

# **Stay Safe East**

## **Trustees' Annual Report**

**2019-2020**



**Charity Number 1153615**

## Stay Safe East

### Trustee's Annual Report 2019-2020

**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  
Cat Everett (Resigned October 2019)  
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  
Policy Officers: Miranda Weston (from July 2019) and Ashley Stephen  
Independent Victim's Advocate/Team Manager (full-time)  
Hate Crime Advocates (2 part-time)  
Domestic Abuse Casework Manager Independent Disability (full-time)  
Domestic Violence Advocates (IDDVAS) (3 part-time, two part-time from December 2019 and January 2020)  
Benefits and Entitlements Advocate (May-August 2019)  
Administrator (part-time)  
Volunteers: 2

*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 (Tesfa Berhane to December 2019)

**Independent Examiner**

John Assie, Jackson Nicholas Assie

Suite 7 Meridian House, 62 Station Road London E4 7BA

**Thank you to our Funders and Commissioners**

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

Ascent Partnership (from January 2020)



**Thank you to our supporters and partners and in particular:**

Members of the Disability and Domestic Abuse Advisory Group

Douglas Kerr from Lloyds Bank for his continued mentoring support to the CEO

Rachel Nicholas and Josephine Feeney at Victim Support for their support with the Disability and Domestic Abuse project

Lyla Adwan-Kamara and David Jenkins, Merton Centre for Independent Living and Louise Holden at Inclusion London for joint work on the DDPO Hate Crime Partnership

Tracey Gilbert-Falconer for help with the data for this report

The Stay Safe East Women's Group for their support for new clients and for each other, and for their input into our work.

Our donors: the staff at Charity Jobs who voted us their Charity of the Year for 2019 and gave us a generous donation, and the Board of Trafalgar Demolitions, a local Waltham Forest company for their kind donation. These helped pay for staff support and for help for clients with No Recourse to Public Funds.

**Thank you!**

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

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**The Trustees' Annual Report for 2019-2020 was approved on 23 February 2021 and signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by:**



**Savitri Hensman**

**Chair**

## Stay Safe East

### Chair's Report

#### Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

The year beginning in April 2019 was a busy one for Stay Safe East, with many reminders of why our work is so important. Domestic abuse and hate crime of various kinds continue to take a huge toll on disabled people, often on top of disadvantage and discrimination. But there are also many people who have resisted the low value placed by others on their safety and wellbeing, finding the support they needed and often encouraging others in similar situations.

We were able to expand our services in London and wider influence, while taking care both to make sure we could keep providing high quality services and to avoid treating people as if they were statistics. Time to build trust and flexibility are needed, especially when serving clients who have often faced harassment, violence and human rights abuses on multiple occasions, as well as having varied access needs in a society which is still largely inaccessible. Staff support has also been important as they have advocated for people in often harrowing situations.

Our work on policy and developing capacity in other organisations around the issues we deal with, which made a difference nationally, remained rooted in our frontline practice. Also staff, volunteers and Board members continued to draw on our lived experience as disabled people as well as specialist skills and knowledge, while being aware of the tremendous diversity even among those using our services. As our expertise won wider recognition, this offered opportunities to help achieve change at a wider level, though this could be a painfully slow process in view of the urgent needs confronting us week by week.

In the final month-and-a-half, as COVID-19 spread rapidly between mid-February and the end of March 2020, we faced challenges we had never had to meet before. Amidst growing fear, hardship and loss, we had to adopt new ways of working quickly, to support clients struggling to have basic needs met. As coronavirus infections grew, changes in the law and in health and social care practice affected the human rights of disabled people, while the devastating effects of inequality of many kinds became even clearer.

We are grateful to the funders, donors and partners who made it possible to keep vital services going, including adjusting to the pandemic, and to widen our reach in the course of the year.

**Savi Hensman, Chair, Stay Safe East**

**Stay Safe East**  
**Trustees' Annual Report**  
**Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

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## **1. Introduction**

The Trustees present their report of activities for the year ended March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020. The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in Note 1 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 established in 2013. It is the only user-led 'by and for' organisation in the UK<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> Sign Health domestic abuse services support Deaf survivors of domestic abuse; some Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations provide advocacy support to disabled victims of hate crime. Stay Safe East is the only specialist service for *disabled* survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and the only organisation to work across all areas 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 seventh 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
- To establish and develop our casework with disabled survivors across London through the London Victims and Witness Service, the Ascent Partnership and the CATCH partnership
- 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. Trustees**

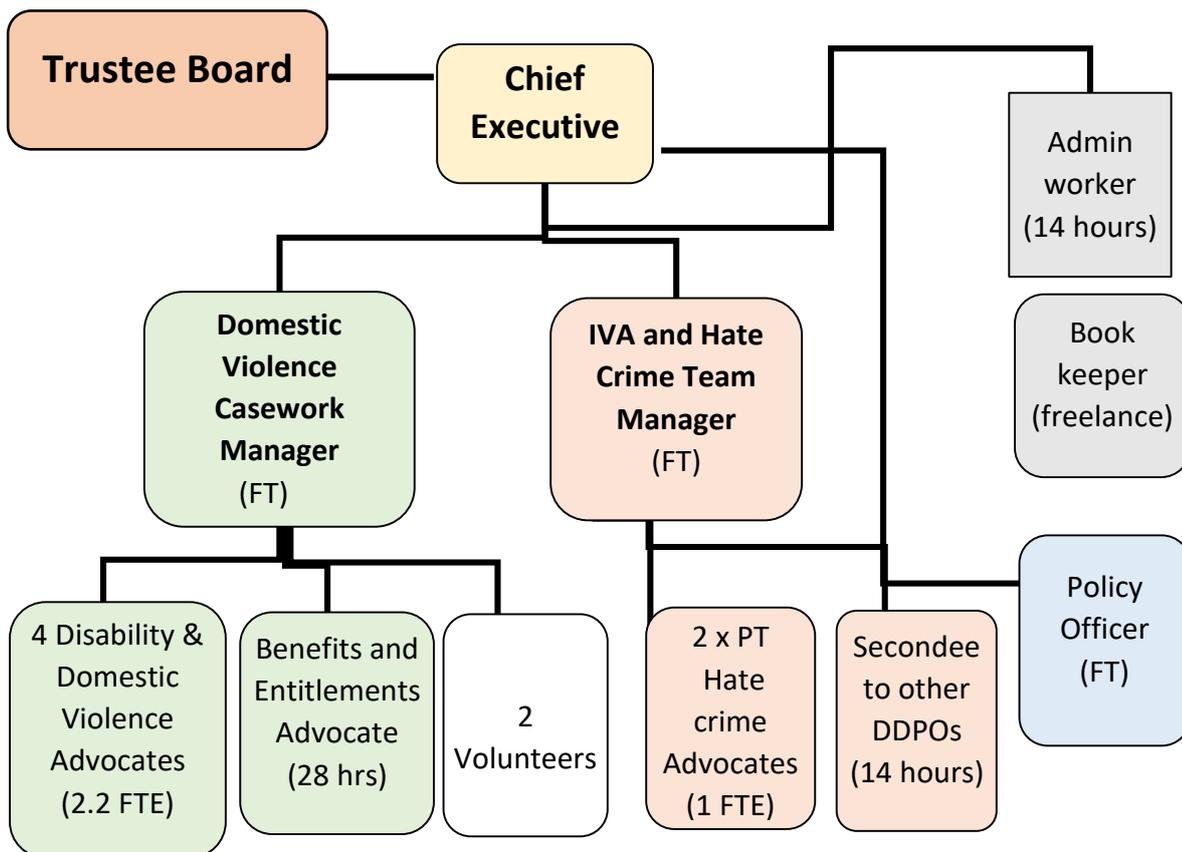
The Trustees are elected by the Charity's members at the annual general meeting for a period of up to three years. Trustees are offered an induction, including presentations by staff, background material and information on the Charity's principal activities. Trustees are all unpaid volunteers and may claim reasonable out of pocket expenses. The Trustees who served during the year are listed on the first page. There were seven Trustees; one resigned during the year. Two clients who are members of the Board have chosen to remain anonymous to protect their safety. All Trustees contribute to major decisions which impact on the organisation, bring new ideas and experiences and help shape the priorities of the Charity.

## 5. Organisational Structure and Staffing

The Stay Safe East Board is responsible for overseeing the work of the organisation and setting strategic direction. The Board appoints the Chair of Stay Safe East, who supports the Chief Executive (CEO). Staff are appointed by the Board with the support of the CEO. 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 are held 4-6 times yearly, either face-to-face or electronically, where the CEO gives 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 Board met face to face and made some decisions electronically. The financial administration is managed by an accountant who works with the CEO to prepare management information for the Board and also does the monthly payroll.

**Stay Safe East Organisation Structure at January 2020**



## 6. Overview of the year

The total number of clients supported increased this year to 154, of whom 97 were new clients- the highest number of clients supported since we were formed in 2013. Stay Safe East worked with clients in 16 London boroughs. *For further details, please see Casework Overview on the following pages.*

2019-2020 was a year of growth and change for Stay Safe East. From a local organisation which began in 2010 mainly serving Waltham Forest and Newham in East London, in 2019 we became a London-wide service potentially serving 32 boroughs. Stay Safe East had already started working with clients in other boroughs in the previous year as part of the CATCH hate crime partnership. The new Integrated Victim and Witness Service <https://www.londonvws.org.uk/about-lvws> (IVWS- now London Victim and Witness Service) led by Victim Support and started in April 2019, represented a significantly larger opportunity to reach disabled people across the capital. The contract gave Stay Safe East a full-time Independent Disability and Domestic Violence Advocacy post (recruited as two part-time posts) and a new post, the first Independent Victim's Advocate (IVA) in the country working specifically with disabled victims of 'general' crime. In January 2020, we also joined the Ascent Partnership of 13 specialist women's organisations led by Solace Women's Aid <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/about-us/our-partnerships>. This gave us another part-time IDDVA and the opportunity to share expertise and network with specialist BAME and LGBTQ+ services.

Whilst we had done some preparatory work in early 2019, the transition was not without its challenges. Staff had to 'learn' new boroughs, find out who to approach in those boroughs when supporting a client, and navigate their way around London - and around our new systems. The process of moving into additional office space in spring and upgrading our IT and phone system in summer 2019 proved disruptive. As existing staff and managers adapted to working as a larger team, new staff had to get used to our different ways of working, and clients had to adapt too. Recruiting a second service manager (who is also the IVA) to oversee the hate crime team and allocating the existing casework manager to manage the domestic abuse team enabled Stay Safe East to manage change and share responsibilities. It also enabled the CEO to step down from directly managing advocacy staff. From 6 staff at the end of 2018-2019, our team had grown to 12 by January 2020. All new staff are disabled women. The commitment of the team to making this work means we have risen to the challenge of becoming a larger organisation with more clients whilst still maintaining our ethos of providing a holistic, personalised and long-term service to our disabled clients.

The year also saw Stay Safe East developing its policy role at national level, as a voice for disabled survivors challenging inequality in services and the lack of a strategic approach to violence against disabled women. For the first time we employed a Policy Officer, thanks to funding from the Home Office. To support our policy work on violence against disabled women and girls, we set up an Advisory Group.

We also continued our work developing the capacity of Deaf and disabled peoples' organisations (DDPOs) to support disabled victims of hate crime.

The year ended with the Covid pandemic. We had to leave the office in mid-March, two weeks before lockdown formally began, expecting to return within a few months. This was not to be, but because of the passionate commitment and hard work of our team, and a holistic way of working which focuses on individual needs, our clients have been able to rely on Stay Safe East through what has proved to be the most difficult year. We look forward to eventually returning to face-to-face work with all our clients.

