they often lead to lightbulb moments when thinking about our own experience and planning."

Local area lead

Barriers

Short term funding cycles

- Funding through DES contributes towards achieving essential short-term outcomes associated with training and workforce development. Medium- and long-term outcomes around strategic systemic change require longer-term investment and resource to plan, co-ordinate and quality assure delivery.
- Variance among organisations' levels of funding, infrastructure and capacity means that they are progressing at different paces and have different requirements for support. Without dedicated resource to support strategic working and to co-ordinate plans, progress can be slow.

"Planning for full implementation would be much more successful and would move at a faster pace if there was someone dedicated to driving it forward."

Local area lead

Strategic working: taking a whole systems approach and collective leadership

- Adopting a "whole systems approach" requires substantial cross-organisational working that includes a wide range of agencies, organisations and individuals to provide multi-faceted support for families affected by domestic abuse. However, there is no specific guidance advising what implementation or best practice looks like in different contexts.
- Different organisations have different perspectives, agendas and priorities; not all have the capacity or corporate support for staff to undertake and implement training alongside other programmes of work at this time.
- Local areas have highlighted that leadership buy-in is critical for increasing understanding and engagement across workforces.

Capacity to evaluate change and measure progress and performance

- Evidencing change within organisational culture and systems can be challenging, especially where change is often anecdotal and captured only informally through conversations with individuals.
- The impact of training on internal teams and processes can be easier to evaluate but in order to evidence the impact of these changes at the systemic level and for families affected by domestic abuse, local areas require qualitative and quantitative information and data that can build a picture of progress and change. There is currently limited resource within organisations to collect evaluation data, with DES Funding primarily being targeted at supporting organisations to deliver training programmes and embed knowledge into practice.

Transforming systems and services at a time of crisis

It is important to recognise that DES Funded projects are working to create system change at a time of ongoing and emerging crisis. In addition to continuing to deal with the added challenges and heightened risks that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed for both families affected by domestic abuse and the workforces that support them, organisations are now dealing with the additional challenges caused by the cost-of-living crisis, a time of global uncertainty, competing demands from national agendas and challenges with recruitment and staff retention. In many places, services are striving to catch up with backlogs, which continue to stretch workforces who have delivered over and above for the past few years. The cumulative impact of all of these factors have negatively impacted on the wellbeing of individuals and organisations, and reduced their capacity and capability to implement system change frameworks such as the Safe & Together Model, despite there being a huge commitment and desire to do so.





Summary and next steps

DES Funded organisations have made significant progress in implementing the Safe & Together Model in the first 12 months since Scottish Government funding was provided. The majority of organisations that received funding across Scotland to undertake this work have begun by creating workplace development plans to ensure that key professionals coming into contact with families experiencing domestic abuse are able to respond in a way that increases accountability for perpetrators as parents, reduces victim-blaming and improves outcomes for the child and nonabusing parent. Initial evaluations and feedback from professionals across Scotland who have undertaken training in the Safe & Together Model over the last 12 months, suggest it is having a positive impact on how they engage with and support families experiencing domestic abuse.

Additionally, DES Funded organisations have begun to progress wider activities to help ensure that workforces are supported to put the learning from this training into practice and ensure that the systems and services that families come into contact with locally are domestic abuse informed.

This has included setting up cross-policy steering groups and champions networks, undertaking supported self-assessment and engaging with implementation support provided by the Safe & Together Institute.

Over the coming year, the Improvement Service and the Safe & Together Institute will continue to work closely with the 12 DES Funded projects to support them in their journey to implement the Safe & Together Model with a particular focus on helping them to measure the impact this is having on creating domestic abuse informed systems, services and workforces. A key part of the next phase of this work will be supporting these organisations to collect quantitative and qualitative information that helps demonstrate the outcomes that this investment is having for women and children experiencing domestic abuse in local communities across Scotland. highlight the change improving outcomes for local families experiencing domestic abuse, and identify where future improvements may be required.

Useful resources

National policies and strategies as key drivers for embedding domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems

For a full list of national and international policies and strategies that domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems contribute to please refer to pages 33-38 of the **assessment and evaluation toolkit.**

The Safe & Together Model

Model Overview | Safe & Together Institute

Safe & Together in Scotland

Safe and Together Approach | Iriss

Safe and Together Scoping Report | Social Work Scotland

Other resources

Children, young people and domestic abuse: impact, support and recovery | Improvement Service

Tackling Inequalities, Trauma and Adversity across the Lifespan: Mapping Cross-Cutting Agendas | Improvement Service

Companion Document: The Safe & Together Model and Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes | Safe & Together Institute

Companion Document: Domestic abuse and trauma informed practice | Improvement Service

Families Affected by Drug and Alcohol Use in Scotland: A Framework for Holistic Whole Family Approaches and Family Inclusive Practice | Scottish Government



Further information

For more information about this report and the information included, please contact:

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