

Stay Safe East

Trustees' Annual Report

2020-2021



Charity Number 1153615

Stay Safe East

Trustee's Annual Report 2020-2021

Charity name: Stay Safe East

Registration Number 1153615

Stay Safe East is registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

Principal office 90 Crownfield Road, London E15 2BG

Trustees Savitri Hensman (Chair)
Paul Dowling (Treasurer)
Bennett Obong
Kirsten Hearn
S, service user representative
S, service user representative

With the agreement of the Charity Commission, the names of the two service user representatives are withheld to protect their safety.

Staff and volunteers

Chief Executive: Ruth Bashall (to 14.3.21)
Co-Chief Executives: Ioana Hanis and Ruth Bashall
(from 15.3.21 to 15.6.21)
Administrator (part-time)
Policy Officers: Miranda Weston (from July 2019) and Ashley
Stephen
Independent Victim's Advocate/Hate Crime Team Manager (full-
time)
Hate Crime Advocates (2 part-time)
Domestic Abuse Casework Manager/ Independent Disability and
Domestic Violence Advocate (full-time)
Domestic Violence Advocates (IDDVAS) (4 part-time, one 28 hours
from July 2020)
Benefits and Entitlements Advocate (from June 2020)
General Advocate
Volunteer

Due to the nature of our work and to ensure their safety, names of advocacy staff and volunteers are not listed in this report.

Bank The Cooperative Bank, PO Box 250 Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

Bookkeeping and payroll: Jane Roche

Independent Examiner

Carbon Accountancy, 80-83 Long Lane, London EC1A 9ET

Thank you to our Funders and Commissioners

Three Guineas Trust

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)

City Bridge Trust

The Home Office

Trust for London

Victim Support for London Victim and Witness Service

Inclusion London

London Community Response Fund

Ministry of Justice Covid Recovery Fund

Ascent Partnership



Thank you to our supporters and partners and in particular:

Members of the Disability and Domestic Abuse Advisory Group

Tracey Gilbert-Falconer for help with fundraising bids

Susie Balderston for consultation and policy input

All individuals and organisations who made donations to Stay Safe East or provided other kinds of assistance.

This report is dedicated to N, K and P, clients of Stay Safe East and Waltham Forest residents, who were taken from us and from their loved ones too early. N and K died from Covid 19 and as a direct result of the discrimination against disabled people during the Covid pandemic.

They will not be forgotten.

Stay Safe East will continue to fight for the right to safety, life and dignity of all disabled survivors.

Stay Safe East Annual Report

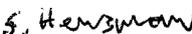
April 2020 to March 2021

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Please note: for reasons of accessibility, the Independent Examiner's Unaudited Financial Statement is contained in a separate document.

The Trustees' Annual Report for 2019-2020 was approved on January 25th 2022 and signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by:


Savitri Hensman

Chair

Chair's Report

Much has been said and written about the struggles which so many people faced when the COVID-19 pandemic caused such damage in the UK, along with other parts of the world. Official statisticians and committees, journalists and researchers have drawn attention to various stark facts. Disabled people, Black and minority ethnic communities and people facing economic disadvantage were even more likely than their neighbours to get seriously ill or die – and much of this was avoidable. Domestic abuse victims (mainly women) found it particularly hard to escape from dangerous environments and minorities at risk of hostility or violence were sometimes cut off from much-needed support. Professionals faced tough challenges in supporting people while minimising the risk of catching and passing on the coronavirus.

All of these were central to our work as an organisation, adding to the challenges already faced in supporting Deaf and disabled people – mainly from communities affected by poverty, racism or other forms of discrimination – facing domestic violence, hate crime and other forms of abuse, along with promoting human rights. We had to switch rapidly to different ways of working, while taking account of the sometimes sharply increased difficulties many clients faced in accessing basic necessities and affordable means of communication.

What is more, our staff, Board members and other volunteers were generally from sections of the population most severely affected and/or at enhanced risk: the danger, hardship and loss were not an unfortunate experience confined to others. Our work included frequent risk assessments and discussions about how to respond creatively to the challenges of undertaking vital tasks. The need for policy work and collective as well as individual advocacy, deeply informed by frontline work with clients, was perhaps more evident than ever before.

It is a testimony to the dedication and professionalism of staff and volunteers, as well as the support of our funders, partners and donors, that we nevertheless managed to increase the number of people supported during the year, with increased income too. On behalf of the Board I would like to thank everyone who made this possible – and again note the inspiration we received from clients dealing with often heart-breaking circumstances. I also recognise the toll on all involved.

Strengthening our leadership and management structures consolidated our ability to manage a staff team which continued to grow, working in circumstances which would have been hard to imagine just a year earlier, and helped to provide a foundation for longer-term sustainability. This included continuing to support and build the skills and confidence of managers, re-examine how best to coordinate the different aspects of our work in light of greater numbers and demands and recruitment of a new Chief Executive so as to enable a smooth handover. Ruth Bashall played a key role in founding Stay Safe East and leading it for many years but wished to free up her time and energy to focus more on policy, training, consultancy and development support around the issues central to our work. I am deeply grateful for all she has done and continues to do for the organisation and delighted that Ioana Hanis, with all the skills, experience and commitment she brings, was appointed.

By the end of 2020-21, the future held much uncertainty for Deaf and disabled people (largely from communities facing disadvantage and discrimination) affected by harassment, violence and other human rights abuses. Yet the importance of what Stay Safe East uniquely offers was even more evident.

Savitri Hensman

Chair, Stay Safe East

Stay Safe East: Report of activities 2020-21

1. Introduction

The Trustees present their report of activities for the year ended March 31st 2021.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the Notes to the accounts and comply with Stay Safe East's governing document, applicable law and the requirements of the Statement of Recommended Practice "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" preparing accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Stay Safe East is a registered charity (as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation) established in 2013. It remains the only user-led 'by and for' organisation in the UK providing long-term advocacy and support to disabled victims/survivors of multiple forms of abuse: domestic and sexual abuse and other forms of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), hate crime, harassment, cuckooing, abuse by care workers or personal assistants (which we consider to be domestic abuse), and abuse in residential and other institutions.

Stay Safe East seeks to use the expertise and evidence from our casework to inform our policy work at London-wide and national level. We aim to help remove the barriers to justice and equal responses to disabled survivors and to ensure that the voices of disabled survivors are heard by policy makers and other providers. We also provide casework advice, training, consultancy and capacity building services to statutory and voluntary organisations in the field.

2. Governing document and Objects of the Charity

Stay Safe East is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). It was registered as a charity with the Charity Commission in September 2013 and is governed by its charity governing document. Stay Safe East is a disabled people's organisation run by and for the benefit of disabled people.

Stay Safe East's Objects are:

- (1) To relieve the distress and suffering caused to Deaf and disabled people by hate crime, harassment, domestic or sexual violence or other forms of abuse
- (2) To promote the human rights of deaf and disabled people in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- (3) Such purposes as are exclusively charitable in accordance with the law of England and Wales as the Trustees may from time to time decide

3. Stay Safe East's objectives during its eighth year

- To continue to provide accessible and holistic support and advocacy to disabled survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, hate crime, harassment and other forms of abuse, and to support our staff and volunteers to deliver a quality and safe service to clients. This was revised to include supporting our clients through the Covid 19 pandemic.
- To develop our casework with disabled survivors across London through the London Victims and Witness Service, the Ascent Partnership and the CATCH partnership and other partnerships
- To share our expertise with Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) and organisations working on Violence against Women and Girls through casework advice, capacity building, training and briefings
- To further develop Stay Safe East's role as an expert organisation speaking out on behalf of disabled survivors of gender-based violence, hate crime and other abuse
- To work to improve operational responses to disabled victims/survivors by the Metropolitan Police, Crown Prosecution Service, local authorities and other agencies
- To work to ensure that London and national policy and strategies on hate crime, violence against women and girls and victims' rights include appropriate measures to meet the needs of disabled survivors
- To strengthen the financial and organisational resilience of Stay Safe East, its management structure and processes in order to help it grow sustainably.

4. Overview of the year

Firstly, the Board would like to thank all our staff and our volunteer for their extraordinary forbearance during that time and their unstinting support for disabled survivors through this difficult time.

2020-21 was a year of extraordinary change for Stay Safe East. Like all organisations, we had to learn new ways of working when the Covid 19 pandemic started but our holistic way of working and our capacity to respond to disability related needs gave us a strong basis for adapting. Our priority was to maintain a quality of service for our clients and keep them safe whilst working remotely.

The Covid 19 pandemic presented specific challenges for us as an organisation working with disabled survivors of abuse, and one which only employs disabled people, many of whom were at high risk from the virus. We are proud that we were able to keep our services going throughout the year.

Looking after our staff and volunteer so they could support our clients was the priority from the outset. Our flexible approach to employing disabled staff proved invaluable. Stay Safe East went into lockdown in mid-March 2020. Our advocates valiantly continued to go about their daily work supporting clients and trying to ensure their safety. Our administrator with the support of the managers and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) did an amazing job of coordinating the transfer of our operations to remote working. This meant not only purchasing new equipment, moving items to people's homes and sorting out our quite basic IT system, but ensuring that people had the right disability equipment and workspaces that met their access needs- several staff had not desk at home, and some had children who were out of school or nursery during lockdown, or partners working from home, so we had to ensure that they had a confidential space.

The year took its toll on people's mental health – lockdown, the loss of face-to-face contact with colleagues and clients, supporting traumatised clients from home, staff shielding or self-isolating to keep safe from the virus, losing loved ones to the virus, and the extreme difficulties of achieving positive outcomes for our clients during the pandemic were some of the factors, in a context where the overarching narrative was that the lives of disabled people and BAME communities didn't matter. We responded by increasing staff support: all staff were able to access frequent reflective practice and counselling, more frequent supervision and staff meetings and more opportunities for informal contact.

In summer 2020, we could have chosen to do a partial return to the office but after two comprehensive risk assessments and setting up a Covid-safe office, we had to cancel the return as the Board and CEO did not consider it wise to put staff or clients at risk. Staff worked from home for the rest of the year, but arranged meetings with clients at high risk or who could not communicate by phone either in the office or at a safe location. staff who were at lower risk from the virus also did some doorstep visits.