## **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 potential risk to our premises remains in that we have no secure tenancy from the London Borough of Waltham Forest who own the building. This was due to be resolved in March 2020 but was delayed due to Covid 19.
- 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. The specialist Benefits Advocate post helped support her colleagues but left after four months; the post was covered by the team manager working additional hours, as were unable to recruit until spring 2020. As we further develop our management capacity and are able to provide appropriate support, we will be recruiting volunteers to whom advocates can delegate some of the more informal support for clients such as form filling or accompanying them to appointments.
- The start of the Covid pandemic was a challenge to Stay Safe East which works exclusively with disabled people, and has a team of disabled staff and volunteers. Extensive risk assessments were conducted, advice sought and measures put in place to protect staff, volunteers and clients. All staff

and volunteers worked remotely from mid-March 2020, before lockdown started. Contact with clients was restricted to those at greatest risk and followed Covid distancing and health and safety guidelines. Thanks to the commitment of our staff, volunteers and Board, we were able to continue operating a full service to existing clients and take on new clients.

## **Income**

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 2020-21.

### **Stay Safe East: Summary of financial activities 2019-2020**

<b>Income during the year:</b>	<b>315,292</b>
<b>Expenditure during the year:</b>	<b>281,409</b>
Surplus of income over expenditure:	33,883
Reserves brought forward	91,449
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<b>125,382</b>
Of which -	
Restricted funds:	77,834
Unrestricted funds:	47,548

**Full Unaudited Financial Statements are available on [www.staysafe-east.org.uk](http://www.staysafe-east.org.uk) and on the Charity Commission website.**

The organisation is on a firm financial footing. The Charity's reserves increased during the year. In February 2020, we were told that Three Guineas trust had awarded Stay Safe East a three-year core grant, which will go towards the CEO's and administrator salary, a Policy Officer post, an Operations Manager and will help ensure the long-term sustainability of the Charity.

Continued funding from the Home Office has allowed us to employ two part-time IDVAs. A two-year contract with Victim Support for the London Victims and Witness Service has the option of being extended for a further two years.

## **7. Employing diverse disabled staff**

We are often asked why it is important that we are an organisation 'of' as well as 'for' disabled people and why this matters. It is a requirement of being a Deaf and Disabled People's organisation that 75% of our Board members be disabled people. Good practice also dictates that we should employ disabled people.

From the outset, it has always been Stay Safe East practice to recruit disabled people to our front line services posts, and where possible to all posts. We specifically encourage applications from BAME and LGBTQ+ disabled people as we want to reflect the communities we serve. This helps in a small way to redress the discrimination which disabled people, and in particular women and disabled people from minority communities face in the job market.

Due to the specialist and unique nature of our advocacy work, there are very few disabled people with the specific skills and experience we need. We train people in a way that suits their learning needs, usually 'learning by doing' and shadowing or co-working so that the advocate can develop their skills safely. This is backed up with a more formal programme of external and internal training. We offer tailored support, flexible working, disability leave and other measures.

By specifically offering traineeships to disabled women from diverse backgrounds as specialist domestic violence advocates, Stay Safe East is increasing employment amongst disabled women, but also helping to increase the numbers of disabled women, and in particular BAME disabled women, working in the Violence against Women and Girls sector; this creates the potential for future leaders. Most importantly, it benefits our clients, and provides a positive role model who they can trust. Almost all our domestic and sexual abuse clients are female survivors of male violence, so a female advocate is essential.

As a result of this approach, all our current staff, volunteers and Board members are disabled people. By end of 2019-20, 90% of staff and 66% of our Board were disabled women; 45% of our staff and 50% of our Board were from BAME communities; 36% of our staff and 33% of our Board identified as LGBT. Being an organisation run by and for disabled people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences makes for a more equal relationship with our clients. It helps create a community of disabled people which is a safe space for our clients.

## Supporting disabled survivors: our advocacy work

### 1. Casework overview

#### **The Stay Safe East approach to advocating for disabled survivors of abuse**

We work at the client's pace and in a way that works for them. We accept disabled people for who they are, and do not make assumptions about their impairments and capabilities.

We believe our clients and listen- often this is the first time they have been believed. Most of all, we 'hold' clients emotionally for as long as they need us.

We accept and welcome client's impairments and differences; we help them develop a positive self-image and confidence as disabled people and to take control.

The social model of disability underpins all our work; the focus is on removing barriers and addressing discrimination rather than seeing the client's impairment as the problem. Stay Safe East works to a feminist, intersectional approach and provides services specifically for disabled women. We address client's cultural, faith and other needs, and provide an inclusive service to LGBTQ+ disabled people.

Our service is holistic, covering all areas of need from initial support around keeping safe, ensuring that action is taken by statutory services, obtaining non-molestation orders or Sanctuary measures, help with addressing barriers to attending court, as well as help with obtaining not only benefits and housing but disability specific services such as care packages, equipment or mental health support. Our support will last from 6 months to 2 years, and sometimes longer.

We meet access, communication and support needs. Supporting disabled survivors is about more than offering the basic building blocks such as a wheelchair accessible space to meet a client, or access via SMS text. Much of our work is about *how* we work with clients, using a range of tools to help them understand their experiences (pictures, DVDs, discussion etc.), and most of all being flexible – for example not closing a client's case if they fail to turn up for appointments. We understand their impairments and how other people have treated them because we ourselves are disabled people who have also faced barriers.

Advocates always meet face to face with clients and if safe visit them at home; the initial contact is made via phone unless the client requires alternative contact for access reasons. This has to cease once the Covid pandemic took hold, but we found other ways to keep in contact with clients. Clients work with their advocate along

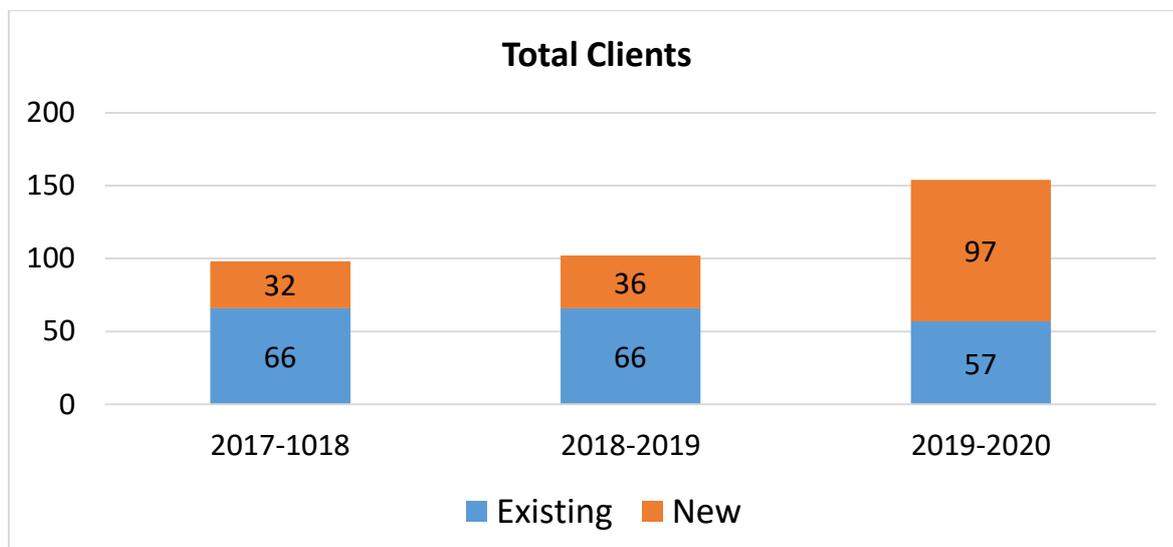
their journey until they have increased their safety, confidence, control and independence. All of these four areas are individual to each client and success of these is determined individually. We monitor outputs and outcomes so that we can improve our services in response to client comments and experiences.

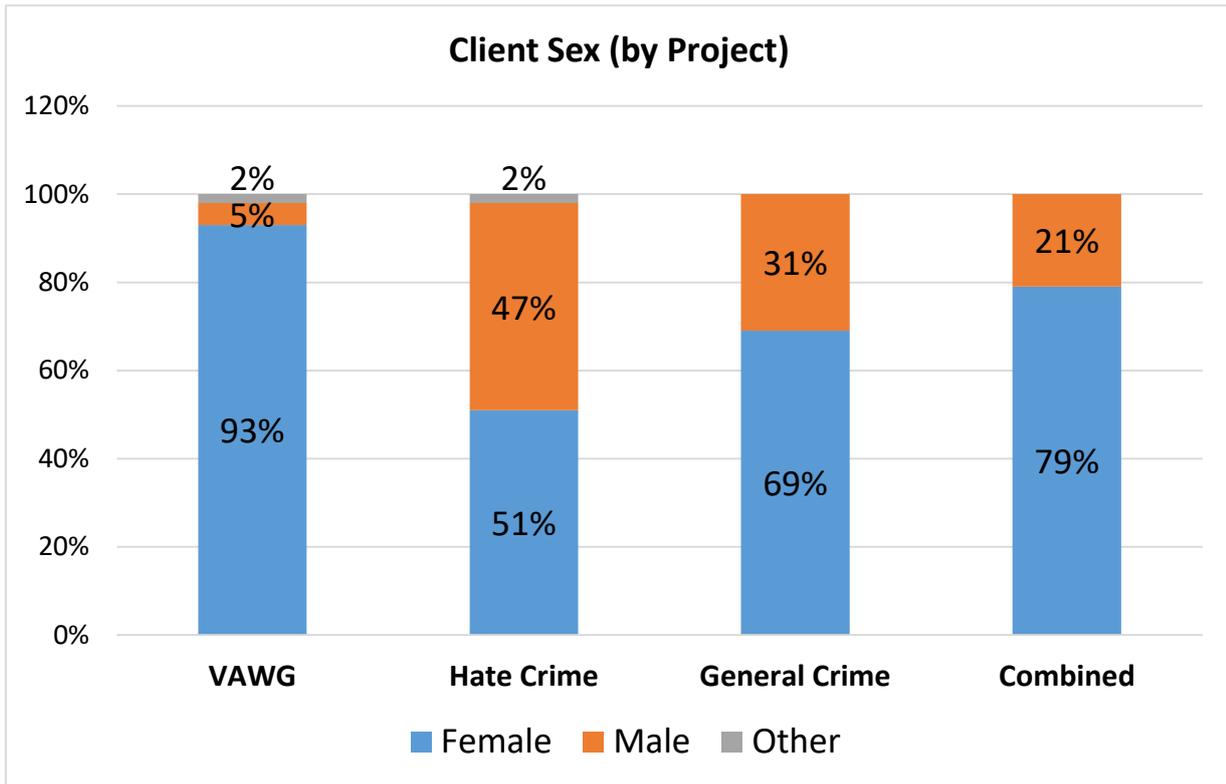
During the year, our advocates and volunteers supported 154 clients of whom:

- 45 were victims of hate crime or harassment
- 5 were victims of cuckooing
- 96 were victims/survivors of domestic and/or sexual abuse
- 16 were victims of other types of crime (financial abuse, assault etc.)
- 3 clients experienced human rights abuses in residential care and support housing
- 57 were long-term clients who still needed intensive support or needed lighter touch support to keep safe and in control of their lives

