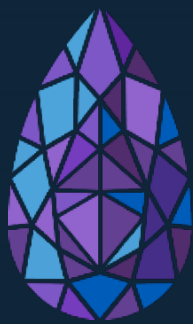


CAPTURING SURVIVORS VOICES

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PARAGON
TOGETHER EMPOWERING CHANGE

Reflections on PARAGON support during COVID



PARAGON
TOGETHER EMPOWERING CHANGE

The needs and wishes of the adults and children we work with are central to everything we do, so it's fitting to begin this report with their voices. The statements are from women and children we worked with and encapsulate the work we do together, both survivor of violence and abuse and the specialist DVA worker.

'You have given me confidence in myself to believe that what I do is ok, it's alright, it's what I should be doing. I've got my own bank account sorted now. I've contacted a solicitor. I'm on the way to independence and living my own life. You have given me the confidence so that of course I am allowed to do this and I am able to. So, a big thank you'

'Helping me realise that it was all real. I was always made to doubt myself. It happened and you believed me. It was not inconsequential, it was something big that happened to me, it was not acceptable and it was abuse. You helped me recognise it. You made me feel that I wasn't stupid and it wasn't in my head.'

'I liked just playing Uno and taking my mind off things sometimes. It helped with my anxiety and helped me talk about my feelings.'

Introduction

Each year we seek to capture the voice of the people we work with through several mechanisms. This includes a Feedback Fortnight, where we ask everyone we work with during the period the same set of questions. This time the questions were focussed on COVID and the impact on access and support. Generally, the responses were from adults. In one area they asked the children and young people they worked with a similar set of questions

Executive Summary

This feedback process garnered over 1,600 pieces of information from across Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset, Sussex and the IOW, from adults and children who are either living with, or have lived with domestic violence and abuse.

93% of adults did not feel that COVID impacted on the support they received, and, whilst 84% said it did not impact on their ability to access support it is the 16% where it did impact that we are seeing what more we could do. Without doubt the people who have responded to our questions are representative of people we work with, and being isolated during COVID made accessing support harder due to living with the person causing harm. The teams offered flexible support, working outside of usual office hours and all teams have on-call and were either directly delivering, or as part of a wider community, staffing help-lines. We know that calls to local and national help lines increased over COVID.

80% of children and young people said they continued with their support sessions virtually. Staff noted that children and young people found it harder to engage virtually and this was supported by comments from some adults where they found it harder to get their children to engage virtually.

100% of children and young people and 96% of adults felt their worker truly understood what was happening for them and/or their family.

100% of children and young people reflected on the work they had carried out with their worker and said they felt helped.

98% of adults said they were linked with other agencies and were positive about the multi-agency work carried out via their worker.

95% of adults said they would be able to spot red flags in future relationships, which is a stunning statistic. Working with PARAGON helps people understand domestic violence and abuse, the typologies of abusers and the behaviours used to undermine, isolate and build dependency, which in turn gives them the choice for their future.

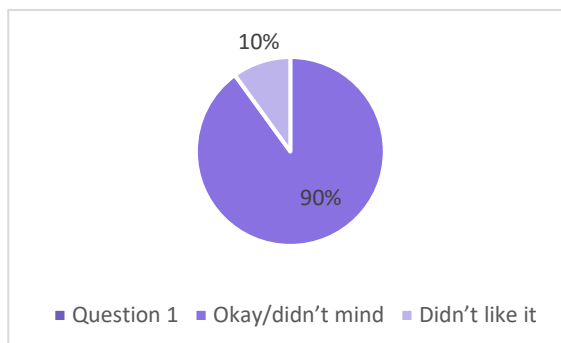
99.9% of people we worked with would recommend PARAGON to others.