In 2020-21, Stay Safe East supported 200 clients across 27 London boroughs. This is an increase on previous years, partly enabled by the employment of more staff but mainly due to the hard work of our teams. Further details can be found in the casework section of this report.

A cornerstone of Stay Safe East's service is meeting our clients face-to-face either at home or in the community. This element of the service had to be put on hold due to the pandemic, and has had a profound impact on our service. Many of our clients have struggled even more than usual with their mental health. Domestic abuse clients still living with the perpetrator, and those being harassed by a neighbour were at highest risk. Some clients were too frightened to go out at all, others took risks. We saw several suicide attempts. Unfortunately, some clients also vented their anger at their advocate because they were so frustrated by the lack of action when statutory services were not responding or taking action to keep them safe. Unusually, we received three complaints. Even after the first lockdown ended in summer 2020, we took the decision not to visit clients at home, except in exceptional circumstances because of the enduring high risk from Covid 19.

The Covid pandemic occurred at a time when disabled people were already feeling under considerable threat from austerity and from a political discourse which represented us as a burden on public services. The responsibility for protecting themselves from the virus and its consequences was put onto the shoulders of disabled people and their families and as a result onto organisations such as Stay Safe East. From the start of the pandemic, the labelling of disabled and older people as "vulnerable" or having "underlying health conditions" was often interpreted in ways that led to a narrative that high level of deaths of disabled people were somehow inevitable. Some disabled people, and specifically people with learning disabilities and older people were subject to 'Do Not Attempt Resuscitation' (DNAR) notices without their consent or that of people close to them. There was also controversy over discriminatory guidance for the NHS from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on access to critical care which was subsequently rescinded¹. At the same time, older disabled people infected with Covid were being discharged directly to care homes, spreading the virus to existing residents and staff. Access to testing and protective equipment was woefully inadequate, affecting some of our clients and staff. The disproportionate rates of hospitalisation and deaths of disabled, people on low incomes and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people across the UK showed the impact of inequalities in health, income and poor housing which made it impossible for many people to social distance. The deaths of two of our clients, both users of social care, directly as a result of the lack of PPE and poor practice by care

¹ <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/adult-social-care/391-adult-care-news/43274-nice-amends-covid-19-critical-care-guideline-after-judicial-review-threat>

agencies demonstrated the true human cost of these inequalities. We had to support our clients, who felt that their lives were being given little value, and who were often confused by government messages, whilst staff, volunteers and Board members as disabled people were dealing with the same impact and the deaths of people close to us. We constantly had to revise our risk assessments and take additional protection measures.

As the first lockdown eased, the message was that this was a price that society had to pay for “getting things back to normal” and that it was up to those who were ‘vulnerable’ to protect themselves. We then saw a second lockdown in winter 2020 which was more difficult to manage for our clients.

The context had a considerable impact on disabled survivors of abuse, and on our whole team. Our clients have had to shield or live extraordinarily limited lives whilst trying to recover from abuse, often stuck at home with the perpetrator, or alone or with their children. Stay Safe East has played a key role in sustaining our clients through lockdown and through the whole year and beyond. We have rung those most at risk every week, sometimes more often, provided tablets or top-ups for mobile phones so clients could use WhatsApp or zoom, or simply attend a court hearing on the phone. We have sorted out shopping and other support, obtained small grants for household equipment, but most of all we have been there for all of our clients through one of the most difficult periods of all our lives.

2020-21 also brought some positive changes. Thanks to Covid emergency funding, we were able to expand the accessible counselling service to our clients. Remote counselling by phone or video has made accessing counselling much easier. Similarly, some clients have access to court via video link from the safety of their own home, but we are concerned at possible miscarriages of justice particularly in cases involving disabled mothers facing care proceedings, who were at higher risk of the children being removed. Some of these proceedings were carried out by telephone, with the client struggling to understand. Had she been in court, she would have had her advocate sitting with her, but it was very difficult for her advocate to support her by phone link. After the initial lockdown, we organised for clients to safely attend the office and meet their advocate there to attend court remotely.

In spite (or maybe because) of the specific working conditions created by the pandemic, we were able to expand our national policy role as experts on violence against disabled women and girls, alongside our role as the only specialist on hate crime, harassment and other forms of abuse against disabled. We broadened our networks, and were able to advise government departments and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

We campaigned for the rights of disabled survivors to be included in the Domestic Abuse Bill, and worked on a number of other policy issues which are explained further in this report.

5. Trustees

The Trustees are elected by the Charity's members at the annual general meeting for a period of up to three years. Trustees are offered an induction, including presentations by staff, background material and information on the Charity's principal activities. Trustees are all unpaid volunteers and may claim reasonable out of pocket expenses. The Trustees who served during the year are listed on the first page. There were six Trustees during the year. Two clients who are members of the Board have chosen to remain anonymous to protect their safety. There were no new Trustees appointed during the year, in part due to the pandemic. All Trustees contribute to major decisions which impact on the organisation, bring new ideas and experiences and help shape the priorities of the Charity.

6. Organisational Structure and Staffing

The Stay Safe East Board is responsible for overseeing the work of the organisation and setting strategic direction. The Board has six members, including two user representatives. The Board appoints the Chair of Stay Safe East, who supports the Chief Executive (CEO). As Stay Safe East has grown, we have changed the way we appoint staff – Board members are now usually only involved in the selection process for senior posts.

The Chair has delegated powers to take necessary decisions between scheduled Board meetings and is responsible for appraising the performance of the CEO on behalf of the Board.

Board meetings were held 4 times in the year; all meetings were held remotely on Zoom. Other decisions were made by the Board by e-mail, or in some instances on Chair's Action. The CEO gives the Board an account of the progress of the Charity's work, reports on financial matters, brings issues requiring particular attention and gets agreement for forward work.

During the year, the day-to-day financial administration was managed by a bookkeeper who worked with the CEO to prepare management information for the Board and also did the monthly payroll. The CEO prepared reports to funders. The decision was made to start recruitment for a Finance and Operations Manager in 2021-22.

Four new staff joined us: we successfully filled the vacancy for the Benefits Advocate; we recruited an additional Independent Disability and Domestic

Violence Advocate (IDDVA) and a part-time Hate Crime Advocate to cover for a colleague on long-term Covid leave. We were able to keep those new members of staff on in the following year.

Our current Chief Executive Ruth Bashall had been leading the organisation since 2011 and wanted to step back in order to focus on policy work and developing new projects.

In January we began the recruitment process for a new Chief Executive – the post was targeted at disabled applicants as is our practice. We were lucky to be able to appoint Ioana Hanis to the post. Ioana brings a wealth of experience as a service manager with Victim Support London and has also worked with domestic abuse and trafficking survivors across England. As a disabled woman she has the lived experience that is essential to leading an organisation run by and for disabled survivors.

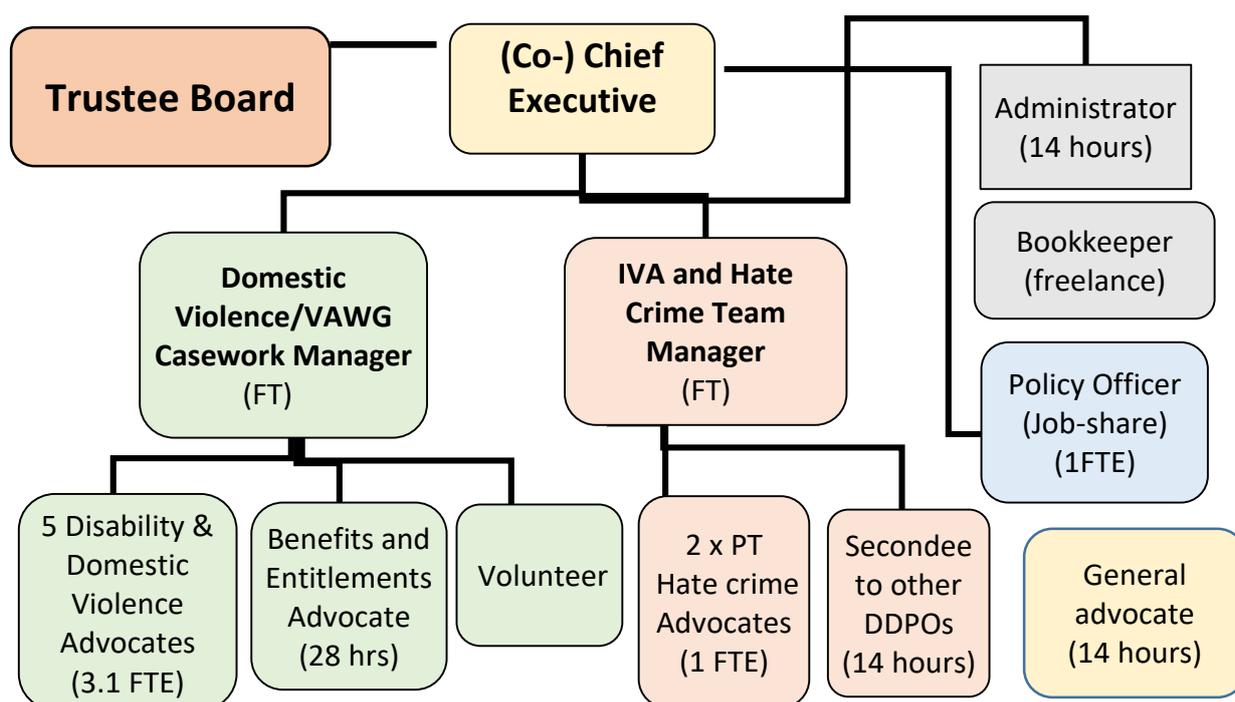
Ioana started at Stay Safe East in mid-March 2021 and for the first three months and into the following year worked as Co-Chief Executive with our former CEO. Ioana became the sole CEO from June 2021.

Ruth will remain as Policy and Projects Adviser to the organisation and will continue to support our new Chief Executive.

The Board opted for this arrangement because the change-over of CEO can be critical for small organisations which have been led by the same person for a number of years, and continuity and a smooth transition are essential. The process of handing over knowledge and expertise in such a unique organisation is a gradual one but Ioana brings her own expertise and leadership skills to take our growing organisation forward into the next 10 years of its life.