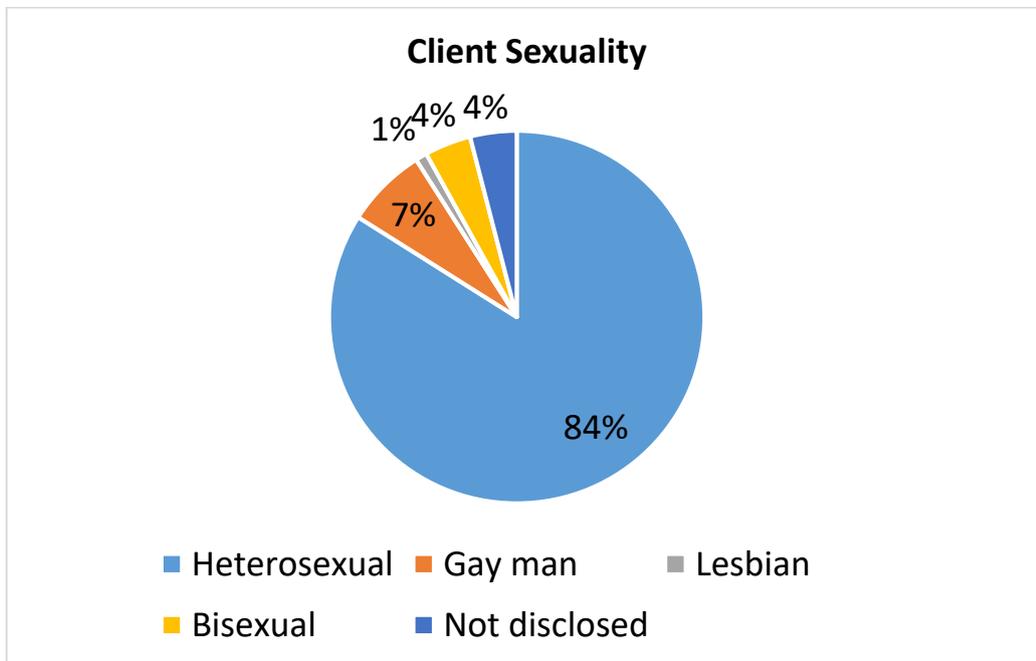
Some clients have been victims of several different forms of abuse and come to us with multiple current issues. We have listed the number of clients under each heading. The total is the number of individuals we have worked with, who may have been supported by two different advocates for different issues (e.g. domestic abuse and hate crime), by the same advocate for different issues (e.g. domestic abuse and loss of human rights in an institutional setting they have been placed in temporarily) or who had support from the Benefits Advocate as well as from one of the hate crime or domestic abuse advocates.

**The total number of clients supported has increased by 52 this year to 154, the highest number of clients supported since we were formed in 2013. 97 of these were new clients.**

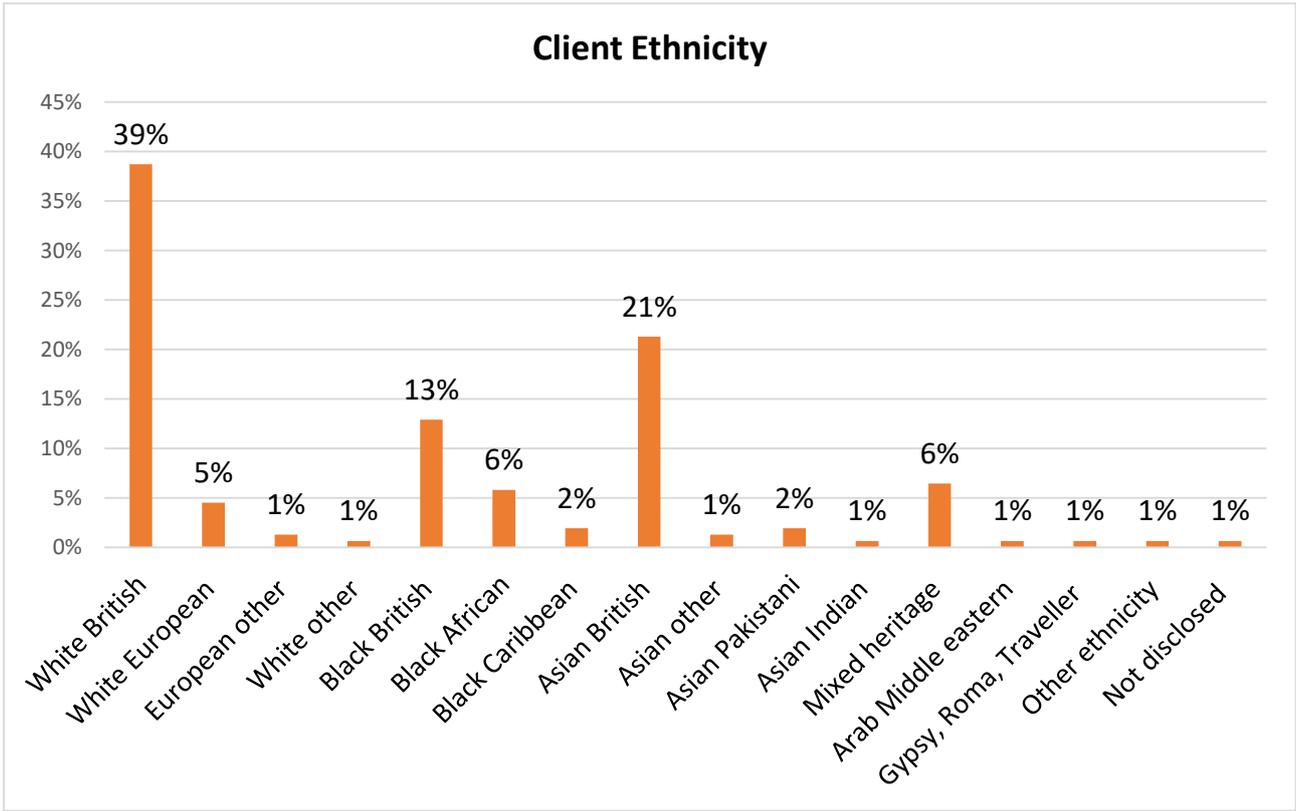




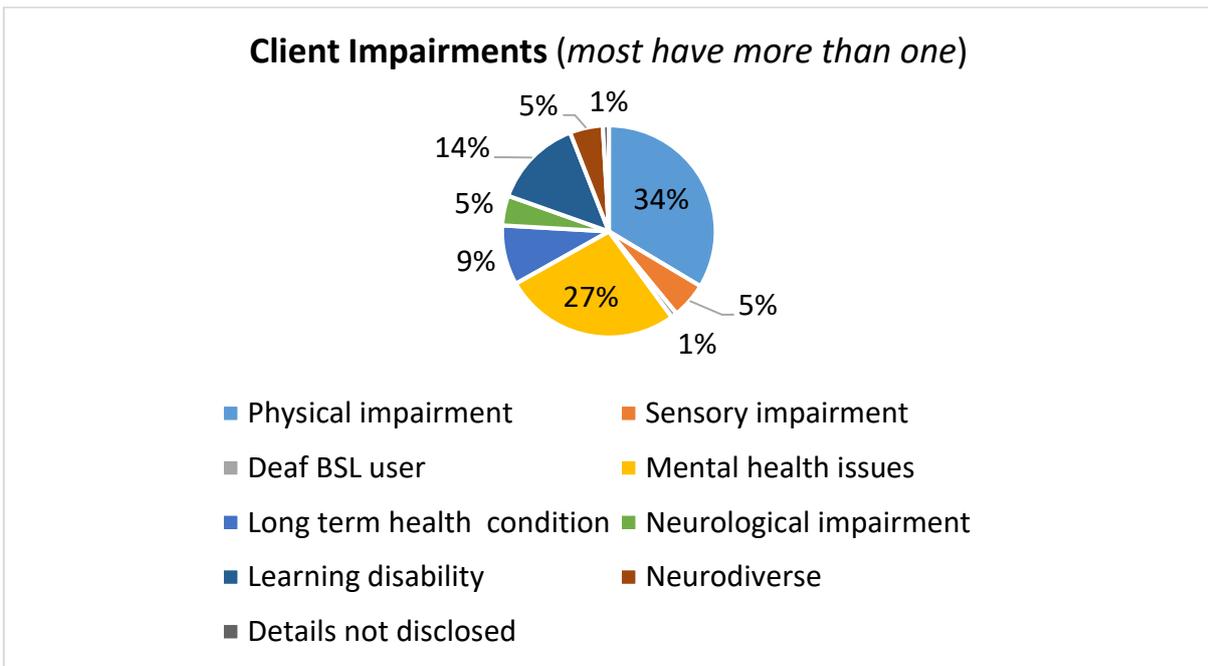
Due to the nature of our work, the majority of our clients overall are disabled women. This reflects international data showing that disabled women are most likely to experience not only domestic abuse but other forms of violence and crime.



The number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender clients is slowly rising. We promote the organisation as LGBTQ+ inclusive.



This data compares with data for Waltham Forest where the majority of our clients live, and for London <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/ethnic-groups-borough>. We have identified the specific need to reach Eastern European and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and disabled people whose origins lie in the Horn of Africa or who are of Arab or Middle Eastern heritage.



## Working across London

By the end of March 2020, we were working with clients across 16 London out of 33 London boroughs. The London Victim and Witness Service advocates had clients in 7 boroughs in addition to Waltham Forest and Newham, the CATCH service had referrals from 9 boroughs. We aim to reach clients in other boroughs as the London wide service become better known. For the hate crime advocacy, it should be noted that Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) have an agreement not to work in a borough where another DDPO is providing advocacy, and that in 2019-20 we were sharing the CATCH referrals with Choice in Hackney so were not working in North London or inner East London, or picking up many cases in Outer West London.



### Number of clients:

Waltham Forest 94

Newham 40

Redbridge 4

Bromley 3

Croydon, Lambeth and Westminster 2 clients from each.

Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Hammersmith, Lewisham, Southwark, Sutton and Essex 1 client in each.

**Where do our referrals come from? (includes new and existing clients)**

Source of referral	DV/VAWG	IVA	Hate Crime	Totals
Self-referral	28	8	18	54
Children's Social care	16			16
Adult Social Care	11	5	2	18
Other local authority source			4	4
Mental health	4			4
Victim Support	8			8
Solace Women's Aid	6	N/A		0
NIA	3			3
Other general VAWG organisation	6			6
VAWG BAME organisation	1			1
LGBT organisation				0
MARAC	12	N/a		12
ASBRAC (Waltham Forest)	N/a		5	5
Disabled People's Organisation			1	1
Police (via CATCH or direct)	2	3	10	15
Other			4	4

There has been an increase in the number of self-referrals (now at 35% of referrals) as Stay Safe East becomes better known and we have promoted our services online. Referrals from our partner organisation increased slowly throughout the year. Adult Social Care referrals have risen, but are still low given that social workers and other professionals deal only with disabled people. Unlike previous years, we received no direct referrals from health professionals (usually midwives or specialist OTs). Referrals from Children's Social Care are often made only when the mother is facing care proceedings for her children – we would like to see referrals made much earlier. The number of referrals from the Police has increased, in the main via the CATCH partnership. In some instances, a client is referred by local multi-agency forums such as MARAC or ASBRAC, or by statutory services but does not respond when we try to contact them. We will not close a referral until the client states they don't want to work with us; we will continue to attempt to contact the client and offer a service over a long period. We understand that they may not have responded because they were afraid, but also because they were unwell, their life is in chaos, or they have had poor experience with other services and don't at this stage trust that we are any different; with some clients it can take months before they trust us enough to engage fully with the service.

