

Despite these examples, the submissions from practitioner's and women themselves in the showcase, clearly highlighted a lack of appropriate accommodation options for women fleeing domestic or sexual violence who may have complex needs. For sexual violence in particular, there were no specialist accommodation projects reported.

Accommodation for women fleeing violence – safety concerns

Many women reported concerns about safety and appropriateness of generic homelessness or housing services and support:

“They put me in a B&B as temporary accommodation for three weeks. This was mixed accommodation for men and women and it did not feel safe for me or my children. Men were drinking in the project and I was scared if they approached me what they wanted to do. Here I feel much safer.” Solace Women's Aid Resident

“Because I have been harmed by men before, I didn't feel that safe in mixed homelessness projects. In one it was dormitories with curtains between the beds rather than rooms. There was a separate section for women, but still there was lots of heavy drinking and fighting... I feel safe in this project (North London Women's Project) and am a lot better now.” St Mungo's North London Women's Project Resident

“I was staying in one homelessness project previously where a man kept climbing up the outside of the building onto a female resident's balcony – when she reported to staff they talked to him and took his word over hers that he didn't. When it comes to violence and abuse there is a problem that often it is the woman's word against the man's and he will say he didn't do anything. There needs to be good CCTV in all mixed support projects so there is more evidence to back women up.” St Mungo's Client Representative, Outside In Women's Group

“When I became homeless and went to the Council they asked me loads of personal questions...I was interviewed in an open room and did not feel comfortable, I was whispering my details. Women who have had experiences such as domestic violence should be interviewed in a private room.” St Mungo's North London Women's Project Resident

The concerns raised highlight a need for more specialist refuge and women's homelessness provision, training for staff in homelessness/housing support services and closer work with the domestic violence sector.

Thank you again to all who submitted

If you would like to view all the submissions in full for this theme, please visit www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org and click on the 'Prevention and recovery from domestic abuse and sexual violence' theme. The third theme of the Rebuilding Shattered Lives Campaign – Families and children – is now open for your submissions of good practice and innovations.

Find out more about the theme and get involved at www.rebuildingshatteredlives.org

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Opening doors for homeless people

Rebuilding Shattered Lives

Rebuilding Shattered Lives Theme Round Up: Prevention and recovery from domestic abuse and sexual violence

Led by Expert Group member Davina James-Hanman,
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The campaign is about to hit the six month mark and we are delighted with its success.

We are really impressed with the response from so many individuals and organisations about their work in preventing and helping survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence. This theme has seen 25 submissions from across the UK – but also from further afield including the United States and Canada. We know that there is lots of good work going on and we need to share this information and learn from one another.

In particular, we can learn directly from service users about what they need and what works (or not) for them. I was especially pleased to hear from women directly affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence who felt able to share their views and experiences.

We also held our first members' event during this theme where we heard about the reality at the front line of delivering services.

Sharing views and practice will help also us to lobby for services to fill the gaps for homeless women who experience domestic and sexual violence.

Thank you to all of those who have joined the campaign and contributed to the Showcase. Please continue to spread the word and support the campaign across other themes.

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Summary of submissions

Prevention services

Women highlighted how they wished that they had been supported to keep their own home and had access to advice and support earlier:

“I am suffering and he is sitting down in our home enjoying himself. It would be better if the man had to leave and the women and children could stay and be kept safe.” Solace Women’s Aid Resident

“I have been to a women’s group on domestic violence delivered by a refuge provider that was really helpful. They talked about what to expect in a relationship, and how to spot signs that someone is controlling or abusive before you go out with them. To prevent more women becoming homeless from domestic violence it would be good if there was some kind of women’s advice bureau where you could access advice on relationships, money and legal matters before things get really bad.” St Mungo’s North London Women’s Project Resident



Many organisations who contributed provide women with advice and support so they don’t become homeless in the first place, for example the Refuge/Women’s Aid help-line, and Rape Crisis Centres.

Women Acting In Today’s Society (WAITS) outlined their education work with women in the West Midlands. Their workshops address a wide variety of issues from domestic violence to housing, resettlement, benefits and business development.

Some services work with men in order to prevent or reduce the impact of domestic violence on women and children. Respect, the UK membership association for Domestic Violence Prevention Programmes and Integrated Support Services, works with abusive partners to address the source of abuse:

“Without the DVPP/ISS Nathan may not have been granted contact, perhaps leading to him trying to track the children down, growing increasingly angry at – and a risk to – Kim. If he was granted contact it is likely that this wouldn’t have been safe or positive leading to a breakdown of contact and further court proceedings. And without addressing his domestic violence, Nathan may well have gone on to be violent to [his new partner] Lisa too.” Case study from Respect leaflet: ‘Working with the source of the problem’

Service provision for specific groups

A number of submissions highlighted services for specific demographic groups of vulnerable women, some have specific services for cultural and linguistic minorities or BME groups¹. Al-Hasaniya MWP deliver a domestic violence project as well as a new three year project which aims to educate, empower and engage Arabic speaking women, supporting them to return to education and employment by offering tailor-made courses. A number of organisations noted services provided in other languages, including Somali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu and Polish.

Jewish Women’s Aid submitted a comment from a service user on the importance of services relevant to specific groups:

“You feel alone, sometimes as a Jewish woman, like you are the only one, ever, to have had an abusive male husband. And then after coming to JWA, you realise that an organisation like that wouldn’t exist if you were the only one. And you wouldn’t wish it on anyone else, but there is comfort in knowing you are not alone.” JWA client (26 years old)

We heard from great services supporting young women, families and children.² For example, the Young Women’s Housing Project aims to provide safe places to live, and specialist support to help young women to overcome the effects of abuse. They do this by providing supported accommodation, floating support and specialist therapeutic care.

The LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum and Edinburgh Women’s Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre highlighted their work to improve responses to LBT women who have experienced violence and homelessness. GALOP provide a youth Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) for the LGBT community, and Stonewall Housing was highlighted as a good specialist accommodation provider for this group.

Provision for women with complex needs – a gap in provision

What was evident from submissions was the lack of accommodation provision for women with substance use, mental health and complex needs. We only heard about two projects, Nia’s Emma Project and Solace Women’s Aid’s projects with a specific substance use worker, which specifically supported women fleeing violence with complex needs. This highlights a gap in provision and we heard how increasingly, in the context of funding cuts, these services are few and far between.

We learnt of some homelessness charities working more closely with domestic violence services to try and improve the support they provide, for example Standing Together are working with Broadway to introduce routine DV enquiry upon admission to hostels. Similarly, St Mungo’s have introduced a new domestic violence policy and training course for staff in partnership with AVA, as well as sexual violence training from The Havens, as part of an organisational wide Women’s Strategy.

There were also three local authority based approaches highlighted in the submissions and during our members’ event.

- Islington, through their Violence against Women Strategy have implemented a revision of service delivery and strategy to have a stronger focus on adults with complex needs. This includes a pilot project, Activ*8 with the Pillion Trust which aims to ensure that women with complex needs access appropriate support and accommodation. All women are risk assessed and where appropriate, referred to a MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).
- East London Housing Partnership is establishing an accommodation project which will assist women with multiple needs who have a local connection to East London.
- Hackney DAAT was highlighted for their partnership with the domestic violence team and ‘tireless work’ to support street homeless women and clients with multiple needs.

¹ Refuge; Preston Domestic Violence Services; Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women’s Centre; Coventry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre and Jewish Women’s Aid

² Coventry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre’s; Edinburgh’s Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre’s ; Safe Horizon and Calgary Women’s Shelter based in from the US and Canada.