We are extremely grateful to Three Guineas Trust for funding the overlap of the two CEOs and the new Policy and Projects Advisor post, which will enable us to develop new services and a wider consultancy role.

Stay Safe East Organisational Structure at end of 2020-2021



7. Financial report

In spite of the Challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Stay Safe East ended the year in a sound financial position. The Trustees regularly consider the finances of the Charity and receive reports from the Treasurer and CEO to ensure that it is a going concern. They are satisfied that this is the case at the date of this report. Budgets and cash flow projections are drawn up to ensure proper governance. Our income increased during the year paving the way for further changes in 2021-22.

Stay Safe East: Summary of financial activities 2020-21

Income during the year:	£ 478,237	
Expenditure during the year:	£ 413,923	
Surplus of income over expenditure:	£ 64,314	
Reserves brought forward	£ 125,382	
Total funds of the charity	£ 189,696	of which -
Restricted funds:	£ 97,741	
Unrestricted funds:	£ 91,955	
This compares with an income for 2019-20 of £315,292 .		

Unaudited Financial Statements are available on www.staysafe-east.org.uk and on the Charity Commission website.

The Board has been steadily increasing our reserves. The unrestricted reserves represent three months running costs/winding down costs, as recommended by CIPFA and the Charity Commission. The restricted reserves include money for 3 projects or parts of projects which we were not able to carry out whilst working remotely. Due to remote working, we underspent on client costs and some other items. Some of the income from Covid emergency funds have been deferred to 2021-22 with the agreement of funders.

Our income came from a mix of grants, contracts for casework and capacity building, and donations. Due to the pandemic, there was no independent income from training during the year.

The Board would like to thank our funders for their support, and for the flexibility they showed during a very difficult year:

- Three Guineas Trust
- Trust for London
- City Bridge Trust
- Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
- London Community Response Fund
- Home Office
- Ministry of Justice Covid Recovery Fund

Income also came from contracts, the first three of which originate with MOPAC:

- London Victim and Witness Service via Victim Support
- CATCH Hate Crime Partnership
- Ascent Partnership
- Hate Crime Advocacy Capacity Building (via Inclusion London)

During the year, two of our grants came to an end. The MOPAC grant for hate crime work ended in June 2020, but we were able to fund our experienced hate crime advocate from reserves until we received a grant from the London Community Response Fund in October. The City Bridge grant ended in November, but Three Guineas Trust kindly stepped in for four months to fund our Domestic Violence Services Manager post until the end of March 2021. We were able to obtain funding for both of these posts in 2021-22.

This was the first year of our grant for core costs from Three Guineas Trust, which funded most of the CEO's salary, (and the overlap between the outgoing and the incoming CEO), a Policy Officer post and core administrative costs. This core funding provides us with security and the funds to create a management structure which is fit for purpose as the charity grows. This will help ensure the long-term sustainability of the Charity.

8. Major Risks

The Charity has a formal structured approach to the assessment and management of major risks which it may face. The Trustees continue to identify the types of risks the Charity faces and to identify means of mitigating the risks:

- The pandemic was a challenge to Stay Safe East which works specifically with disabled people, and has a team of disabled staff and volunteers. We were working with people at high risk, so we had to ensure that any contact was safe. However, we successfully maintained our services with the exception of our Women's Group, and supported staff through a very difficult period of their working lives. All staff were able to work from home, risk assessments were conducted in relation to confidentiality, health and safety and the welfare of staff, and measures put in place to mitigate the impact of remote working and lack of face-to-face contact with clients and with colleagues. Face to face contact with clients was restricted to those at immediate high risk and followed Covid distancing and health and safety guidelines.
- There was a substantial risk that key members of staff or of the Board would fall prey to Covid and either die or be left with long-term serious health issues. We put in place mitigating measures such as ensuring that we had sufficient bank signatories and worked to build the skills and confidence of managers so they could step in for one another if required.
- The risk of overloading staff with complex cases is part and parcel of our work and has continued to be addressed by assessing referrals and holding a waiting list when needed, and providing more intensive support to staff whilst working remotely. We adapted our working practices to meet these new challenges.
- An extensive system of weekly safety calls to clients allowed us to check on their safety, and whether they had food, heating, money, or were isolated or suicidal, or had accurate information about Covid 19 and how to keep safe.
- The potential risk to our premises has been reduced, as we were offered a three-year fixed charge licence by the London Borough of Waltham Forest who own the building.

- The risks from the change of leadership to our unique organisation were mitigated by a three-month period from March 2021 when the outgoing and new CEOs worked together as Co-CEOs, with the support of the Chair. The outgoing CEO will remain working for the organisation and will provide support and mentoring to our New CEO. It was agreed that we will be recruiting a Finance and Operations Manager in 2021 so that the organisational responsibilities are shared.

Casework report

Supporting victims/survivors of abuse and other crimes

1. The numbers

In 2020-21, Stay Safe East supported 198 clients. This is the largest number of clients supported since we became an independent organisation in 2013. The number of clients has doubled in the two years since 2018-19.

Year	All clients	Domestic/ sexual violence	Hate crime	General crime
2017-18	98	70	16	12
2018-19	102	59	29	14
2019-20	154	93	43	18
<i>Of whom 97 were new referrals</i>				
2020-21	194	118	56	20
<i>Of whom 119 were new referrals</i>				

36 clients also accessed supported from the Benefits Advocate. Some clients also had support from the general advocate and the volunteer. They are included in the above.

Sex	Domestic abuse/ sexual violence	Hate crime		General crime/IVA	Totals	
		CATCH	WF/N'ham		No.	%
Female	105	16	18	18	157	81%
Male	12	7	15	2	36	18.5%
Other	1	-	-		1	0.5%

Sexuality	Domestic / sexual violence	Hate crime		General crime	Totals	
		CATCH	WF/N'ham		No	%
Heterosex'l	118	13	21	16	168	86%
Lesbian	3	-	0	1	4	2%
Gay man	1	-	3	0	4	2%
Bisexual	1	1	1	1	4	2%
Not disclosed	1	9	8	2	20	10%

Age	Our youngest client was 14, the oldest was 82
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Ethnicity	DV/SV	Hate crime		General crime/IVA	Total %
		CATCH	WF & Newham		
Asian British	6	2	1	2	5.5%
Asian Indian	5	0	0	0	2.5%
Asian Pakistani	12	0	1	0	6.5%
Asian Bangladeshi	1	0	0	0	0.5%
Asian Sri Lankan	2	0	0	0	1%
East Asian	2	0	0	0	1%
Asian other	1	1	0	0	1%
Black British	17	2	0	1	10.5%
Black African	2	0	3	1	3%
Black Caribbean	2	1	1	0	2%
Black other	0	0	1	4	2.5%
Mixed heritage	3	2			2.5%
White British	53	7	11	9	41%
White European	4	2	1	0	3.5%
White Other	1	2	1	1	2.5%
European other	3	0	0	0	1.5%
Mixed Other	3	2	0	2	3.5%
Arab Middle Eastern	1	0	0	0	0.5%
Other	0	0	2	0	1%
Not disclosed	0	1	11	0	6%

Impairment (<i>clients may have more than 1 impairment</i>)	DV/SV	Hate Crime		General crime	%
		CATCH	WF/N		
Physical impairment	69	9	15	9	63%
Deaf BSL user	1	1	1	0	1.5%
Hearing Impairment	4	0	3	3	3%
Visual impairment	4	0			2%
Learning disability	21	0	6	1	14.5%
Long-term mental health	45	3	13	6	34.5%
Long term condition	16	5	5	0	13.5%
Neurological impairment	14	1	0	1	4%
Neuro-diverse	5	3	3	0	6%
Terminal condition	1	0	0	0	0.5%

them on to us. Few of our domestic abuse clients trusted the police enough to approach them but we did obtain referrals for hate crime victims from the police through CATCH. By the autumn, numbers had risen and we exceeded the number of referrals for the previous year.

Our referrals came from:

- Self-referrals were 27% of our referrals; disabled people find out about Stay Safe East online (our details were added to the Home Office Covid domestic abuse pages), through existing clients, community organisations, disabled people's organisations or in two cases through attending events our CEO spoke at.
- Police – our main source of Police referrals is CATCH to whom the police Hate Crime Liaison Officers regularly refer victims; crime victims; it is very unusual for the police to directly refer domestic or sexual abuse victims direct to us.
- Victim Support as part of the London Victim and Witness Service
- Solace as part of the Ascent Partnership
- Waltham Forest ASBRAC multi agency forum (hate crime and cuckooing) and MASH (safeguarding hub)
- MARAC multi agency domestic abuse forums in London boroughs
- Children's Services where a disabled mother's children are subject to child protection or care proceedings
- Mental Health services
- A range of voluntary sector agencies including Deaf and Disabled people's organisations, GALOP for both hate crime and domestic abuse, Race Equality Councils and Violence against Women Organisations.

2. Domestic abuse/ Violence against disabled women

The team supports survivors of domestic abuse which takes place in a context of widespread Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). Our clients have rarely experienced only one form of abuse, and may be survivors of institutional abuse, sexual violence or rape, trafficking or other forms of abuse. Like all 'by and for' VAWG specialist services, we do not limit our work to supporting clients around domestic abuse but deal with the survivor's whole experience and let her set the priorities.

Our domestic abuse workers are Independent Disability and Domestic Violence Advocates (IDDVAs) who are disabled women, as such as they work within an intersectional social model of disability approach and act as positive role models for clients through being disabled women in a position of responsibility.

During the year, the domestic abuse team worked with **118 clients** of whom 66 were new referrals and 58 were existing clients. An additional 8 people declined our service when we made initial contact with them. Of the 118 clients, 105 were women.

Sex	Number	Percentage	Gender identity
Female	105	88%	1 client identified as a transgender woman
Male	12	10.5%	
Other	1	1.5%	

Sexuality	Number	Percentage
Heterosexual	111	94.5%
Gay man	1	1%
Lesbian	3	2.5%
Bisexual	2	1%
Not disclosed	1	1%

Impairment (<i>many clients have more than one impairment</i>)	Number of clients	Percentage
Physical impairment	69	55%
Deaf BSL user	1	1%
Hearing Impairment	4	3.5%
Visual impairment	4	3.5%
Learning disability	21	18%
Long-term mental health	45	36%
Other long term health condition	16	13%
Neurological impairment	14	12%
Neuro-diverse	5	4%
Terminal condition	1	1%

Most Deaf BSL users prefer to access SignHealth, the specialist service for Deaf survivors of domestic abuse. Women with long-term conditions may not be identified as disabled by professionals, and women who are neuro-diverse may not may not themselves identify as disabled. We will be addressing the gap in reaching blind or neuro-diverse survivors in future years.