Information gathered

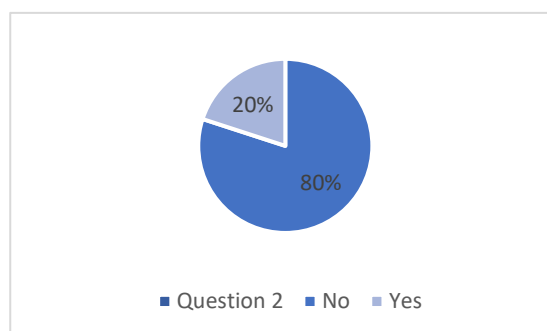
Young people

We asked 6 questions and received a range of responses: -

1. **How do you feel about your worker having to wear a mask when they visit you?** We were concerned regarding boundaries and young people not liking talking to staff if they had masks, however, only 10% of young people said it impacted on them negatively and they did not like it.



2. **Did COVID stop you having some face to face support sessions and how did you feel about this?** Generally, all staff found alternative ways of working virtually with young people to keep their sessions going. One young person said they enjoyed skipping lessons and another said they were annoyed as they could not talk about their feelings.



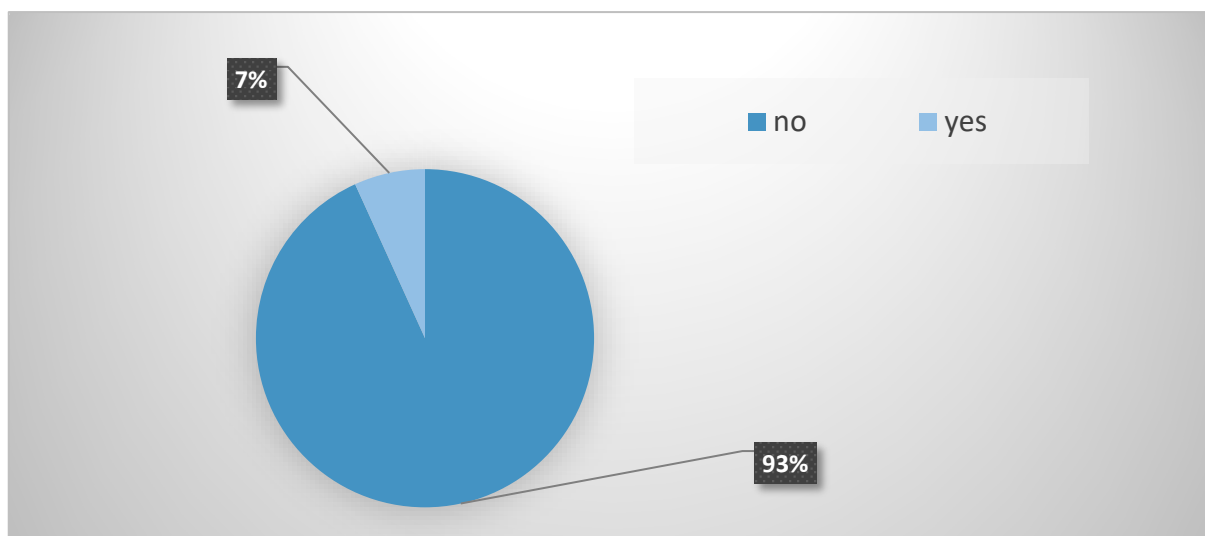
3. 100% of young people felt their worker listened to them and understood what was happening for them and their family
4. 100% of young people reflected on the work they had carried out with their worker and said they felt helped. One young person commented that they had enjoyed their sessions and another that it helped them talk about their feelings.
5. **Did your support worker ask you if they could speak to other people who help you such as teachers, social workers, etc?** 60% of young people said they had been asked and had agreed, whereas 40% said they could not remember. This has been taken forward as a learning point for the team, to be clear about asking and revisit permissions so all young people were clear what was being asked and who we could speak with.
6. **What was the one thing your support worker did that has helped you the most?**
 - I liked playing Uno and taking my mind off things
 - Helped me with anxiety
 - We made a worry box

- Helped me talk to people
- Keeping me safe
- Helps me talk about my feelings

Adults

These questions were asked to the victims and survivors of DVA that we work with – next time we will focus on people causing harm.