## 2. Supporting survivors of domestic abuse and other gender- based violence against disabled women and girls

Domestic abuse is defined by Women's Aid as

“ an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.<sup>2</sup>

Domestic abuse is part of a pattern of violence against women and girls (VAWG) that affects women across the world. It is also more likely to happen to disabled women who are at least two times more likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women, more likely to experience multiple abuse, and at least 3 times more likely to experience sexual violence. This harsh data is mirrored in the lives of our clients, who when they come to us for support bring with them a life history of multiple abuse from childhood and beyond. Stay Safe East's five Disability and Domestic Violence Advocates (IDDVAs) and their Manager recognise and listen to this experience, creating a safe space for women to disclose, reflect and heal. The team works not only to a social model of disability model, but from an intersectional and feminist perspective. The IDDVAs are disabled women in positions of responsibility who provide positive role models for clients.

Our clients may have experienced domestic abuse from intimate partners, family members (20% of our clients, the abuse comes from adult children to older mothers, siblings, other family members) or from paid and unpaid 'carers'. Though the law does not currently include abuse by paid and unpaid 'carers' and personal assistants who are not family members constitutes domestic abuse: it is perpetrated by people who have a 'close personal relationship; with the victim, it happens in people's homes and it is about power and control. It is also more likely to happen to disabled women. This is an area of our work we aim to develop in future years, as there is little support outside of the safeguarding process for disabled people who are abused by people they should be able to trust.

The IDDVAs work with clients for as long as they need, providing 1-to-1 holistic advocacy. There is no time cut-off point for clients working with their IDDVA as we recognise that each client's path to recovering from domestic and other forms of abuse is individual. One of the team is now supporting long-term clients who have moved on from recent abuse but still need support to keep safe and well, for

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/>

example because they may be repeatedly targeted for exploitation, financial abuse or sexual abuse.

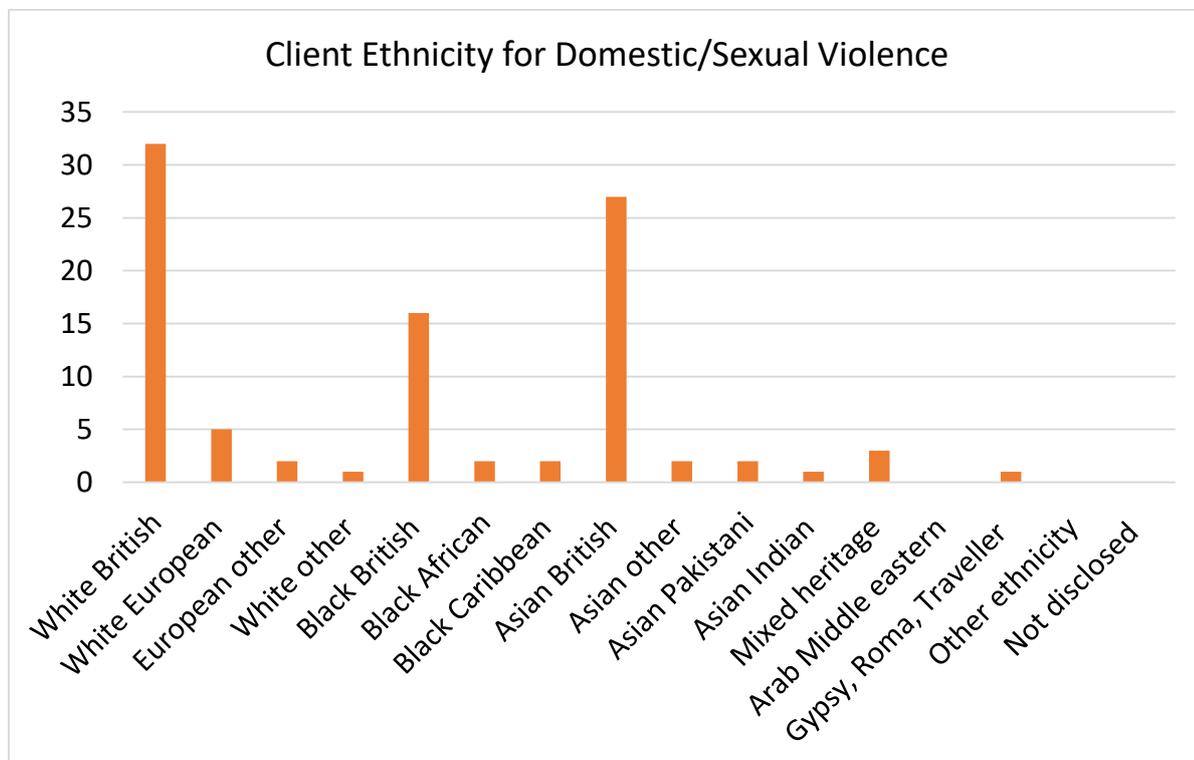
During the year, the domestic abuse team worked with 96 clients of whom:

- 89 were women, 5 were men
- two clients self-identified as transwomen
- 52 new referrals in the year, 44 existing clients

Sex	No. of clients	Percentage
Female	89	93%
Male	5	5%
Other	2	2%

Gender identity
2 clients identified as transwomen

Sexuality	No. of clients	Percentage
Heterosexual	92	96%
Gay man	1	1%
Lesbian	0	0%
Bisexual	3	3%



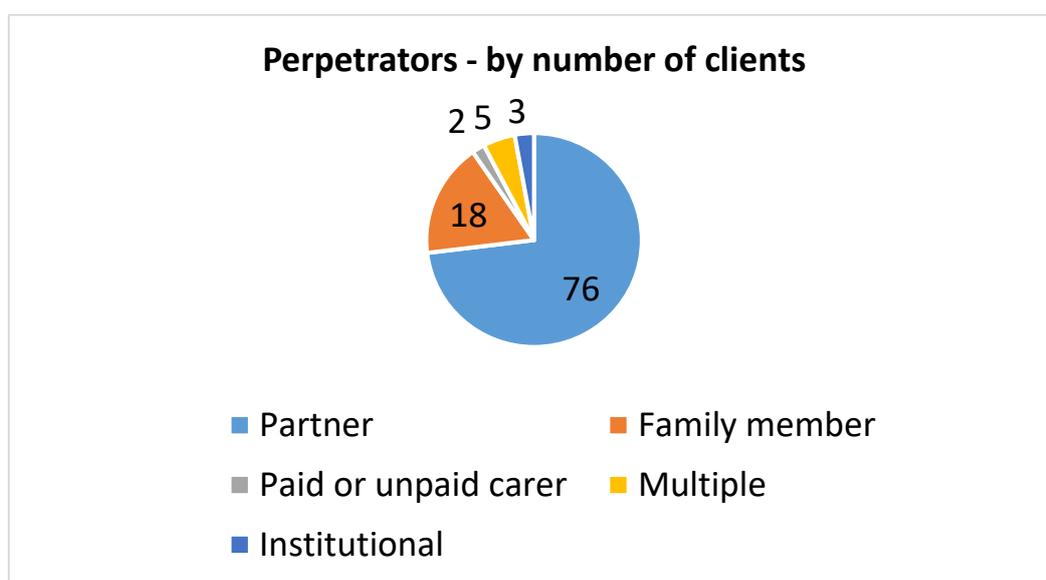
## Impairment

There are more impairments than clients open to the domestic abuse service as the majority of disabled people have more than one impairment. This is particularly true of disabled women who often acquire additional impairments as a result of multiple abuse. We aim to increase the numbers of clients who are blind or partially sighted or are neuro-diverse through targeted promotion of our services. Unusually during this year, our domestic abuse service did not support any Deaf women who use BSL or other Sign language –most Deaf survivors prefer to approach Sign Health for Deaf on Deaf support around domestic abuse, though some may from time to time choose to come to Stay Safe East.

Impairment	Number of clients
Physical impairment	50
Mental health issues	35
Long term health condition	15
Neurological impairment	6
Learning disability	18
Neuro-diverse	5
Sensory impairment	5

## Who were the perpetrators of abuse?

The majority of our domestic abuse clients in 2019-20 had been abused by their partner or ex-partner, but a significant percentage had been abused by other family members: adult children, siblings and other relatives. A small number had been abused by paid care or support workers in their own home or in residential care—Stay Safe East considers this to be domestic abuse.



## Support provided

Clients were supported around the following areas

- Risk assessment and safety planning
- help to understand domestic abuse, power and control
- Emotional support
- Support to apply to the courts for non-molestation or occupation orders, or for a child arrangements order
- Support at a variety of meetings to understand what is being said and to have their voices heard (e.g. in adult safeguarding meetings)
- Support to seek safe and suitable accommodation including referrals for refuges, support to apply for emergency accommodation, the Pan London Reciprocal scheme or to seek management transfers
- Support for clients to have their access needs met
- Help to challenge other professionals
- Help to access adult social care or mental health services, and to obtain a care package, equipment or other support
- Support to find the evidence for legal aid applications and when attending solicitors' appointments
- Support when attending court for private and public proceedings
- All clients were offered the opportunity for a weekly phone call from a volunteer to help them keep safe.
- Support around benefits and dealing with bills: All clients have a review of their housing, benefits & entitlements, adult social care, children's social care and disability related needs to ensure that no area is missed. Most domestic abuse clients face poverty, and in some cases have been left destitute by the abuser.
- Support for disabled mothers involved with Child protection- from Early Help meetings to child protection or care proceedings

Beyond the advocates' day-to-day work, all female clients have been offered access to our Women's Group; this helps reduce isolation and improve their self-image as disabled women. Clients are referred to a volunteer who does weekly phone safety checks; befriending gives clients an alternative way of accessing the service.

**"I don't think it could be better. It's a lifeline for someone like me; if I didn't have Stay Safe East I don't know what I would do. It has given me confidence and a safety net. People there don't judge you, they are so accepting."**

***Domestic Abuse Survivor***

### **Case study**

A young woman and her child were the victims of domestic abuse from the child's father. The woman was a wheelchair user and relied on assistive technology for communication as she was non-verbal. She was pleased to engage with Stay Safe East after struggling with shorter term support services who themselves struggled with her means of communication. She had full capacity. She was living with family after the perpetrator had remained in the accessible flat which she had fled from. The local authority had taken no action to remove the perpetrator from her accessible flat. She didn't have access to her money as it was managed by the local authority – it was never made clear to use why this was the case. The client had a care package but didn't feel it was sufficient to enable her to live a full and independent life. Her goal was to return to her own home with her child. Because her case was seen as 'complex', adult social care were involved, holding repeated large meetings with and about her, attended by a range of professionals, which the client found difficult. Our advocate supported her to manage the meetings, ensuring she was listened to - her reliance on assistive communication meant she was often left out of the discussion. This made a significant improvement in how professionals interacted with her. The IDDVA advocated for the client at a Continuing Healthcare assessment which would have given her additional support. The advocate helped the client put together a case for an occupation order, helped her liaise with her solicitor and supported her to report to the police. The IDDVA negotiated with the court around making the hearing accessible. The case was listed for a two week hearing to allow time for the client to communicate, but was deferred as the client was unwell. It went ahead as the pandemic started to take hold. The IDDVA was able to explain the risks to the client of attending the court (a remote hearing was not offered in spite of the client's risk) but the client decided to go ahead. 5 days of the hearing had gone ahead when lockdown started so the hearing was postponed. We had been hoping to support the client to resume this case after lockdown but sadly she died of Covid related complications. At the suggestion of children's service, the abusive father was then allowed contact with his child. He remains in an accessible flat which was designed for a wheelchair user. This case shows the multiple barriers faced by disabled women seeking to live independently after domestic abuse.