Ethnicity	DV/SV
Asian British	6
Asian Indian	5
Asian Pakistani	12
Asian Bangladeshi	1
Asian Sri Lankan	2
East Asian	2
Asian other	1
Black British	17
Black African	2
Black Caribbean	2
Black other	0
Mixed heritage	3
White British	53
White European	4
White Other	1
European other	3
Mixed Other	3
Arab Middle Eastern	1

As our presence across London increases, we will aim to reach disabled migrant women, and survivors from communities who are not yet aware of us.

Perpetrators

The majority of our clients were women abused by a male partner or husband, or by their ex-partner. 15% were abused by a family member or members – this is slightly less than in previous years, when our work was focused mainly on Waltham Forest and Newham and we were able to identify disabled women referred to the MARACs, including those abused by family member. Disabled women abused by family members may be more likely to be referred to Adult Safeguarding, not a domestic abuse agency.

Perpetrators	Number	Percentage
Male partner or husband or ex-partner	87	68.5%

Wife of male victim <i>(2 of the 3 perpetrators had dementia)</i>	3	2.5%
Family members: of whom	23	15.5%
<i>Mother of young women</i>	6	
<i>Mother of young man</i>	1	
<i>Adult son</i>	7	
<i>Father/step-father</i>	1	
<i>Other family members</i>	8	
Paid carers or PAs	3	1.5%
Co-resident or close friend	2	1.5%

The support we provide to clients

The support given by the domestic abuse team support to clients includes:

- Giving the client time to tell their story, sometimes for the first time – or often for the time to someone who believes them
- Safety planning and disability risk assessment
- Supporting clients to obtain non-molestation orders and occupation orders to remove the abuser from their home
- supporting clients to report to the police (including attending Achieving Best Evidence interviews with the client)
- Making options accessible and working with the survivor to help her decide what actions she wants to take options for disabled victims of domestic abuse.

You've been very helpful and supportive since you started working with my daughter. You always listen to her and have her best interests. You have built a good positive relationship with her, always making sure her voice is heard. My daughter struggles to retain information but you take your time to explain everything to her and make sure that she has understood what is being said and will always recap and remind her what has been explained. We appreciate you.

Mother of client with learning disabilities

- Support to access safe and suitable accommodation for their individual access needs; help with tenancy management
- Support to apply for care packages and OT assessments
- Support for the client if the case is referred to adult safeguarding

- Support to women on child protection plans and going through care proceedings who are facing their children being removed from their care and helping them to negotiate the Family Courts - however during lockdown this has involved remote hearings by phone which has meant increased discrimination and injustice for disabled mothers.
- Support around child protection, safeguarding and care proceedings
- Supporting clients around mental health issues such as helping them speak to mental health professionals and helping them get their repeat prescription. Support to challenge discriminatory approaches, for example refusal of services to women diagnosed with “Borderline Personality Disorder”
- Support to attend care proceedings cases and post hearing meetings to explain what was said during the hearings and what this meant for clients, and assist them to respond to legal documents.
- Contacting other agencies such as solicitors or MPs when agencies do not take client’s cases seriously.
- Support to client who was hospitalised with Covid to be discharged safely from the hospital

All clients were provided with emotional support. We work at clients’ pace and work with them in a way that takes into consideration their access needs.

Stay Safe East got me re-housed. Without them I would be street homeless. You have stood by me and helped me through some of my worst times.
Young female client

Keeping contact with clients who still live with the perpetrator requires the advocates to be both careful and inventive. We did manage to arrange appointments in a safe place with some clients, being careful not to disclose our role as IDDVAs, but because of safety risks had to delay some contact until lockdown was over.

Stay Safe East has always prided itself on being safe place for LGBT survivors. Thanks in part to a close partnership with GALOP, we have also seen a small but significant rise in the number of LGBT clients referred to our service. GALOP referred on clients who had already had support at crisis point but needed longer term support around their impairment issues, housing and emotional support. Other clients self-referred, or found they could be open about their sexuality in a safe environment.

A client was being stalked by her female former partner. The client is physically disabled and has long term health issues which means she is in and out of hospital. She was at high risk from Covid 19. The ex-partner turned up regularly at her address and used emotional manipulation to persuade the client to let her in. The abuser took the client's disability aids away from her and demanded money. The client was too frightened and controlled to refuse her ex-partner entry or call the police. Stay Safe East worked with the client to increase her confidence and help her understand coercive control. She wanted to move away from the abuser but finding accessible accommodation is proving a substantial barrier – the local housing department initially looked at an innovative approach using a partial closure order on the property, which would protect the victim without having to involve her, but the legal process was delayed by the backlog in the courts. The client is struggling to decide what to do, and is still at risk; she trusts her advocate who will continue to support her until she is safe and has moved.

Long-term support continues to be critical for clients in controlling relationship who need time and confidence to believe that things can change and they don't have to depend on the abuser.

We are receiving more referrals for clients who have suffered long term trauma and have substance misuse issues, and who struggle to maintain a tenancy or manage their lives. We work in partnership with other agencies, and offer long-term support to those which other agencies label as having 'complex needs' – and may turn away because of that label. Stay Safe East very rarely turns down a referral. Whilst we cannot heal a lifetime's trauma, we can be there for clients and be as flexible as we can in meeting their needs, whilst setting boundaries.

Stay Safe East supported a client who was evicted from her homeless hostel after her partner died and she was sexually assaulted by another resident. The hostel evicted her and disbelieved that she was a victim of sexual assault. Stay Safe East supported her to challenge the decision by housing to treat her as 'intentionally homeless' after she lost her temper and threw an object at a staff member at the hostel. We asked Housing to consider the mitigating circumstances in her case. Stay Safe East managed the situation of this client through close partnership working with her drug and alcohol worker whom she trusted. The client was provided with emergency vouchers for basic necessities as the hostel has refused to return her belongings to her so the client had not had basic changes of clothes.

Our IDDVA continued to advocate for this client and challenge the violations of her human rights and dignity. The IDDVA discussed the client's housing options with her and looked into supported living for her as she has in the past struggled to manage a tenancy. The client was eventually moved to supported housing outside London but she again struggled to maintain a tenancy. She stopped contacting us after losing her phone, but she has support where she is now living.

Disabled mothers

From the outset, Stay Safe East has worked with disabled mothers who have experience domestic abuse and are at risk of or engaged by the local authority in care proceedings. Unfortunately, women are still referred to use too late, when proceedings have started, we support them through the process, we are with them at the many meetings they are required to attend, explain what is expected of them and discuss what 'good enough parenting' is. many of the women have suffered multiple abuse, have been controlled throughout their lives, and have never encountered good parenting. most had no choice at having children, the abuser has used multiple pregnancies as a means of control. Children's Social Services show a strong bias towards disabled mothers, and over the year we have seen children placed with an abusive father rather than with a non-abusive mother who may have learning disabilities or mental health issues and need some support to parent. That support is rarely offered to her, but it may be offered to the father. some others choose to stay with the perpetrator, in order to keep their children. the abuse becomes hidden and about control.

The staff go the extra 100% for me. I would recommend your charity to anyone who is a victim of domestic violence. Female client

In 2020-21, the domestic abuse team's clients included 40 mothers of children under 18. Of these mothers, 18 clients did not live with their children. 4 had no contact with their children. 4 were on child protection, 14 were in care proceedings during the year. 7 disabled mothers and 1 father had their children removed during the year.

Client A is the mother of three children under 10; she was in an abusive relationship. Her children were subject to care proceedings because Children's Services alleged she failed to protect her children from the abuser because she left and then returned to him with the children and this has impacted on them emotionally.

Children's services also stated that she could not parent effectively because of her mental health issues, which are a direct result of trauma from abuse. She was on a waiting list for therapy but could not complete it within the care proceedings timescale. The mother asked for a Family Support Worker but was then placed in temporary accommodation in another borough which the Family Support Worker could not travel to. The children were placed in foster care with two different carers, one of whom failed to address basic issues about one of the children's personal care. Children's Services then offered the mother the 'choice' of keeping either the eldest child, or the two youngest – an impossible dilemma for a mother who loves her children and wants to do her best. We supported the mother and her solicitor to address the discrimination she was facing. The case went to care proceedings, and the children were placed together with a long-term foster carer. Their mother has contact six times a year. We continue to work with her to address the trauma she has experienced.

Psychological or parenting assessments by statutory services conducted via WhatsApp video on someone's phone proved challenging for our clients. Technology would break down, the client would not understand the questions or would disengage, and our advocates could not physically be with the client due to Covid. We have attended court hearings where the client was only on their phone. Parenting assessments were delayed, causing mothers caught up proceedings additional anxiety and trauma. Social services were also doing fewer home visits to mothers living in their own home, and may therefore have been making decisions on the basis of sometimes incomplete information. Stay Safe East does not view this as genuine justice for disabled mothers.

In spite of the barriers, we did have a small number of successes.

Stay Safe East supported a client with mental health issues through care proceedings for her child. she had been abused by the father of her youngest child. She was living in a Mother and Baby foster placement outside of London. Initially it appeared that her child would be placed for adoption however with the support of her IDDVA, she was able to start engaging better with agencies and professionals involved in the care proceedings. The IDDVA helped her understand the importance of attending meetings and helped professionals understand more about her needs in order for her to engage consistently.

The client has now moved back in with the non-abusive father of her eldest child who is supporting her to manage her mental health and she

has been able to keep her youngest child in her care under a care order. The IDDVA has also facilitated a care needs assessment to make sure our client's care needs are being met whilst she cares for her child. We will continue to support her. We hope the care proceedings will soon be finished and she will maintain permanent care of her daughter.