1. Did COVID impact on the support you received

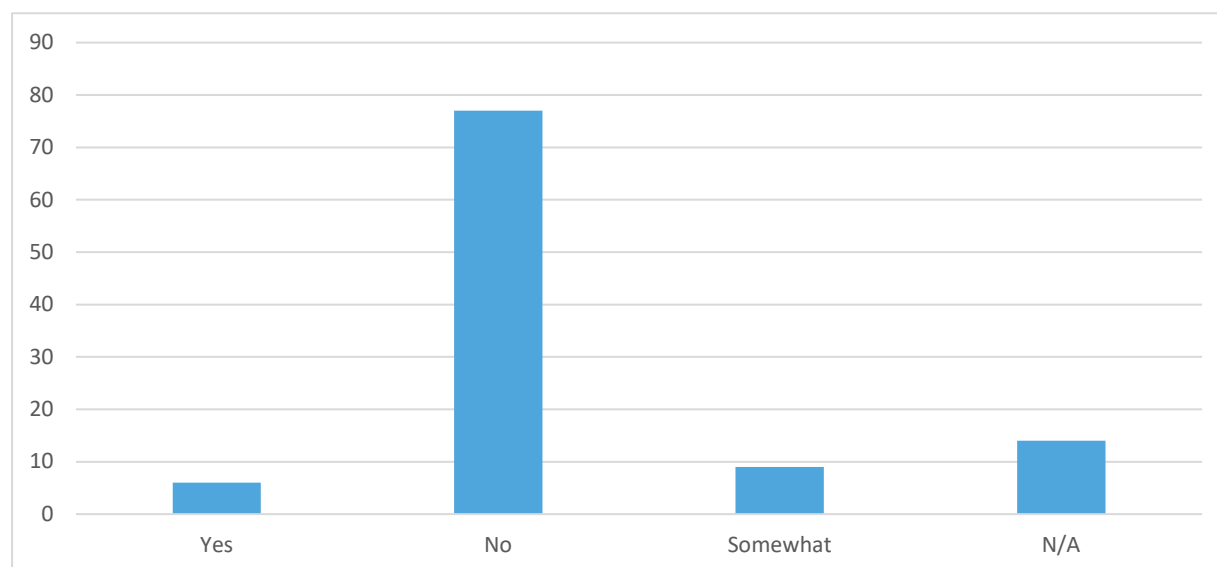


From the responses received, the overwhelmingly majority of people we worked with found that COVID did not impact on the support they received. Some said it felt different and that speaking with someone virtually was familiar, but felt different with a worker.

Other comments included

- ‘.....I feel it has worked better around family life, I feel better in my own space talking to you’
- ‘....he was at home meaning I couldn’t really access my support as much....’
- ‘I wouldn’t have seen anyone as my child was not at school so it was good to still be able to talk’
- ‘Was amazing to have such support at this time’
- ‘You’ve been amazing, you’ve gone above and beyond, but getting the kids to communicate over digital has been hard’
- ‘I missed the face to face groups, I missed socialisation and found it difficult as I live alone, having someone in the room to discuss points is really useful as I find it takes time for me to understand’
- ‘virtual sessions saved me time’
- ‘it was hard in the beginning over the phone, talking to someone you did not know, but my worker understood and visited me anyway’

2. Did COVID impact on your ability to access support?



The majority responded that they did not feel that COVID impacted on their ability to access support, but one person said they did not know how to get help and felt lost. This has been shared with the commissioned team in that area. PARAGON staff helped the person find all the information they needed in case they wanted to self-refer to the commissioned team in the future.