*Note: to protect the identity of our clients, we have left out details of the client's ethnicity, age and sexuality. This is the case for all the case studies in this report.*

## **Disabled Mothers and domestic abuse**

Stay Safe East has been supporting disabled mothers who have experienced domestic abuse through care proceedings for many years now. Stay Safe East have observed a trend particularly around mothers with learning disabilities, cognitive issues or long-term mental health issues. Of the 96 clients whom the Domestic Abuse team worked with in 2019-20, 46 were mothers. 15 of these mothers (33%) were not living with their children. The majority of these children had been removed by children's social care and live in a range of placements such as family or friends, with foster carers or have been placed for adoption.

During the year, clients were supported around child protection processes:

- 6 mothers and one father were facing care proceedings for their children
- One was a grandmother seeking a Special Guardianship Order for her grandchild
- 4 mothers had children on child protection plans and 2 were on a Child in Need plan.

This data has been consistent over the past 7 years; we believe it is part of a pattern of discrimination against disabled mothers: a mother is criticised for “staying” with a perpetrator of domestic abuse but when she separates, she is often informed that she does not have the capability to parent on her own due to her disability needs. Paradoxically, we have recently found that some local authorities' processes give the mother very little choice but to stay with an abusive partner if she wants to keep her children. As long as he attends domestic violence perpetrator programmes, he is seen as a 'protective factor' for the children, whereas the disabled mother is seen as more problematic than a man who has been abusive.

Our IDDVAs challenge this injustice and advocate for more support to be provided to disabled mothers so that, given time and some support if necessary, she will become a 'good enough parent' as required by law. We advocate for proceedings to be fair and just. Our advocates provide intensive support to each client, attending the numerous required meetings with her, explaining what 'good enough parenting' is expected of her, helping her liaise with her solicitor if the care goes to court, helping her understand the processes, and most of all being there for her and her children at the most difficult time in their lives. We have found an unwillingness to consider reasonable adjustments for clients, for example proceedings should be completed within 6 months- for a mother with learning disabilities who has not had the opportunity to access appropriate support, this is not long enough, especially when she has to attend multiple meetings about her child almost every week, and

deal with up to 10 different professionals. Our advocates are the constant in the mother's life during this time. We never judge, we never talk about women being 'bad mothers' – we support her and advise her, but also recognise that not every woman wants to be a parent, especially if she has been poorly parented herself and did not choose to become a mother. We are there for women if their children are taken into care, and help her get access rights, and in the long run, help her move on, whilst understanding that she may grieve for her children for the rest of her life.

Even when a mother has left the perpetrator, and is managing her children well, she can be blamed for factors which relate not to her impairment but to disability in the sense of discrimination which excludes her. This is best illustrated by the case of one mother whose children were subject to safeguarding because the mother was a wheelchair user placed in inaccessible temporary accommodation.

#### **Case study – Disabled Mother**

The client is a physically disabled woman with three children who fled domestic abuse from outside London. She was accepted as homeless by the local authority but was rehoused in inaccessible accommodation in an adjacent borough. There was no wheelchair access to the property. She remained there for nearly two years. Our advocate made a request for a review of temporary accommodation to the local authority, which was rejected on the grounds that the client was adequately housed- the reviewer alleged that because the client could walk a little, she did not need full wheelchair access to the ground floor, or indeed to the first floor bedrooms where her children slept. Child safeguarding concerns were raised, alleging the mother was unable to care for her children. The advocate supported the mother at safeguarding meetings over a period of over a year. The client felt she was being blamed for being a victim of abuse and for having access needs. The advocate made a complaint on the client's behalf to Children's Social Care. Thanks to the persistence of our advocate, the client was eventually rehoused in a fully wheelchair accessible property and the child safeguarding case was dropped.

Whilst our advocates can challenge individual injustice, we are looking at longer term work to challenge the structural inequalities which discriminate against disabled women and mean that children of disabled mothers are more likely to be separated from their mothers and to be denied their right to family life.

### 3. Supporting victims of hate crime, harassment and cuckooing

Hate crime is defined as:

*Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by a hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.*

A series of incidents which are not crimes in themselves should be treated as a hate crime.

Supporting victims of hate crime follows a similar pattern to the support we provide to victims of domestic abuse – allowing the person to tell their story, believing them, assessing the risk with them and then helping them to make to a decision about what action they want taking, if any.

Except in cases of cuckooing, the perpetrator(s) do not live in the same household as the victim and do not usually have an intimate relationship with them (though we also recognise that disability hate is a strong part of most domestic abuse against disabled women).

The level and form of control exercised by perpetrators of long-term hate crime may be different, but the impact is equally traumatic. Hate crime is about targeting people for who they are, it is an attack on the person's very identity.

Incidents may be one-off occurrences, or they may involve neighbours, gangs or others targeting the disabled person. Our disabled clients are subject to verbal, physical, psychological and in some cases financial abuse by the perpetrators; most clients suffer long-term trauma which they may find difficult to talk about and carry with them for many years. Our role is to support them and let them know they are not alone and most of all to help ensure that the abuse stops – either because action has been taken against the perpetrator, or because we have helped them move to another location. it can take up to two years or more to achieve this.

The 2 part-time hate crime advocates supported a total of 45 clients during the year. The CATCH advocate was still in training at the start of 2019-20 but took 14 referrals from 10 boroughs. The Waltham Forest and Newham experienced advocate worked with 31 clients; of these 18 were new clients, and 13 were clients who we are supporting long-term whose cases were carried forward

## Hate Crime Casework 2019 -2020

	Waltham Forest and Newham	CATCH	Total
New Clients	18	14	32
Existing Clients	13	0	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45</b>

### Waltham Forest and Newham

Of the 31 clients, 18 were men, 13 women. 23 were in Waltham Forest, 7 in Newham. the larger number of male clients may partly reflect the fact that male victims of cuckooing are more likely to be 'noticed' and referred for help, and partly that our Hate Crime advocate for this project is our only male worker whom some male clients may feel more comfortable working with.

- 21 were direct victims of hate crime - all experienced disability hate crime; of these, 2 people also experienced disablist and homophobic hate crime, one was an intersectional disablist and racist hate crime against a refugee.
- 5 clients were victims of cuckooing.
- 5 were victims of Anti-social behaviour that Stay Safe East helped prevent from escalating into hate crime.

We advised one person from Essex because she had nowhere else to turn to. Her case was resolved when the abuser moved but showed that lack of police action is not limited to London.

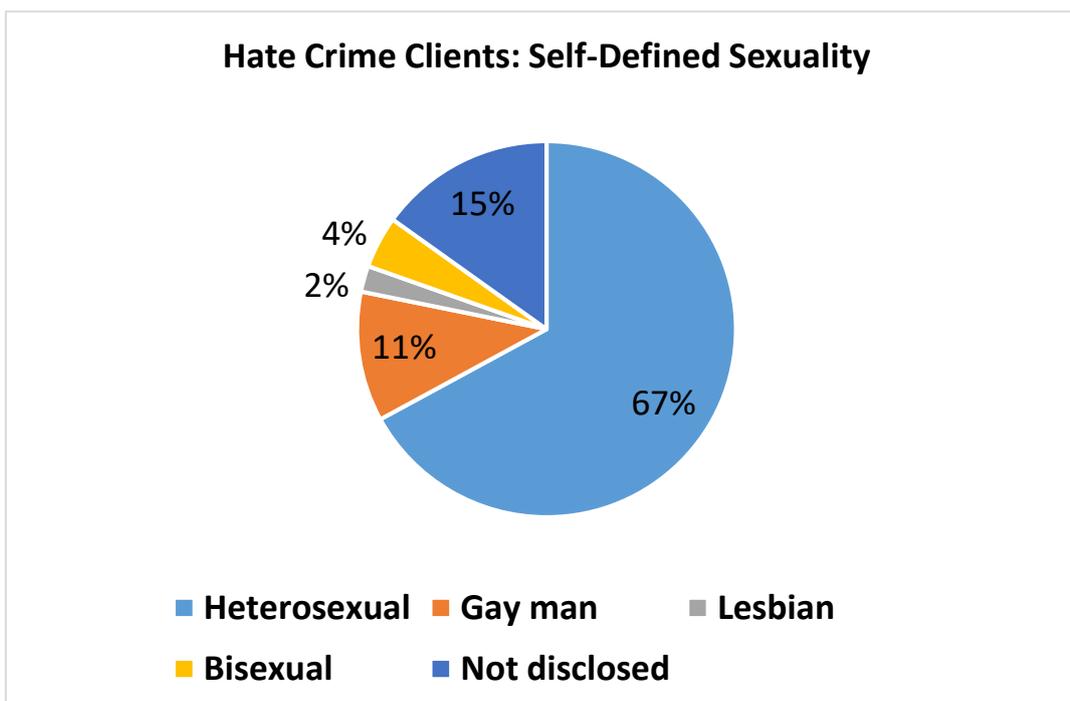
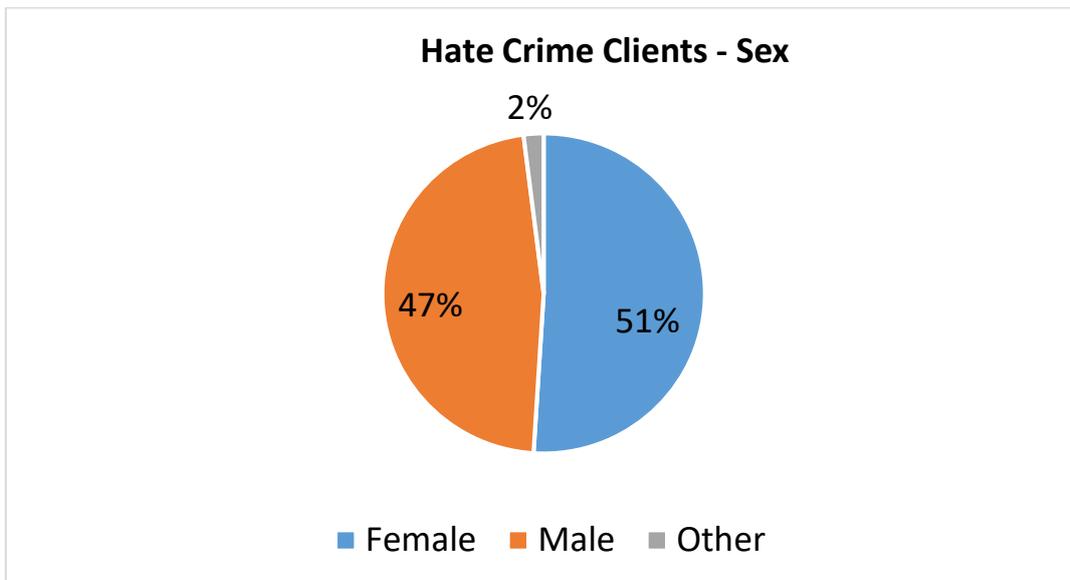
The oldest client was 60, the youngest 18. Victims of hate crime were across all impairment groups and from a range of backgrounds.