3. Hate crime and cuckooing

Our hate crime service has two strands:

- An established local service in Waltham Forest and Newham with a part-time advocate who supported 33 disabled victims, of whom 22 were new clients:
 - 25 victims of disablist, homophobic or racist hate crime
 - 2 victims of cuckooing (we referred another victim of cuckooing to our sister organisation Choice in Hackney)
 - 5 victims of anti-social behaviour
 - 1 victim of institutional abuse.
- A small London wide service as part of the London wide CATCH partnership which has been operating since early 2019. This year, the part-time CATCH advocate supported 23 disabled victims of hate crime across 11 London boroughs (with Hillingdon making the most referrals). 21 of these were new clients. Stay Safe East works with two other disabled people's organisations to cover the growing numbers of CATCH referrals.

Who we worked with

The hate crime advocates worked with x men and x women during the year.

Sex	CATCH	Waltham Forest and Newham
Female	16 (70%)	18 (54.5%)
Male	7 (30%)	15 (45.5%)
Sexuality	CATCH	Waltham Forest and Newham
Bisexual	1	1
Gay man	-	3
Lesbian	-	0
Heterosexual	13	21
Prefer not to say	9	8

Ethnicity	Hate crime	
	CATCH	WF & Newham

Asian British	2	1
Asian Indian	0	0
Asian Pakistani	0	1
Asian Bangladeshi	0	0
Asian Sri Lankan	0	0
East Asian	0	0
Asian other	1	0
Black British	2	0
Black African	0	3
Black Caribbean	1	1
Black other	0	1
Mixed heritage	2	
White British	7	11
White European	2	1
White Other	2	1
European other	0	0
Mixed Other	2	0
Arab Middle Eastern	0	0
Other	0	2
Not disclosed	1	11

Impairment	Hate Crime			
	CATCH		Waltham Forest and Newham	
Physical impairment	9	40%	15	45%
Deaf BSL user	1	5%	0	0%
Hearing Impairment	0	0%	1	3%
Visual impairment	0	0%	3	9%
Learning disability	0	0%	6	18%
Long-term mental health	3	15%	13	40%
Long term condition	5	21%	5	3%
Neurological impairment	1	5%	0	-
Neuro-diverse	3	15%	3	9%
Terminal condition	0	0	0	-

Our data supports the national evidence that hate crimes against people with learning disabilities are very unlikely to be dealt with as such by the police and is more likely to be referred to social services as abuse against a 'vulnerable adult'. We can use this data to focus our outreach in future years.

A proportion of hate crime clients will stay with the service for a shorter period than domestic abuse survivors - except for disabled victims of neighbour related hate crime and harassment which may take several years to resolve – these are the majority of our local cases in East London. Clients who stay with us for a longer time tend also to be those who are profoundly traumatised by prolonged hate crime and by historical abuse, for example domestic abuse or childhood sexual abuse, and to need ongoing emotional support to rebuild their lives. We offer regular phone checks to keep in contact with them. We also offer a benefits and entitlement check to all hate crime clients, and help with referrals for a social care package or to mental health services.

Lockdown meant more sustained anti-social behaviour and harassment of disabled people by neighbours and people feeling isolated, with less general support networks available, and struggling to access services.

Disabled people trying to go about their lives during lockdown sometimes faced hostility from members of the public. One of our staff was spat at on the street by a group of schoolchildren. In the early months of the pandemic, people who were unable to wear a mask for physical or mental health reasons were being challenged by shopkeepers and bus drivers – a legitimate action but how this was done was not always appropriate.

“One driver said the bus would not move unless the passengers made our client leave the bus - this was incitement to hate (which currently if the victim is disabled is not part of hate crime law) – such behaviour normalises the idea not just the idea of disabled people as ‘virus spreaders’, but that disabled people are legitimate targets for abuse and hate.

Stay Safe East Hate Crime Advocate

The pandemic exacerbated the already poor police responses to disabled victims of hate crime: dismissing the client’s report or questioning their credibility (particularly if the client was a woman), failure to investigate even where there was video and other evidence. A client wanted help with making a right to review to the police, but this was refused. The client was so exhausted by the process that they did not want us to take this further. One client wanted support to report to the police being thrown out of a shop - we made a complaint about the way the police had investigated this crime – it is still open a year later. This was not a single incident – it happened on buses, in shops, in the street.

Housing related hate crime remains the most difficult part of our work. Most clients face multiple issues.

A woman and her teenage daughter were referred to Stay Safe East in January 2020. They requested our support after the teenager was bullied at school and had been subjected to distressing online racist and homophobic memes which were later flagged by the police as hate crimes. We supported the young woman with reporting and following up the case with the police and school. The mother then reported that her son had recently targeted due his disability and perceived to be “acting strangely” when in a local supermarket; he was held and searched. This was an upsetting experience for him and he is now afraid to go back to the store.

The family live in inaccessible housing, with large parts of the home being out of bounds to the mother who is a wheelchair user. This has forced her to sleep uncomfortably downstairs in the living room as she cannot access the bedrooms upstairs. She managed not to let this affect her parenting, but she was struggling more and more and needs to move. The family had also experienced unfair treatment by the school staff and struggled with accessing shopping during the pandemic.

We did extensive work to support this disabled family. We supported the daughter in her transition to college, contacted the school to ensure she had resources for home schooling, ensured a referral for neuro-developmental assessment was made, persuaded the school to arrange an escort for the daughter after school. We also helped the family regarding a dispute with a neighbour which was eventually resolved. The client now has her neuro-development appointment booked and is attending college. The abuse has now stopped, our client did not want to pursue it and has since become friends with the girl who has been harassing her, with no sense of there being any more abuse. The family are still waiting to be moved, but are very grateful for the support they have received and they mentioned that they felt very strong knowing there is an organisation who is on their side and supporting them.

This case demonstrates the complexity of the types of assistance and the long term commitment needed by people who contact Stay Safe East. The CATCH advocate supported the daughter, while our Independent Victim’s Advocate supported the mother.

4. Independent Victims Advocate/General crime

Our Independent Victim’s Advocate (IVA) is the only specialist IVA we are aware of. She is also the Manager of the Hate Crime Advocates. Her role is to

support disabled victims of a wide range of crimes that are neither domestic/sexual abuse or hate crime: financial abuse, institutional abuse, assault, harassment etc. The IVA also takes on a small number of complex hate crime cases where there are other issues relating to past abuse, housing issues, school bullying etc. This is the second year of the service.

The IVA supported 20 clients across 9 London boroughs in 2020-21, of whom 11 were new referrals. 65% were rated high to medium risk. 90% of the IVA's clients are women, reflecting a greater incident of disabled women being targeted for abuse and other crimes. Ages of clients ranged from 19 to 70.

Sexuality			
Bisexual	5%	Heterosexual	80%
Gay man	0%	Prefer not to say	10%
Lesbian	5%		

Ethnicity	Number	%
Asian – British	2	10%
Black – British	1	5%
Black African	1	5%
Black Caribbean	0	-
Black other	4	20%
White – British	9	45%
White – European	0	-
White – Other	1	5%
Mixed heritage	2	10%
Primary impairment	Number	%
Deaf	0	
Physical impairment	9	45%
Visual impairment	0	
Hearing impairment	3	15%
Learning disability	1	5%
Mental health	6	30%
Long term condition	0	-
Neuro-diversity	0	-
Neurological Impairment	1	5%
Long-term health condition		

Stay Safe East prides itself on providing holistic wrap-around support to victims facing complex barriers to safety and well-being, enabling them to achieve as optimum a quality of life as is possible. My role is crucial in helping clients navigate what some describe as feeling like an

“impenetrable maze” in which they feel confused, ignored and forgotten and which they become too exhausted to traverse on their own. I am there for them, I help them to be safe and to get things done.

Independent Victim’s Advocate (IVA)

Our Independent Victims’ Advocate has acted on victims’ behalf, contacting councils, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), landlords, the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), landlords, HM Courts, lawyers/solicitors, Mental Health services, private sector businesses and voluntary organisations in order to help people receive necessary and needed services.

A young woman self-referred to us – she has learning difficulties and mental health issues arising from the trauma experienced as a child and a young person brought up within the care system, as a result of abuse and neglect by her parents.

At the time of referral to IVA, the young woman was being targeted by individuals who were involved in criminal activity, who were trying to coerce her into partaking in drugs and alcohol, with threats of violence threatening to ‘get her’ if she reported them to the police. The perpetrators repeatedly caused damage to her property. The perpetrators’ incessant noise and anti-social behaviour has put the victim’s tenancy in jeopardy, with neighbours associating the continuous noise disturbance to her address and reporting this to the council, who in turn began the process that could lead to her eventual eviction.

The IVA was able to advocate on the victim’s behalf to in order to halt any progress towards an eviction, and for her to be recognised as the victim who needed support. Our IVA was able to support the victim to secure the necessary repairs to her property and alerted the safer neighbourhood team as someone at risk and have the incidents recorded. Our IVA also provided advocacy support to advise around safety planning to reduce her risk.

The client told her advocate:

“I’m very grateful for what you do for me, I know that I sometimes get stressed and go off and take it out on you, but I really appreciate everything and I’m thankful that you still help me because if it was anyone else they wouldn’t, so I just want to say thank you.”

A physically disabled woman was being subjected to sustained incidents of harassment by a neighbour and their family. The perpetrators mocked, laughed and ridiculed her in relation to her mobility difficulties as she went towards her vehicle, and stating that she would not be able

to drive. The victim was so distraught by the incidents that it led to her frequently feeling forced to abandon plans to go out to buy essential items.

Having reported the matter to her housing officer on a number of occasions and then to the police, with no apparent action being taken, the issue began to have a devastating effect on her mental health leading to severe anxiety, depression and feelings of worthlessness.

When the case was brought to our IVA's attention, we were able to take the case on and advocate on the victim's behalf, raising the matter formally with the Housing Association who then took note of the issue and stated that they had issued a warning to the perpetrator.

There have been no recent incidents reported however the mental health impact has persisted with the client continuing to be afraid to go out past the neighbours' house. The issue has led to the client suffering a serious mental health crisis. Our IVA was able to provide support to the police and paramedics, to help the client keep calm as they transported her for medical attention.

Along with other support needs which are being pursued, the IVA arranged for the client to receive weekly counselling funded by Stay Safe East while she awaits further support through her GP and Mental Health Services.