- One person was approached by the DA Advocate in hospital and said they only engaged with support because they were approached.
- One person said even with how bad COVID got it did not impact on their support as their IDVA went out of their way to make sure her and her son had what they needed to feel safe
- One person said it was hard with three children at home, but the worker was flexible with the times they called
- The person causing harm had moved in/was around for some of the time making it harder to access support

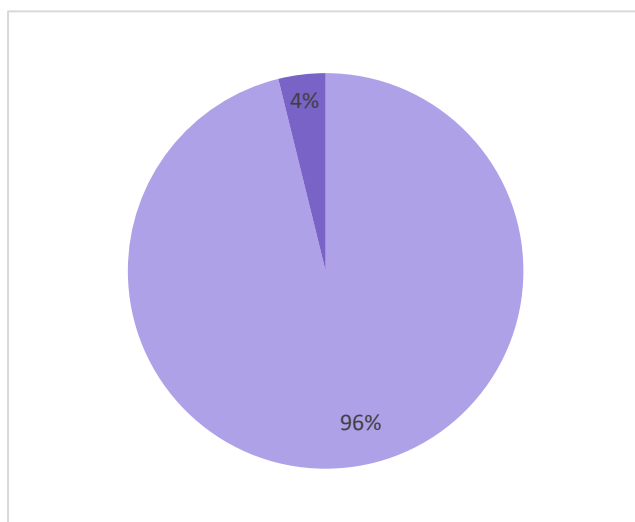
3. What could we change to help you access support easier?

Again, the majority of respondents said there was little to change but we did receive some helpful comments that we have included within our service review: -

- 'More flexibility for someone working and want to talk'
- 'Have more virtual drop in sessions'
- 'Advise police on DVA and how to help, they weren't very good' (this was one of a number of comments aimed at police not being perceived as helping)
- 'keep services on-line'
- 'If I've got a problem, you've given me various options. PARAGON could do more to make their service more visible, e.g. through GP,s that would be good'
- 'The wait between referral and first appointment seemed a bit long'

- ‘Better communication between different organisations’
- ‘Would be useful to have a glossy booklet of contacts needed. I know that everything is on websites but it can be hard to navigate when traumatised’

4. Do you feel your worker truly understood the abuse you suffered and how this impacted on you and/or your children?



96% of people we work with felt that their worker truly understood the abuse they had experienced and the comments received were very positive: -

- ‘...understood how I was feeling straight away and the impact it had on my health and wellbeing...’
- ‘.....fully encouraged my decision to leave’
- ‘...my walking angel’
- ‘deserved a medal’
- ‘there were a few times I felt like giving up but she completely understood.

- ‘It is the first time I feel like someone actually got me’
- ‘Really approachable and 100% getting to know us and understand us’
- ‘The staff were brilliant and they seemed to know what to say’
- ‘I do not think it was possible for me to fully explain what I had gone through but what I was able to say was understood’
- ‘My child was not able to attend school most days and it was even harder to get back to the routine after lockdown, but the visits did make a great difference and I think this helped him engage and I think they understood the impact on my child’
- ‘My worker understood before I and other professionals did, she made social services aware of what was going on and advocated for me and my son’
- ‘I think they understood me entirely. One thing people have told me is that I apologise far too much. I think that’s a habit that has been drilled into me, that everything I do is wrong or that I am a nuisance, the worker made me see differently’

5. What could they have done differently?

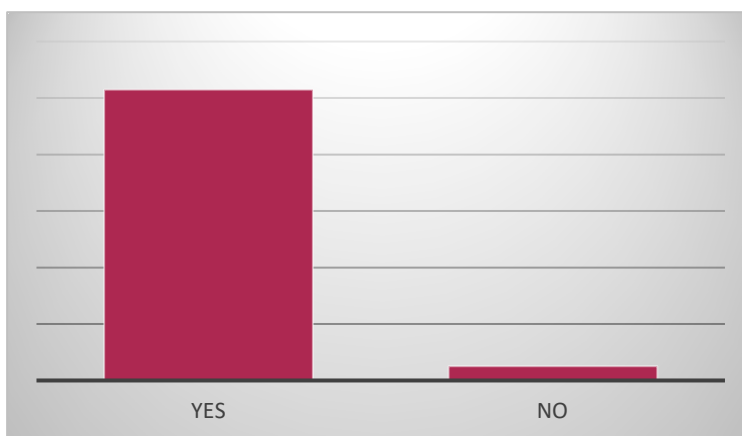
The majority of respondents did not feel that anything could have been changed, and there were many positive comments on the individual workers and their support. However, there were some insightful comments that we have added to our service review: -