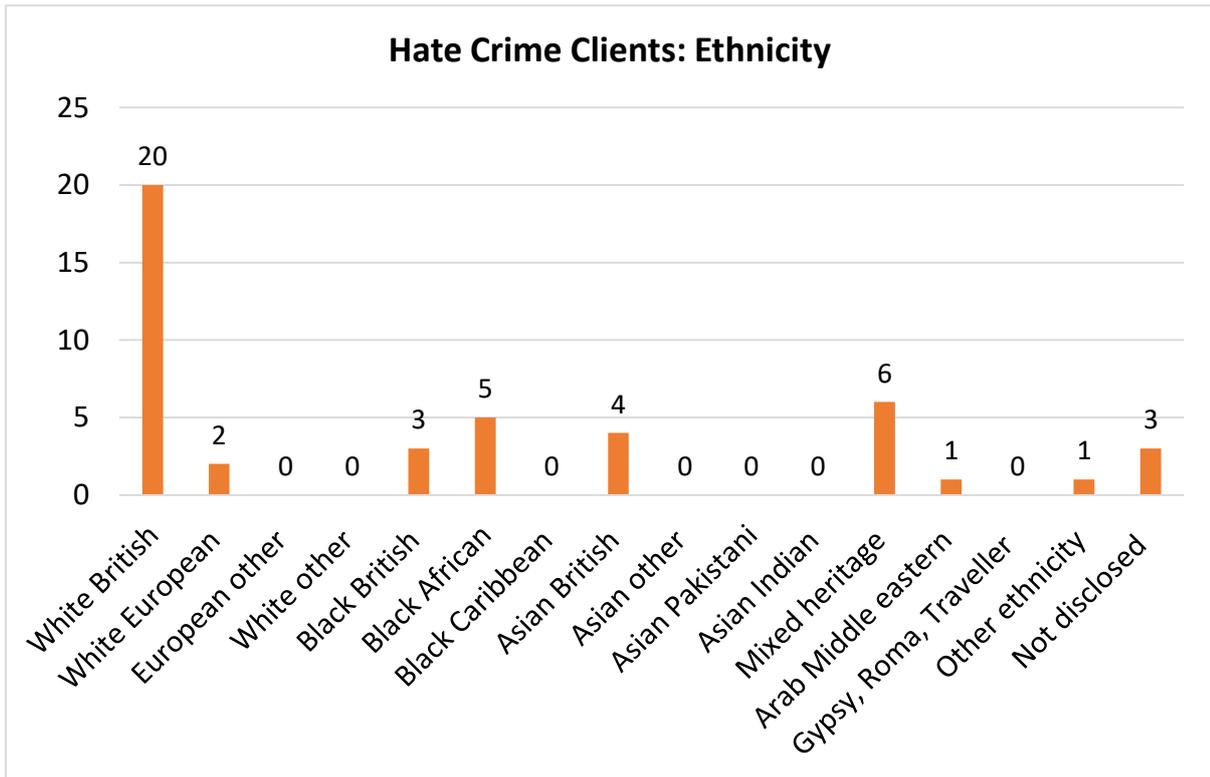
### CATCH

the profile of the CATCH client was slightly different. Of the 14 clients, 10 were women and 4 were men and 1 identified as Transgender. Nearly half the clients were victim of intersectional hate crime.

- 7 were victims of disability hate crime
- 3 were victims of disability and race hate crime
- 2 were victims of disability and LGBTQ+ hate crime
- 1 was a victim of disability, race and LGBTQ+ hate crime
- 1 was a victim of misogynist hate crime.

## Hate Crime Client Data (all hate crime clients)

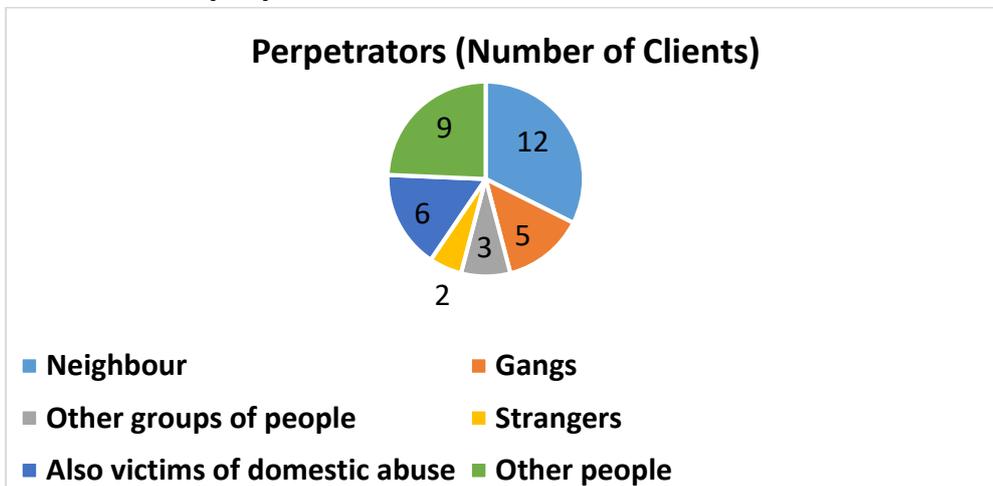




### Impairment (most clients have more than one impairment)

Impairment	Number of clients
Physical impairment	16
Mental health issues	17
Long term health condition	5
Neurological impairment	3
Learning disability	9
Neuro-diverse	6
Sensory impairment	5
Deaf Sign Supported English user	1

### Who are the perpetrators of Hate Crime?



Long-term hate crime from neighbours or by groups of people in their neighbourhood continues to be the main issue for our clients. This requires equally long-term advocacy from our advocates, to try and resolve their situation – usually by helping the client to be rehoused. Action is rarely taken to remove the perpetrator.

Hate crime against disabled people is often poorly identified, and responses by the police and local authorities are slow; disabled people have low level of confidence in the criminal justice process. Nevertheless, unlike our domestic abuse clients, those experiencing hate crime are more likely to want to report to the police, because they have access to support and are less worried about the impact on the perpetrator. However, getting a prosecution for hate crime against disabled people remains problematic, as is the case across most of the UK.

#### **Hate crime: Case study A**

The perpetrator of hate crime against a Deaf man was charged but only after our advocate intervened. The victim is a Deaf user of Sign Supported English whom the police had initially interviewed without an interpreter. Our advocate advised and the client was then re-interviewed by an Achieving Best Evidence trained officer; however the interview was then held in a room with a glass partition, which meant that the interview was not confidential. The other witness, who is also Deaf and uses sign language could see him from where they were waiting to be interviewed. our advocate had to inform the officer, and the interview was eventually moved to a different room. The case was eventually dropped because the police could not contact the victim. They did not contact his advocate. this case is the subject of a complaint.

- 11 of the Waltham Forest and Newham clients were supported to report to the police and make a statement but in only one case was the perpetrator charged.
- One case (set out below) did go to court but perpetrator was found not guilty.
- 7 cases were marked as ‘no further action’
- One case was closed due to lack of evidence.
- Police provided a supporting letter to housing for 2 clients which assisted in their case to be moved. 6 other clients were successfully supported to get rehoused.

The following cases illustrates some of the barriers our advocates face in supporting clients and getting justice for them.

### **Hate Crime – Case Study B**

The client is a disabled Lesbian and was the victim of homophobic and disablist hate crime. The case was referred to us by the police through CATCH but taken on by the manager of the hate crime team due to its complexity.

The woman involved was attacked while out at a café where a small group of women met each week. On this occasion, a man walked in with only his trousers/shorts on and was asked by the staff at the café to put on a shirt or top, he refused to do so and argued with them. The disabled woman who was attending as a customer appealed to him to just put on a shirt. He turned on her and started verbally abuse her “who does she think she is” and that she was a “fat, ugly, disabled, lesbian \*\*\*\*.” The language used left no doubt this was a hate crime – disablist, homophobic and misogynist (the latter is not currently included in hate crime law). The client was extremely scared and intimidated. She tried to get out of the cafe, but as she got out of the front door using her electric wheelchair, the man came out with a piping hot drink and threw it over the victim’s front, scolding her groin which almost sent her into shock. The assault was witnessed by several people. The woman had to be taken to hospital. The police were called, and the crime reported.

The advocate made sure the case was flagged by the police as a homophobic and disablist hate crime and supported the client to make a Victim Personal Statement which the client dictated to us. The IVA liaised with the court and the Witness Care Unit prior to the court case, organized the pre-trial court visit, ensured the client’s access needs were met and accompanied the client at court. Our advocate had to intervene with the CPS after the designated prosecutor initially had insisted they should focus only upon the criminal offence of common assault. This was changed after we wrote to the Senior Prosecutor that evidence should be put forward that demonstrated the homophobic and disability hate crime elements of the case. The case went to court shortly after lockdown but the perpetrator was acquitted. One of the key witnesses was not called. The verdict increased the trauma and anxiety for the client who had the courage to speak out in court in the midst of the pandemic. Stay Safe East were able to provide the victim with counselling from our in-house service which helped her through her ordeal. After the court case we organised security measures for the client’s home as she had become very anxious about her ongoing safety.

### **Hate Crime – Case Study C**

This client was referred to us in September 2019 by his social worker. He is a Gay man with learning disability and was targeted by perpetrators who live within his community. This has been ongoing for many years, though he had moved out of the area for a while. The client said he found it extremely difficult living in this community, and that he did not feel safe going out. He described homophobic incidents to both our advocate and his social worker: he had reported the incidents to the police and housing before we started working with him. The client did not feel that the police and housing were not taking his reports seriously. The client was too frightened to identify the perpetrators, but no investigation had taken place in spite of the fact that the alleged perpetrators were local and likely to be known to police in an area with high crime, gang activity and a previous history of hate crime, which we had dealt with 5 years before.

Incidents included a lit firework thrown at the client as he was walking through the communal doors of the flats he lived in; eggs thrown at the client's front door and verbal abuse calling the client "batty boy" and threatening they were "*gonna stab me up*".

Following the client's hate crime reports, a safeguarding was raised by his social worker and a meeting was held. As no action was being taken and we assessed the risk as being high, Stay Safe East paid for the client to stay in a hotel overnight. Our advocate informed the safeguarding that the client urgently needed to be moved out of the borough. Housing initially refused to move the client because there was no written letter from police to move the victim. After our advocate obtained a police letter stating this case was high risk, housing did agree to move him. They could not find appropriate accommodation, so social services agreed to place the client in temporary supported accommodation, but the client experienced abuse from staff, difficulties with other people staying there, and didn't feel comfortable in an institutional setting, having always lived independently. As a result, he walked out several times, leaving him at further risk. There was then a further delay due to an offer of housing falling through. It took housing a further 3 months to find the client permanent suitable accommodation in a safe area. The client was finally rehoused in early 2020, shortly before lockdown began, in an area where he feels safe and is close to facilities in the Gay community.

### **CATCH – Case Study D**

The client self-referred, with a history involving past domestic abuse and current experiences of hate crime. She had already reported these incidents to the police prior to getting in touch with us. She has a sensory impairment, significant health and memory issues due to brain injury.

The client and her two children had all been threatened with violence. The perpetrators were the family of a child who attend primary school with the daughter. The perpetrators stated that the mother's disabilities made her a bad parent. In their verbal abuse, perpetrators also call our client "disgusting" due to how her impairments present themselves. The perpetrators threatened to attack the client and additionally threatened to go to the school of the older child and attack him as well. The schools were informed but took no action, and both children are reluctant to attend school out of fear for their safety.

Due to the stress of hate crime, the client's health was deteriorating as she was missing doctor's appointments to stay home with her children. The client and her family also needed to be rehoused as their current flat was both too small and inaccessible for our client's needs.