We have also been able to provide support to other organisations and providers by giving advice and guidance on matters such as how to proceed in dealing with certain agencies on behalf of clients, identifying suitable support for clients, obtaining information in accessible format for clients.

With the project being the first of its kind, we find that where professionals may be more aware of Stay Safe East's role in supporting disabled victims of hate crime or domestic abuse, many are less aware that we provide support to disabled people who are victims of other types of crime or as we refer to it, victims of 'general crime'. We would like to increase the number of referrals of disabled people who are victims of any types of crime, e.g. common assault, financial abuse, robberies, other abuse, etc. All are issues which people find extremely difficult to deal with and require further help and support to get their lives back on track. We will be seeking further resources for this work.

5. General advocacy and client safety checks

We matched the funding from the Ministry of Justice Covid Fund with some funds from reserves and were able to employ a part-time general advocate to support the casework advocates and our volunteer. Her role was three-fold

- General advocacy and tasks such as emergency food packages or shopping, obtaining a direct payment for client's care package, completing forms, arranging appointments, chasing actions on behalf of the advocates
- Regular weekly emotional support and safety calls to clients at high risk of suicide or in poor health. Our volunteer continued with calls to clients at lower risk who are isolated or need emotional support, including some long-term clients to whom we provided the only social contact during the pandemic. The advocate and the volunteer provided information about Covid safety, dispelling myths and helping clients stick to lockdown rules and put them in touch with volunteers. The lack of home visits by mental health professionals for clients in mental distress meant we had to make frequent calls to clients and in effect became their main source of support.
- The advocate is also processing referrals and enquiries.

"Stay Safe East has saved my life. She [the general advocate], she has been really brilliant and really helped me when I needed it and stays in touch with me and I know I can call her too."

We are indebted to our long-term volunteer who continued to contact clients right through the pandemic. She is known and trusted by clients. Her commitment is appreciated by staff and the Board.

6. Benefits and Entitlements Advocate

In July 2020, after two attempts at recruitment after the previous worker left, we successfully recruited a Benefits Advocate to support our Waltham Forest and Newham clients to apply for welfare benefits and entitlements. Clients in other boroughs are supported over these issues by the IDDVAs or hate crime advocates, if needed with advice from the Benefits Advocate. Often obtaining benefits or sorting out a Freedom Pass is the key to getting the client's trust and minimising dependency on the abuser. The new worker started in late June. Her skilled input has enabled us to maximise client's income and to ensure they access essential entitlements which improve their quality of life. The Benefits Advocate supported 36 Stay Safe East clients during the year with the following:

- Emergency food provision (food banks, NHS responders)
- New clients received a benefits check to assess if they were missing out on any benefit

- Assisting clients to gather medical evidence, fit notes and other evidence for benefits claims
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applications, Mandatory reconsiderations, SSCS1s, and Tribunal Appeals, advice on existing Disability Living Allowance claims
- Attendance allowance claim
- Claims for Universal credit
- Help to complete and evidence Limited Capability for Work forms (disability element) and support at assessments
- Ensuring that errors in Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit and other benefits were corrected by the DWP
- Help to sort out Pension credit payments
- Support to claim additional nursery hours for the client's child
- Health support and advocacy
- Application for Special Guardianship (SGO) allowance
- Child benefit claims/reviews, child tax credits claims/complaints to HMRC
- Support in benefit fraud investigation
- Housing benefit claims/support, Council tax reduction claims
- Housing repairs issues
- negotiating over water bills arrears
- Applying to grant giving trusts for grants for furniture, white goods, clothing and other essentials
- Support to move house
- Challenging financial assessments for community care charges
- Referrals for qualified free debt advice and management; help with basic budgeting
- Applying for Blue Badges, Motability, Freedom Pass, Taxicard and other entitlements
- Small grants for essential equipment, white goods, clothes, furniture and furnishings etc.

Like all our advocates, the Benefits Advocate provided emotional support to her clients. She also stepped in to support a client at child protection hearing, and supported a client with divorce proceedings, putting together legal documents and securing an adjournment to find the client legal

representation. she made referrals for occupational therapy (OT) and adult social care assessments and to community/mental health support.

The benefits advocate worked in partnership with her colleagues, helped take some of the strain off the domestic abuse or hate crime advocates, and provided a second point of contact which helped keep clients safe. We hope to expand this service in future years to all our clients, particular those in boroughs where there is no disabled people's organisation providing benefit and other help- survivors struggle to deal with multiple agencies or long waiting times.

7. Counselling service

Stay Safe East has been offering holistic counselling to a small number of clients since 2019. Emergency COVID funding enabled us to increase the number of clients we could offer this service to. During the year, we made 22 referrals to the counsellor. 19 took up the service. We offered clients an initial 12 sessions (up to 24 for some clients) from a counsellor with considerable experience of working with disabled clients, who is flexible about attendance and knows how to make the process accessible. The Counsellor provided weekly and fortnightly counselling sessions in a variety of formats: face to face, telephone and video online appointments to accommodate clients' individual needs. Our counsellor provided the following report.

My way of working is based on the person-centred humanistic therapeutic approach where the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence are present, enabling a strong therapeutic alliance where clients can explore and process emotions and difficulties in a safe environment. As a person-centred counsellor I offer a non-judgemental and compassionate space for clients to work through their challenges and understand who they are as individuals.

When accessing counselling with me, clients are seen as individuals with their unique life experiences and challenges regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, religion or culture. In order to build rapport, trust and openness which are essential for developing a strong therapeutic relationship, I avoid long questionnaires or assessment forms. Many Stay Safe East clients report feeling misunderstood and judged at previous attempts of accessing statutory services regarding psychological and emotional support. They report completing long questionnaires and/or answering intrusive questions

that left them feeling unheard and judged. In order to avoid their previously lived experiences in accessing mental health support, counselling contracting with Stay Safe East clients is carried out verbally on the initial appointment and risk assessments form part of the ongoing counselling journey at clients' own pace and as the need arises.

Each individual's communication and access needs are taken into consideration and reasonable adjustments are made to support them in their therapeutic journeys. Most of Stay Safe East's counselling appointments are late morning or PM appointments. Clients' report that in the past, they have been offered early morning appointments when they have specifically stated that early mornings are difficult for them. This has led them to miss appointments and the support provision being denied or removed due to the perceived non- engagement of individuals by professionals. As part of Stay Safe East's counselling provision, I offer an inclusive and accessible service that caters for each person's unique needs with flexible appointment days and times. Allowance for late cancellations or missed appointments has enabled clients to continue receiving much needed support without the fear of the service being stopped. I make reasonable adjustments to meet each individual's specific needs and use simple language, avoiding jargon and check for understanding often. I am currently working with a client on Zoom where a palantypist provided by Stay Safe East transcribes the sessions live, enabling the client who has a hearing impairment to read the typed conversation live as we speak.

During our counselling sessions, clients have expressed feeling heard, understood, validated, empowered and able to talk about events from their life that they have previously not been able to share with anyone else. I believe that this is due to the strength of our therapeutic relationship based on empathy, openness and trust, allowing clients to feel safe enough to access difficult experiences and make self-directed changes.

Due to funding, Stay Safe East's counselling provision is limited to 12 appointments with an extension to up to 24 if the client needs it. Endings are part of our therapeutic journey from the initial session due to the time limited nature of the provision. I have signposted clients to NHS talking therapy services and other agencies in order to access longer term support which most Stay Safe East clients could benefit from but unfortunately accessing long term statutory humanistic counselling/

psychotherapy is difficult. Overall, I believe that clients are benefitting from receiving counselling sessions funded by Stay Safe East.

Our aim is to expand this service into a full counselling service with in-house supervision, and offer much longer term therapeutic support to our clients, whose needs are not always met by mainstream services.

8. Challenges of casework during the pandemic

Working from home with a toddler in the room – you can't control when they need you, you might be on a call to a client in crisis. It's been a mental struggle hard to find the space to deal with the clients – I was supporting a client when he was in the ambulance and had Covid while my child was playing in the background. I had no choice as my client trusts me, but luckily my child is young enough not to understand what is was saying to the client.

Stay Safe East advocate

Main barrier for me has been lack of face to face work; where possible I have done WhatsApp, with some clients I use Zoom. Remote working has made me more anxious. If you are in the office, if you have a tough phone call, there is someone there to say 'I know'; you can make a cup of tea; my cat is lovely but she doesn't really understand! The benefits are I can start work an hour after I get up, I have access to my own bathroom and kitchen

Stay Safe East advocate

All our clients have experienced a negative impact from Covid 19, whether because they are trapped at home with the perpetrator or because they are self-isolating or shielding, or have been in lockdown. It has required our Advocates to be incredibly resourceful in navigating the varying and differing routes of entry for different boroughs in a bid to find and coordinate solutions for clients who were left at risk without even the most basic of necessities vital to their health and wellbeing. As an organisation Stay Safe East has been able to be flexible and add to the support that we offer in order to meet and accommodate the changed needs of our clients arising from the national crisis.

Part of the advocates' work during the pandemic has had of necessity to focus on ensuring that clients had access to food, medicines, benefits and heat and that for example housing repairs have been carried out. All clients received weekly phone check-ins. Stay Safe East put several clients in touch with the volunteer support groups that were running across London. One client found these schemes particularly helpful and had them delivering everything from bottled water to prescription medication.

Communication with clients has been more difficult. we were not able to attend meetings in person for a large part of the year

When you are explaining legal issues to the client, it is going to be complicated. We don't assume they will understand, or understand the way others do. Solicitors continue to use legal jargon and legal concepts and the client doesn't understand. Solicitors take it for granted that the client understands; we have to explain but the solicitor should do that as well. My legal training made clear legal practitioners should make sure the client understands. But we have to do the explaining, ofgten more than once.

Domestic abuse advocate

A domestic abuse client repeatedly received letters that she did not understand. In 'normal' times, we would have met with her, read and explained the letters to her. She did not have a smart phone, so was not able to take pictures on their phone and send them to her advocate which resulted in increased distress for the client.

Her advocate managed to get a copy of the letters via a neighbour sending a picture on WhatsApp. we were then able to explain the letters to her and help deal with them.

Funding from the Ministry of Justice and other sources has enabled us to provide emergency food packages to clients and top up their phone data so they could speak to us via Zoom.