- More support with groups
- Self help workbooks that we can complete instead of going to a group
- Leaflets and evening recovery groups
- Could have sessions focussed on emotional resilience
- More drop-in groups

- Having some regular updates or tips for everyday life
- Be aware of everyone in the group and not to focus on the people who talk
- Offer to print off and send paperwork to clients
- More and frequent support whilst waiting for counselling to get started

6. After working with PARAGON do you think you would be able to spot red flags in future relationships?

This question was aimed at those experiencing violence and abuse within an intimate partner relationship. Nearly 100% of respondents said they could spot red flags in a future relationship.



In a previous feedback session clients' said they wanted to learn about, and understand domestic violence and abuse. They lived it day in and day out, but did not know what it was, nor did they understand how grooming can happen at the beginning of an abusive relationship.

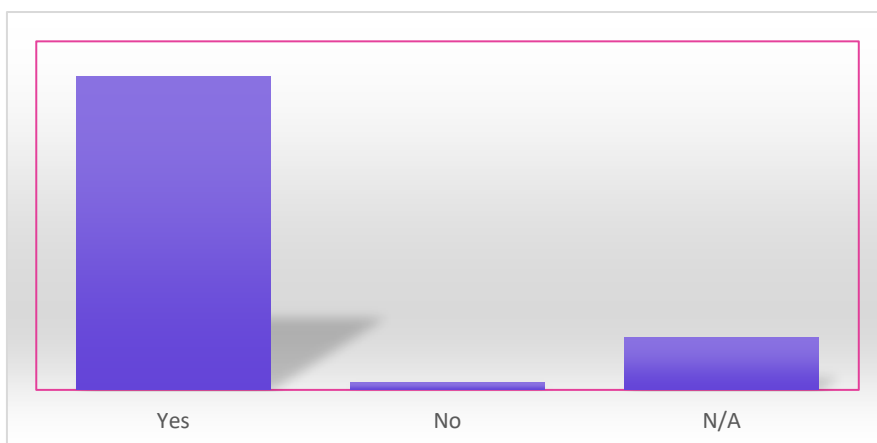
Some people were understandably cautious with one participant saying 'I think I got a pretty good idea but I think I'm still susceptible. I recognise it, but I'm still a bit vulnerable', and another saying 'it's still new but I believe I will in the future'.

Others said: -

- 'Learnt about things I would not have noticed previously'
- 'I am working on this and I know that my worker will keep helping me'
- 'Yes, I would, but I don't want to be in a relationship for the time being'
- 'Yes, and I have been helping a friend to seek help from an abusive relationship'

7. Did your worker link you with other agencies to ensure you got support for everything?

Multi agency and partnership working is key to ensuring each person we work with gets the right support at the right time, for all areas identified via our in-depth strength-based assessment. Whilst we focus on domestic violence and abuse, we understand that to help a person to escape a violent and abusive relationship, you need to focus on all of who they are. This is why our assessment covers health and wellbeing, housing, benefits and other areas where we can signpost and work in partnership with others.



98% of respondents said that the worker had helped them either access other agencies or signpost where appropriate.

For some clients they already had help and support in place with other agencies and the

worker confirmed what other people were doing via the assessment.