The family had been in this unfit temporary accommodation for two years after fleeing domestic abuse, so we contacted housing to get this process moving. Additionally, the client needed assistance with her benefits and finances, as she is so frail that she spends a significant portion of her benefits on cabs. Client also required help in accessing medical professionals and appointments as, due to her brain injury, she struggles to remember appointment times. Our reminder calls have been a help in this regard. The client required help to develop support systems and to make contingency plans around parental responsibilities when unwell or needing to go into hospital. Children's services are involved with this case as it has been referred onto Child Protection. Multiple meetings have been attended, including Children in Need conferences, alongside the DA team manager. Domestic abuse team is assisting with this case as it falls into several categories.

The client has expressed many times how much the support from Stay Safe East has meant to her and her family. Other professionals have made supportive comments regarding the good rapport our team has with this family, as it is something they struggle to achieve. We have provided client with an accessible phone, doorbell, and alarm due to her access needs.

## Cuckooing

This was our second year of supporting disabled victims of cuckooing in Waltham Forest.

Cuckooing (a term used by the police) involves people being targeted in their own homes by groups of people, gangs, street drinkers and others, usually to use the person's home for criminal activity, including dealing or storing drugs, financial abuse, and in some cases sexual exploitation.

Our previous annual report outlined how Waltham Forest Council identified 40 victims of cuckooing between May 2018 and May 2019, but recognised that cases involving disabled people are under-reported. This remains the case, but a steady number of cases, mainly involving male victims were referred to Waltham Forest ASBRAC in 2019-20. Disabled women remain less likely to be referred for support. Our advocate had 3 new cuckooing clients referred to him. Other victims of cuckooing referred to ASBRAC were offered help but turned it down, and in two cases it would not have been safe for the advocate to take on the client. The advocate also continued to work with 2 existing clients who had been cuckooed.

### **Cuckooing: Case study A**

The client was targeted by a gang when living in a homelessness hostel and coerced into criminal activity. He came to Stay Safe East without full details of his impairments, but we managed to establish that he has learning disabilities and anxiety through his GP.

The client is a European Union national. Because he had a criminal record, he was technically ineligible for settled status<sup>3</sup>, which he needed to remain in the country after Brexit. The client moved to the UK as a child with a parent who is also an EU national. He attended school in the UK. As an older teenager he was kicked out of the family home due to a breakdown in the relationship, and lived on the streets where he was found by an outreach team and accommodated in a hostel. After having been groomed by a gang operating in the hostel, he was convicted on drugs and gang related charges and served a prison sentence. On his release, he was detained at Yarlswood Immigration Detention Centre. He was eventually bailed, and to his vulnerability was accommodated by the local council.

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<sup>3</sup> His prison stay counted as a break in his continuous residence in the UK, where he had lived since childhood

By the time Stay Safe East came into contact with the client, he was unhappy living in shared accommodation as people there were using and selling drugs. He did not feel safe and was at high risk; his advocate discussed with the client the risks of exploitation and violence.

The client's application for Job Seeker's Allowance was refused due to failing the Habitual Residency Test. Working with the client, in tandem with his support worker and the No Recourse to Public Funds team in the local authority, Stay Safe East helped him to gather the necessary documents to make an application for Settled Status. This included evidence of his having lived in the UK since childhood, the abuse and difficulties he suffered and how they related to his prison stay, supporting medical evidence from his doctor explaining his impairments, other medical notes and letters from the council.

During this period, his advocate continued to offer him emotional support, met with him regularly to discuss issues with housing and personal relationships, and helped reduce risk by making sure the client had a good support network and safe housing. The client was experiencing regular emotional abuse from his ex-girlfriend, who would often tell him he was worthless and useless. The client said that he did not want to be alone. We would talk about ways he could feel less isolated, and how living somewhere else, independently, might help him emotionally too. We also talked with him about his rights once he had settled status.

The client was eventually granted Settled Status. The client is relieved and feels safe that he was able to stay in the country he lived since he was a child. As a result of the change in his status, the client's accommodation and subsistence being provided to him by his local council were due to end. We were able to support him to apply for universal credit. He was offered temporary accommodation, which was still unsuitable but safer. After a number of unsuitable offers, he was eventually offered his own studio flat in 2020. Stay Safe East helped him move and he is now settled.

**"I want to thank you for your help with this application process. I am so pleased for [name] and your support has been invaluable."**

*Client's support worker*

### **Case study B: cuckooing**

The client was a former drug user and had a physical impairment who was referred to Stay Safe East by Waltham Forest ASBRAC. He was living in a local hotel where he was visited by individuals dealing drugs. There were concerns that he lost part of his support network over this period, as a result his drinking levels increased. He was moved into temporary accommodation by the local authority – a third floor studio flat with a lift that was too small for him to get his mobility scooter into the lift. The block was known by police to be used by drug dealers. Due to the client's mobility issues, he tended to leave his door unlocked, as he could open the door himself once his carers had locked it. Social Services had a key safe installed but would not give him the code for it, as there were concerns that he would give it to unwanted individuals dealing drugs. He felt trapped.

The client told our advocate that some people had come to his flat while he was home and stolen his passport and Taxicard. We supported the client to report this incident to the police. The police informed the client that the case had not been flagged as a hate crime, despite being told by the client that he believed the motivation for the above crime was based on the fact that he is a disabled man. We supported the client to explain to the officer why he believed the motivation for the crime was his disability, and why it should be flagged as such. As a result of our intervention, the case was flagged as a hate crime. However, no further action was taken, as the police could not find out who the perpetrators were. We were able to identify the level of risk using our own risk assessment. We informed the ASBRAC panel and the police of our findings. It was agreed by the panel and the police that the client's flat was not an appropriate accommodation for a person with limited mobility, and that the risk of further incidents was high.

The client was also struggling to communicate with his carers, was receiving cold and inappropriate food and was unable to get washed properly (the temporary accommodation had no accessible shower), and keep up to date with his rent payment without support; our advocate made a safeguarding referral. The care providers were changed.

The client told us that people were banging on his door and shoving drugs underneath the door, claiming afterwards that he owed them large amounts of money. He felt isolated and was frightened. We supported the client to make additional hate crime reports to the police. Statements were taken from the client with our advocate present. No further action was taken as the police could not find out who the perpetrators were. An officer that attended did however provide an e-mail to Housing to support the client's application

for re-housing, expressing concerns that the latest incidents could escalate in to a more serious incident. Stay Safe East asked for a review of the client's case, and attached the above email to it and obtained support from the client's local MP. Eventually, special measures were put on the client's home address by the police, and a Merlin was raised for each incident that we supported the client to report to the police – we were also able to make sure that the police had the client's key safe code, so that they could access the property in an emergency. We kept the ASBRAC panel updated monthly in relation to further incidents, and social services liaised with housing in relation to the urgency of rehousing.

Eventually Housing offered the client sheltered accommodation and he expected to be moving. We had to borrow a wheelchair from another local charity so the client could view the property with our advocate. The property was again unsuitable for the client's mobility needs – it was on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, the building had only a small lift, the communal corridors were too narrow to fit even the wheelchair we provided, the flat itself was too small for the client to manoeuvre a wheelchair around in. It was agreed by all parties that the property was unsuitable for the client, and that housing would look for a ground floor flat, with more suitable accessibility. The client was put on the priority for re-housing. Finally, after two years he was offered a more suitable property and moved in. In July, our advocate visited the client at home to discuss a safety plan with him, and support him to apply for a replacement passport and taxi-card. The client had endured a long period of exploitation, abuse, neglect and loss of dignity and independence. Unfortunately the client died in August 2019, only a month after he had been moved.

Both of the above cases involve clients targeted by drug dealers in temporary accommodation, but others have experienced cuckooing in their own homes.

We will be commissioning an independent evaluation of the cuckooing pilot in 2020-21 so that we can share the learnings of this work with local authorities, criminal justice agencies and organisations working with victims of gangs.

#### 4. The Independent Victim's Advocate: supporting disabled victims of other crime

Stay Safe East employs the first and so far only specialist disability Independent Victim's Advocate (IVA), as part of the London Victim and Witness Service headed by Victim Support. The IVA's role is to support those disabled victims of "general crime" not covered by our domestic abuse or hate crime/cuckooing services including:

- serious harassment
- financial abuse
- physical assault
- on-line abuse
- abuse while living in residential care
- harassment by landlords or neighbours
- threats and violent crime.

These are clients whom we could not previously have helped. The IVA also manages the hate crime advocacy team and steps in to assist with the most complex cases.

We were able to recruit an experienced advocate who had considerable experience as a hate crime advocate for another Disabled People's Organisation. She began working as the Stay Safe East Disability IVA on a part-time basis in May 2019, moving to full-time in July of that year. After setting the groundwork by making other agencies aware of the service, the IVA began receiving referrals very early on, taking on 16 complex cases between July 2019 and March 2020 while also assisting colleagues with elements of some other cases. Almost all cases involve long-term support as clients faced multiple abuse and/or incidences of crime.

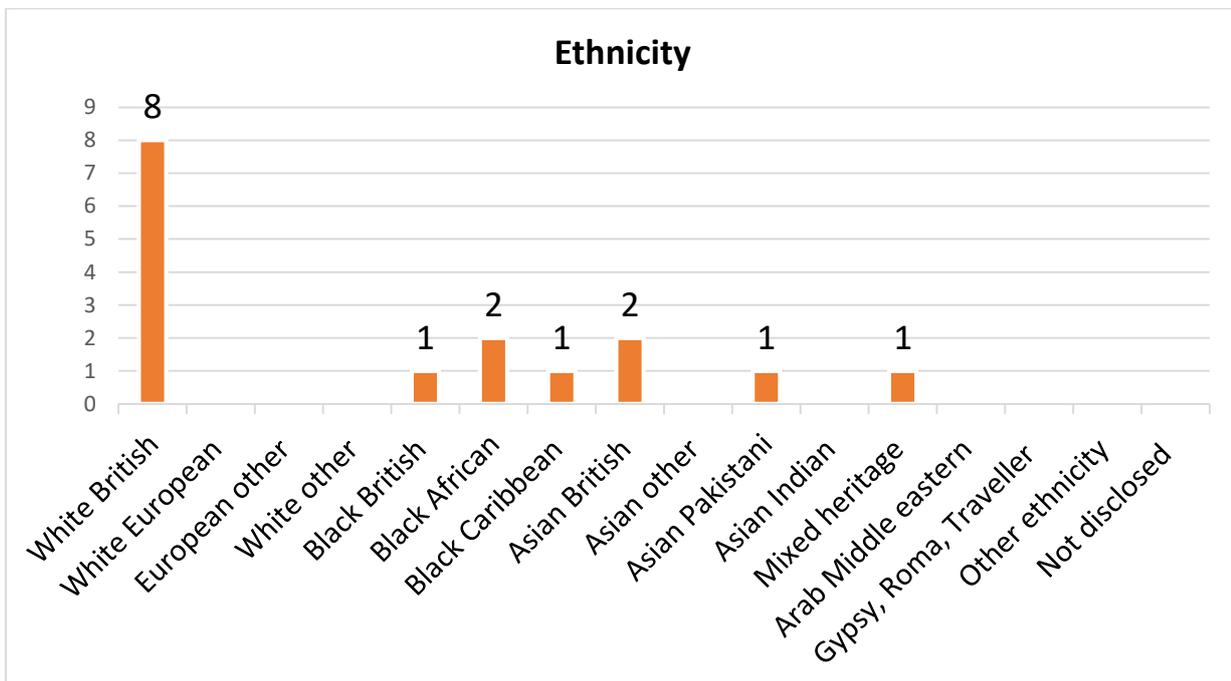
In her 9 months in post, the IVA worked with 16 clients across seven East and South London boroughs (8 in Waltham Forest, 2 in Lambeth, 2 in Bromley, 1 in Croydon, 1 in Lewisham 1 in Newham, and 1 in Redbridge). as the service become more widely known, we aim to reach disabled people in more boroughs.