We already work holistically with clients, so dealing with the challenges of helping the client access a range of services was already part of our work. However, Covid and working remotely have proved challenging, as Stay Safe East's usual practice is to work face-to-face with clients, meeting women at home (if safe) and if not in our office or in the community, and developing trust and understanding between client and advocate. This is much more difficult over the phone – the nuances of body language, voice etc. are often lost, especially with clients who do not have the digital skills to use What's app or technology to use Zoom.

Domestic Abuse Service Manager

This proved especially difficult over the winter for our clients whose mental health had deteriorated, and some have become angry with us because could not get the resolution they wanted quickly enough.

Some clients attempted suicide when previously they had self-harmed. For many clients, lockdown was challenging – loneliness and isolation led to mental health crises and situations of risk.

A client who had previously been targeted by drug dealers had been safe for quite a while but because he was more isolated during lockdown, we realised that he was being targeted again, even though he had regular contact with his support worker. The police's 'problem solver' referred the client back to the local ASBRAC multi agency panel. The Safer Neighbourhood Team visited our client but he was not at home when they visited. We kept in regular contact with the client and his mother but it was difficult as we could not visit the client at home and the client was less open on the phone. Nevertheless, this was an example of agencies working together to safeguard a client.

Women have had flashbacks during lockdown to their experiences of being locked in their home by an abuser, or being institutionalised – this has especially hard for women with learning disabilities or cognitive issues who struggle to grasp the need for staying at home and socially distancing: one client with learning disabilities was arrested for assault after months of lockdown which she could not cope with.

Stay Safe East supported a client who had experienced abuse from an adult male family member; the case was dropped by the CPS. As a result of the abuse and the unsuccessful action to prosecute the abuser, the client experienced a mental health crisis. The client rang her IDDVA stating she was going to commit suicide as she "could not cope anymore". With the support of other team members, the IDDVA was able to stay on the phone with the client whilst the ambulance was called. She was in hospital for a week, then received mental health support and is slowly improving. The client is being support holistically around other areas of her life such as understanding safe and respectful relationships, applying for benefits to increase income and support to manage physical health struggles.

Obtaining mental health support or OT assessment or a care package from adult social care (essential to reducing dependency on the abuser if he/she is also the disabled person's carer) has involved substantial work by the advocates, particularly due to the suspension of the Care Act, which has left local authorities failing to meet their duty of care to survivors of abuse.

Contacting police officers, housing officers or social workers proved challenging- everyone working at home relied on mobiles, messages were not passed on. Housing officers would not show the client the temporary accommodation. A client would have to check the property themselves to see if it met their access needs, thus increasing the risk from Covid 19.

We asked the advocates for their comments on working with clients during the pandemic.

The police did not appear to be seeing our cases as significant. They regularly failed to take a statement from the client or to investigate cases of hate crime or sexual violence fully, even when evidence was supplied. In a few cases, the police did visit the client at home but were dismissive of our clients – one officer said “this stuff happens” – yet the client was terrified of a stalker who was known to be dangerous. In one case, the officer was present when the client received three threatening calls, the officer eventually took the phone and warned off the perpetrator, but nothing further was done. The client continued to receive further calls after that.

Hate crime advocate

We have gone backwards. The Police are no longer using the Protection from Harassment Act as a tool to give first or second instance warnings. They argue there is no evidence, and take no action to safeguard the victim, they just tell them to call if it happens again - usually they tell clients to contact us. There is no understanding of patterns of incident.

We had to use the police complaints system more often, but it is profoundly flawed. Complaints take too long, the same thing we have complained about happens time and time again, we constantly have to clarify complaints, and there is pressure not to complain – “we have arrested him, are you sure you still want to complain”.

Hate crime advocate

Usually, we manage to get some people moved; this year it didn't happen. A lot of the hate crime has developed from anti-social behaviour; some clients want to move because they no longer feel safe. It is very hard to get them any kind of priority - even if there is threat to kill, there is no recognition of the impact on the victims.

'It's been easy for people not to respond to e-mails during lockdown – it is hard if someone is at risk. When we make a referral, we need to work with social services to support the client - but they don't call us back.

We have been 'accidentally excluded' from professionals' meetings. The client may agree to things when we are not there that they would not have done if we had been there to support them.

Domestic abuse advocate

The legal system has been kicked and dragged into the 21st century. They had been using bundles tied up with ribbon. The pandemic made the court system realise they can do things on line. For disabled survivors it means there are no restriction on how many people can support them at a court hearing – if you are at home, you can have your family, your pets, you can mute and take time out. If you do this in court the attention is drawn to you and everyone sees you leave. It is not as hard in the family court where you get five days hearing or more.

What are our advocates most proud of that you achieved during 2020-21?

I am proud to have kept my clients safe.

The emotional support we have provided to clients right through the pandemic.

Really proud of helping my clients become more independent; some of have gone from me having to contact every professional to them speaking to them direct; increased confidence; one client specifically named me who has helped her learn how to put her point of view across to professionals.

Supporting my team to do their job

Working right through in spite of all the challenges, the losses we suffered and being told we were expendable.

The way we have pulled together as a team and been able to include new staff who joined us during the pandemic

Projects: consultancy and training work

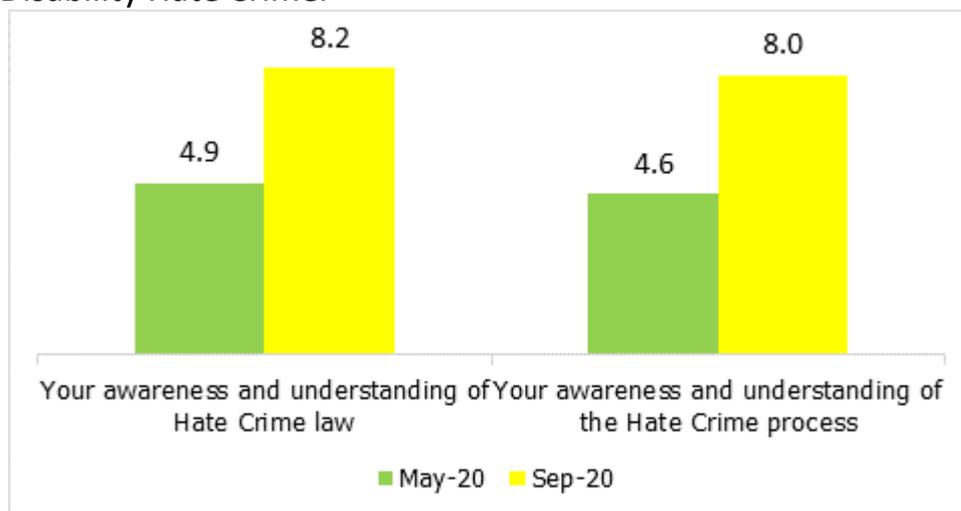
1. Secondment: capacity building disabled people's organisations to advocate for victims of hate crime

As part of the London Deaf and Disabled People's Hate Crime Partnership, our experienced hate crime advocate is seconded every year to two different Deaf or Disabled people's organisations (DDPOs). This year he worked with:

- Action and Disability Kensington and Chelsea (ADKC), an established local user-led organisation with a long track record of advocating for disabled people.
- Transport for All, a London-wide disabled people's campaigning organisation which provides information and advice to disabled people on using public transport and door-to-door transport.

Working remotely with two very different organisations proved a challenge – it was more difficult to build up relationships with the staff teams remotely. The secondee found there were limited opportunities for responding in the moment, for example if a member of staff had taken a call. Nevertheless, our secondee successfully ensured that both organisations acquired a broad knowledge of hate crime and how to advocate for disabled crime victims.

The ADKC team were asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the secondment to determine the level of awareness of Disability Hate Crime.



On a scale of 1-10

This chart makes clear the impact of the secondment in increasing awareness and understanding of hate crime amongst ADKC staff.

"The training is down to earth and practical"

Staff member, ADKC

'It is lovely and such a great pleasure for me to work with T (Hate Crime Advocate and secondee) and I have been very impressed at the level of professionalism exhibited by him and the tremendous standard of information and care he provides. I have learnt a lot from him about this so very important for all disabled people issue – the Hate Crime, by his wonderful training and extremely useful presentations. T is a perfect tutor and a magnificent supporter, the very best one!

Action on Disability Kensington and Chelsea Advocate

The project is growing in confidence and developing materials which can be adapted to each project:

- We have developed new ways of measuring the knowledge of the people our secondee is training e.g. by doing a Zoom poll at the beginning, middle and end of the secondment
- We help each organisation set up protocols for casework with clients
- We help the organisation go through recent casework to identify cases which involve hate crime, and work with them to understand what actions they could take to support the client. Over the year, we have developed a risk assessment for disabled victims of hate crime. This was adapted for the work with Transport for All as hate crime on public transport present very different risks to that originating with neighbours for example.
- We have worked with both organisations to put information on their website about what to do about hate crime
- They have our training materials and tools to refer back.
- We have created a flow chart about what to do if a person disclosed a hate crime

Working with Transport for All was very different as they are transport specialists who don't currently do advocacy. Our role was to raise the awareness of staff about hate crime so they could respond to callers to their information and advice line who might be disclosing hate crime on public transport, and know where to refer people, for example the BTP or MPS transport team. As a result, staff acquired a better understanding of hate crime and the impact it has on disabled people, where it could occur on public transport and what to do.

2. Training work: sharing good practice enquiries@staysafe-east.org.uk

For the previous 18 months, we had been delivering a two-day Domestic Abuse and Disability Equality training course to Victim Support staff around the country, as part of the Home Office funded joint project with Victim Support. Training was suspended when lockdown started. We refocused our energies on working with consultant Dr Susie Balderston to refresh and restructure the course so it could be delivered remotely. Dr Balderston is a disabled woman and an expert trainer and researcher on abuse against disabled women with experience of developing online training and teaching packages. She presented a section of the draft training package to the Advisory Group who offered comments. The package is now complete. We started delivering the training later in 2021.