Generally, staff helped with signposts/access to a wide variety of services, including: -

- Legal sanctions and access to solicitors
- Housing
- Mental Health
- Time to Talk referral
- Referral to counselling services
- Food bank and help with clothing
- Children's social care
- Recovery groups
- CAB
- Target Hardening
- Police
- Vivid
- GP's
- Youth Trust
- Adult Social care

Many positive comments regarding the work undertaken by the team were also received: -

- 'Yes, she continually fought for me and advocated for me with the MET police and also signposted me to other agencies so I had all support for my needs in place'
- 'Within a week, my worker had spoken to the police and housing on my behalf'
- 'Yes, she gave me an app to download called Hollie Guard and explained to me what it is. She also gave me some information and support groups and a number to call in case of any further abuse'
- 'Yes, my health visitor is amazing and women from the Freedom Programme are amazing. Lots of support and I've made new friends who have experienced the same as me along my journey'
- 'Yes, there are agencies I am now working with which I did not have the confidence to contact on my own'
- 'She made the police and social services listen to me'

- ‘Yes, she did things I didn't think were possible’
- ‘Yes. I have never spoken to professionals before because I was too afraid. My worker introduced me to everybody and made them listen to me. Then everything changed for the better’

These responses more than any demonstrated the added value that the DVA team bring to their work, ensuring people are engaged with other agencies, advocating for them and helping to get their voices heard.

8. What was the one thing your worker did that has improved your life the most?

All our feedback requests contain both qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring we capture the voices of the people we work with. This question was to seek the qualities in a DVA worker that are essential – for us to understand what matters to the people we work with.

The majority of the respondents said ‘Listened to me’, which correlates with previous feedback and is an essential criterion within our role profiles - the ability to listen. All our staff take time to get to know each person they work with, following a co-produced assessment process that takes a minimum of 4 weeks/sessions with safety as an initial focus.

Other comments included: -

- ‘I don't know if it's one thing - but the constant support has made a massive difference - who understands and will be there to listen’
- ‘In general, confirmed that the relationship wasn't right and if it was abuse. Made me realise it shouldn't be like that’
- ‘Feeling supported and not judged has made me feel more confident and stronger. I feel I can move forward’
- ‘I feel more confident that this isn't how life should be’
- ‘Made me feel confident that I could change my life. You made me feel stronger and that things weren't always on his terms. I also felt like I was a better Mum because of it’
- ‘Just to listen to me and be kind to me, help me improve my life and escape the situation I was in’
- ‘You caught me when I was falling. I am so grateful’
- ‘Given me a voice, I can speak again, I feel like I am validated’
- ‘Communicated ways to help me build my self-confidence’
- ‘I am now able to go to town by myself which is something I struggled with from the sessions’
- ‘Receiving information on journaling and letter writing and I have started journaling a lot and this has helped me get to write what is in my mind’
- ‘Listened to my situation and fought hard to get me safe’
- ‘Made me feel that it wasn't bad to be a single mother and there was nothing wrong being divorced. In my community, it is a very bad thing and women are shamed for it’

- ‘Introducing me to other professionals and building my confidence in them. This means that when my worker closes my case, I will be able to communicate with professionals, without her’

9. What three words spring to mind when you think about PARAGON and the work we did together?

As part of the rebranding that PARAGON undertook in 2021 staff and people we work with engaged in a number of workshops exploring who we are, and what we do.

We continue to ask this question to ensure the work we do remains meaningful and has value.

We end this report with the voices of the people we worked with.

The words below were shared with us and underpin

TOGETHER EMPOWERING CHANGE

which is the PARAGON mission.

believed brilliant calming camaraderie **caring** challenging comforting **compassion** confident determined

education empathetic empathy **empowered** empowerment encouraged fantastic

fast forward friendly happy

helpful informed inspiring interesting

invaluable joyous kindness **listened** love memorable moving non-judgemental

patient positive **professional** reassuring **reliable** resourceful respectful responsive safer strong stronger

supportive trusting **understanding**

uplifting valued