The training course consists of 2 training modules, a total of 10 hours learning. Each module includes

- Pre-course learning using animations, interviews and guidance, for example on how to make processes accessible to disabled clients
- A 2.5 hour face to face session with the trainer using a presentation, discussion/question and answer sessions and case studies
- Post course quiz and reflective practice
- Resources (including contact details for local Deaf and disabled people's organisations) and further reading

The course covers the following:

- 1) Introduction to the course. Guiding principles: social model of disability and intersectionality and implications for working with disabled survivors
- 2) Disabling risks and barriers in domestic abuse; understanding domestic abuse in the context of wider violence against disabled women and girls
- 3) Meeting the needs of disabled survivors: access, communication and support needs; disability and domestic abuse risk assessment
- 4) Legal rights of disabled survivors: 2020 Victims' Code, Care Act, Mental Capacity Act, ADASS Safeguarding Guidance
- 5) Working in partnership: MARACs, safeguarding enquiries, working with local Deaf and disabled people's organisations and with specialist providers

The finished product was piloted in March 2021 to a small group of Victim Support managers and then revised following their comments. The programme was rolled out from October 2021 to IDVAs across England, including those in

the North West, the Midlands and Bedfordshire who missed the face to face training, and newly recruited Victim Support IDVAs in London and Brighton.

We also delivered three training sessions to partner agencies in the Ascent Violence against Women and Girls Partnership, including a session on how to use the Stay Safe East disability domestic abuse risk assessment.

Developing these online packages of training will allow Stay Safe East to offer on-line training to other organisations. The package is designed so that it can eventually be accredited. We will also be training some of our staff to deliver part or all of the training.

Once the pandemic is under control, our two priorities for projects remain

- Setting up a counselling service for our clients
- Developing a holistic project to support disabled mothers at risk of losing their children through care proceedings or private proceedings

Disability and domestic abuse/Violence against disabled women helpline: in summer 2020, we submitted an outline bid to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for a pilot for a specialist helpline for disabled survivors of domestic abuse, modelled on the national LGBT domestic abuse helpline. This bid was unsuccessful as the MoJ was only funding additional capacity for existing helplines but we hope that either the Home Office or the MoJ will consider supporting this project in the long term, which would enable Stay Safe East to reach a wider range of disabled survivors, initially in London and ultimately across England.

Policy work

policy@staysafe-east.org.uk

The Black Lives Matter movement which rose again² from late spring 2020³, the murders in June 2020 of Nicole Smallman and Bibba Henry, and in March 2021 of Sarah Everard have once again highlighted police violence against Black communities, the violence against women and girls, racism and misogyny the consequences of which all staff in the sector deal with daily. Though Black and other disabled women for example took part in the protests following the murders, violence against disabled women remains hidden and unacknowledged. Stay Safe East has been working with other women's organisations and organisations of disabled people, including those led by disabled women, to highlight the structural changes needed to address violence against disabled women and girls, hate crime and forms of violence which are only experienced by disabled people such as abuse in institutions, abuse by people who provide us with care, and restraint of people with mental health issues.

Our focus in 2020-21 moved to trying to influence legislation and government strategies. This proved to be a difficult task in the context of multiple draft laws and the Covid pandemic, but we are confident that we have made inroads into issues which hitherto had ignored the reality for disabled victims of abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Bill

As members of the national COVID sector network on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), we contributed to developing a set of joint recommendations for the Domestic Abuse Bill⁴ which included recommendations on meeting the needs of disabled survivors. This is a step forward to the VAWG sector which had previously not fully acknowledged the issues.

In an effort to bring to the fore the rights of disabled survivors to politicians and the Government, Stay Safe East produced a briefing⁵ on our four proposed amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill and the reasoning behind them and

² <https://theconversation.com/black-lives-matter-how-the-uk-movement-struggled-to-be-heard-in-the-2010s-161763>

³ See our statement at <https://staysafe-east.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Stay-Safe-East-re-Black-Lives-Matter-220620-final-converted.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Joint-Recommendations-on-the-Domestic-Abuse-Bill-.pdf>

⁵ <https://staysafe-east.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Stay-Safe-East-Domestic-Abuse-Bill-Amendments-Updated-for-House-of-Lords-January-2021-converted.pdf>

obtained support for our two key amendments from women’s organisations. Some MPs supported our amendments in the Commons, but it was Baronesses Jane Campbell of Surbiton and Tanni Grey-Thompson and who led on our two key amendments throughout Committee Stage and Report Stage in the House of Lords and scored a success - our amendment on the inclusion of abuse or non-family paid and unpaid carers in the definition of domestic abuse received widespread cross-party support in the House of Lords and was passed by 318 votes for the amendment to 234 against⁶. However political manoeuvring meant the amendment was withdrawn by the time it came back to the House of Commons – the Government argued that this was broadening the definition too much; our argument was that it reflected the reality of disabled people’s lives. Nevertheless by July 2021 the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding Victoria Atkins MP had promised a review of abuse of disabled people by paid and unpaid carers. The review will start later in 2021.

We commented on the initial draft guidance on the Bill, and the guidance now includes examples of the experiences of disabled survivors. We have advised the Home Office on making their engagement and consultation processes accessible to Deaf and disabled survivors and their organisations, as these had failed us and our sister organisation SignHealth at all stages of the consultation process.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy

In March 2021, we responded to the Home Office Call for Evidence on the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2021-2024. Our response⁷ included details about what an inclusive VAWG strategy would look like for disabled survivors, as well as data on violence against disabled women and supporting evidence from our casework. Alongside many other headings, we also discussed how we have been advising the Home Office on the accessibility of their engagement methods.

Law Commission Consultation on Hate Crime law reform

In January 2021, Stay Safe East prepared a detailed response⁸ to the Law Commission’s initial consultation on changing hate crime law. Alongside many other disabled people’s organisations, we argued for parity across all equality strands, and for the law to recognise the specific forms of hate crime which are targeted at disabled people because we are disabled, and the intersectional

⁶ <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2021/march/house-lords-vote-criminalise-domestic-abuse-carers>

⁷ <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Stay-Safe-East-response-to-the-Home-Office-VAWG-Strategy-2021-25-14-pt.pdf>

⁸ <https://staysafe-east.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Stay-Safe-East-response-to-Law-Commission-Consultation-on-Hate-Crime-Laws-final.pdf>

nature of hate crime. We evidenced our arguments from our casework and also argued that incitement to hate against disabled people should be included in a new law. We hope to see a change in the law soon, this will greatly help our work supporting disabled victims of any form of hate crime.

Covid Policy and Practice Briefing

In April 2020, we published our COVID-19 briefing⁹ on the impact of the early stages of the pandemic on disabled people. Even at this early stage, we could see that the pandemic would heighten existing inequalities and create new ones, and that the lives of disabled people carried little value.

Victim's Code Consultation

We responded to the Ministry of Justice consultation on Improving the Victim's Code in May 2020. Our response can be found on the Stay Safe East website under the 'policy work' page¹⁰. The response includes answers to set questions regarding the restructuring of the Code and the rights of victims to have an advocate or other supporter by their side at all stages of the criminal justice process, which we are pleased to see has been adopted. We will be making further contribution to any future Victims Bill which will help improve the rights of domestic abuse survivors seeking justice.

Stay Safe East Advisory Group on Violence Against Disabled Women and Girls (previously Disability and Domestic Abuse)

We have held 11 meetings during the year. The group is made up of Deaf and disabled women's organisations, disabled survivors and academics and representatives from a range of organisations working on domestic violence and violence against women. During the year, we increased representation from organisations outside of London. The group acts as a sounding board for our work and allows members to learn from each other. The group shared evidence for our work on the Domestic Abuse Bill and has discussed topics ranging from the experiences of disabled mothers after domestic abuse to the consultation on the Victim's Code and of course, the impact of Covid on disabled survivors.

Ask for ANI

We have also been instrumental in advising on the campaign materials, accessibility and implementation of the 'Ask for ANI' domestic abuse codeword scheme. As the campaign evolved, we commented on each aspect of the initiative, from draft materials to the practicalities of where and how to roll out

⁹ <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Stay-Safe-East-Response-to-Consultation-Equality-Impact-of-Covid-19-final.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/index.php/policy/>

the scheme effectively. We are also members of the Ask for ANI Advisory Group.

#YouAreNotAlone Home Office campaign

We were instrumental in the development and implementation of the #YouAreNotAlone government domestic abuse campaign. We liaised with the Domestic Abuse team at the Home Office to advise on the content and accessibility of campaign materials, social media messages and practicalities of rolling out the scheme. We were influential in the process of ensuring that these materials are accessible in terms of format and content, and advised on the Easy Read format¹¹.

External partnerships

The unprecedented circumstances of this year have enabled us to forge connections and relationships that would not have happened had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been attending the weekly (now fortnightly) COVID Violence against Women and Girls sector call hosted by Women's Aid and End Violence Against Women (EVAW). In September our CEO was invited to join the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's call which includes the major national domestic abuse organisations, the Home Office and key government departments.

Our cross-sector open letter to the Prime Minister in early April¹², listing recommendations for responding to an increase in violence against women and girls during the pandemic, exemplifies the beginning of our COVID-related collaborative working as a sector. In early September the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs brokered a meeting with the Chief Social Worker for England and Wales, Fran Leddra, and we discussed not only our work but specifically the role of adult safeguarding and adult social care in relation to domestic abuse. We have agreed to work on a checklist for social work and other social care staff on ensuring the safety of disabled survivors of domestic abuse.

In January 2021, the CEO gave a presentation at the Women's Aid Winter Conference on Exploring the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on disabled survivors and the staff who support them. This can be found on our website under 'policy work'¹³. The CEO also spoke at the Crown Prosecution Service Community Engagement Forum on addressing the needs

¹¹ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/For-Survivors-COVID-19-Advice-SCREEN-READER.pdf>

¹² <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/An-open-letter-to-the-prime-minister.pdf>

¹³ <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/index.php/policy/>

of disabled survivors post Covid, and at the Ministry of Justice Covid 19 Victim and Witness Silver Command Group. On 4th March 2021, we met with Minister for Safeguarding Victoria Atkins MP, to discuss the experiences of disabled survivors under Covid and talk about our work- the Minister was particularly interested to hear our account of victim-blaming of disabled women. She listened to our concerns and stated her intention to reach out to the other departments who have responsibility in this area, especially with regards to awareness around the suspension of The Care Act during the pandemic.