8 clients self-referred, 5 were referred by Social Services, 3 through the Police via a CATCH referral form – the IVA took on some of the more complex cases referred through CATCH that did not fully fit into the hate crime definition and required input from an experienced caseworker.

Of the clients supported, 11 were female, 5 were male, reflecting the empirical data that women are more than twice as likely to experience crime than their male counterparts. Significantly nearly all the women had experienced previous domestic or other abuse. Individuals were aged between 19 – 69 years.

The equality data reflects the rich mix of the population of London, with 13 persons identifying as heterosexual, one as lesbian, one as bi-sexual and 1 did not provide this information. 8 clients identified as White British, 4 as Black Caribbean, 3 as Asian British and 1 of mixed heritage. 5 clients identified as Christian, 1 as Muslim, 1 as Sikh, 4 stated no religion and 5 were Unknown.

<b>Gender:</b>	Number of clients	Percentage:
Female	11	69%
Male	5	31%



<b>Sexuality</b>	Number of clients:	Percentage:
Heterosexual	13	82%
Lesbian/ Gay	1	6%
Bi /Pan	1	6%
Not given	1	6%

### **Impairment** (several clients had more than one impairment)

Impairment:	Number of people	Percentage:
Physical Impairment	8	50%
Mental Health issues	7	43%
Learning Disability	3	19%
Sensory Impairment	2	12%
Neurological impairment	1	6%
Not disclosed	2	9%

Religion:	Number of clients:	Percentage:
Christian	5	31%
Muslim	2	13%
Sikh	1	6%
No Religion	3	21%
Not known	5	31%

The IVA new role brings many challenges, not least that local authorities, mental health services and the police are not aware what the role of a Victim's Advocate entails. Clients bring multiple issues, usually because they have been let down by the police, landlords and other agencies, and face multiple access barriers. Victims have not been heard, have faced long-standing injustice and in most cases, little action has been taken to address the crimes they are facing. Like many other Stay Safe East clients, the IVA's clients have been traumatised by their experience and have lost faith in ever getting resolution; some are isolated; as well as losing their self-confidence, their mental and physical health has deteriorated, they may be facing homelessness. They remain at constant risk of harm.

The IVA also had to manage the expectations of these clients, as in some cases it was too late to get them full resolution of their issues. However, having access to a skilled advocate who listens and who is there for them in the long term will help increase their confidence. Clients already felt safer due to the contact with Stay Safe East.

**“We bang on the door to ensure that disabled people have been heard, help them get the support and services they are entitled to, and get them justice where we can.”** *Stay Safe East Independent Victim’s Advocate*

Sometimes it is too late for Stay Safe East to get justice for the client. But our involvement means the disabled person is no longer dealing with the situation alone, and that they can be helped to access services which will enhance their quality of life and help them move on. In some cases, the complexity of the abuse an individual or a disabled family is experiencing means they will need our input for a long time to come.

### **Independent Victim’s Advocate – Case Study**

The client became physically disabled as a result of domestic abuse several years ago. Following a break-in and threats with an offensive weapon by three males (unrelated to the domestic abuse), the client referred herself to Stay Safe East. The IVA contacted the housing provider to get the door repaired and safely secured, helped source accessible security equipment, and supported the client emotionally whilst the police investigated the crime. Our aim was to help reduce the risk and help the clients feel less unsafe. Police eventually made an arrest but the main suspect was never arrested. The case went to court 6 months later during lockdown. The IVA had to liaise with the police officer in the case and the Victim Care Unit to ensure that the victim/witness’s access needs were met and she was kept as safe as possible from Covid. The IVA attended court with the client. Though the case led to a successful outcome, the client feels she was treated disrespectfully by police. The support which the client got from the IVA helped her deal with the court case. She also started to attend our Women’s Group before lockdown.

These two cases show the pressing need for specialist support for disabled victims who face multiple barriers to getting justice, including such simple issues as obtaining documentation in large print or ensuring wheelchair access to the court, as well as negotiating a justice system that is impenetrable to most ordinary citizens. For our clients, the emotional support from the IVA complements the practical advocacy and helps give clients a voice, often for the first time. We will be seeking further funding for a second Independent Victim’s Advocate as we believe that disabled victims of crime need our support.

## 5. Supporting our clients to access benefits and entitlements

Thanks to a grant from Trust for London under the 'Realising Rights, Strengthening Voices' programme for Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations, we were able to employ a specialist Benefits and Entitlements Advocate. All referrals are internal referrals from other members of the Stay Safe East team. Unfortunately the postholder left after a few months, and a second recruitment drive in the autumn failed to find the right person. The Domestic Abuse Team Manager, who has the necessary expertise increased her hours and covered the post until we were able to recruit a new advocate. In spite of these difficulties, 38 clients were supported to apply for and maintain the following benefits:

- Employment Support Allowance
- Personal Independent Payment
- Council Tax support
- Housing Benefit
- Universal credit
- Attendance Allowance
- Tax Credits
- Child Benefit

Stay Safe East works all the way through from making a claim over the phone or online to tribunal appeals to ensure the best possible outcomes for clients. We are one of a limited number of benefits services to attend benefits assessments with clients, who may be re-traumatised by intrusive and sometime aggressive questioning by DWP officials. We have had to make complaints, and to repeatedly

Some clients required help with mandatory reconsiderations and tribunal applications due to negative benefit decisions. These decisions would often have a stark impact on clients being left without a significant income often over a period of many months. One reason for this is that clients fleeing domestic abuse and who are claiming Employment Support Allowance are still asked to complete Work Capability forms and assessments but cannot cope so their benefits are stopped. Non-disabled survivors in a similar situation who can provide evidence of domestic abuse are exempt from work related activities for up to 13 weeks<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Domestic Violence Easement entitles recent domestic violence survivors in receipt of JSA, Universal Credit or in who are in the ESA work-related activity group only to claim a break from job seeking and work preparation requirements for up to 13 weeks:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-and-abuse-help-from-dwp/help-available-from-the-department-for-work-and-pensions-for-people-who-are-victims-of-domestic-violence-and-abuse>

Where client's benefits were stopped or reduced, referrals were made to food banks and discussions were had with utility companies to manage their bills during this difficult period in their lives. All mandatory reconsiderations/tribunal applications were successful. In one case, we had to advise the client that appealing to get a high rate would be unadvisable as she might lose all her benefit. Each case resulted on average in 2 interventions per client.

### **Benefits Support – Case Study**

One client that was supported around both her ESA and PIP claims. The client was a survivor of domestic abuse with long-term health conditions and was supported to attend benefits assessment; she was provided with advocacy to help her explain her symptoms and conditions. Despite this, the Department of Work and Pensions declared the client to only score 2 on her PIP award and declare that she was "fit for work" under ESA rules.

The advocate wrote Mandatory Reconsiderations for both benefits however these were initially turned down, including in the response it being stated "we trust our assessors unbiased opinion". The advocate wrote tribunal applications breaking down point by point and referencing the medical records provided. Due to the strengths of the tribunal application submitted, both PIP and ESA awarded the client the highest components of all benefits before it reached tribunal hearing.

The client was therefore not forced to attend a daunting tribunal hearing and is now receiving the benefits she is entitled to and this income has greatly increased her quality of life, including being able to lease a Motability car.

### **Managing and understanding bills**

A quarter of the clients were supported around understanding bills and communications from the DWP or other agencies such as housing. This is vital part of the advocates' work as clients when they come to Stay Safe East often do not know what they are receiving, what they are entitled to or simply do not understand paperwork. It is a common occurrence for Stay Safe East clients to turn up with several months of un-opened letters which can cause their benefits to be stopped as they had not applied in a timely manner. Sorting through paperwork on its own can take up to 2 hours before advice work can begin. It also involves phoning the DWP to clarify what entitlements are being received. This often is a 45-minute wait on the phone.

## Entitlements

Stay Safe East supports clients to access entitlements such as Freedom passes and Taxicard. This is particularly important for victims of abuse as this can help a victim leave the house and also be used as an income maximisation tool.

When clients are initially assessed the primary advocate will triage the client; if they need benefits or entitlements help, they are referred to the Benefits Advocate. If the client finds it hard to work with more than one advocate, the benefits advocate will advise the primary advocate.

## 6. The Stay Safe East Women's Group

The Stay Safe East Women's group continued to meet during the year, providing a social network for our clients, and enabling them to meet other women who have also experienced abuse. The group does not always talk about domestic abuse or other difficult topics, sometimes it is enough for women to be together and share food and stories.

Meetings are organised by one of our volunteers, and during the year one of our new IDDVA who has extensive experience of community work took over the running of the group with a colleague. The group expressed the wish for more focused activities such as art classes. Unfortunately, the last meeting of the year was cancelled due to the pandemic as we could not put our clients at risk by bringing them to the building. Attempts at coordinating the group online were hampered by the lack of digital phones, internet or knowledge of how to use Zoom by group members. We aim to resume the group as soon as it is safe.

## 7. Counselling service

Stay Safe East had been able in the previous year to receive help from a qualified Counsellor and Life Coach who volunteered to provide one day a week support to a small number of clients. The counsellor had professional supervision; she has a positive approach to disability and is experienced in dealing with trauma survivors. She continued to support 5 clients during the year. This professional support was further developed in 2020-21: thanks to emergency funding during the Covid pandemic, we were able to pay the counsellor to provide a more extensive service to more clients.

**“No matter your problem or issue they will deal with it, from family issues, support to dealing with benefits, housing or if you need counselling, they support you to find it. Often, I have been into the office just venting my thoughts and feelings; there is always my advocate or someone to talk to and listen.” Client.**

## **8. The initial impact of COVID 19 on Stay Safe East's work**

The end of this period presented a unique challenge to the way Stay Safe East operates. Due to Covid 19, all staff went from being office based and carrying out client visits including home visits, to operating a phone-based service. The advocates worked hard to make sure that clients continued to receive an excellent quality of service during this time. From id-march when the office was closed down, all high and medium risk clients were being contacted weekly (some more often) and their issues continue to be resolved via phone and email, and we were offering reassurance calls to all clients.

The coronavirus pandemic brought peculiar challenges to our advocacy work. In order for the advocates to work from home, Stay Safe East arranged for equipment to be brought home and created a WhatsApp group. This has been vital in providing a good level of support to staff and communication regarding clients during these current times. We have faced challenges in regards to meeting staff access needs but these were gradually resolved during April.

Because Stay Safe East has always provided a holistic service to our clients, we were open to the challenge of being problem solvers and helping clients with any issues that arose from being in lockdown. A significant percentage of our clients started to shield, many others were self-isolating. A few struggled to understand the need for social distancing and lockdown. Most were confused and scared. some experienced severe PTSD early on, as being in lockdown at home brought back memories of abuse by partners and family, and of being 'locked down' in institutions. We were there for all our clients. Our staff pulled together and contacted every current client and a number of former clients who we knew would be most isolated; we did a risk assessment for every client; we kept regular contact, re-assured them as much as we could, explained the pandemic and how to keep safe, arranged home deliveries, contacted their GP for their medication to be delivered, ordered masks for them, contacted their care agencies to ensure they followed guidance and used PPE (a significant issue early on in the pandemic and one which may have led to the death of one of our clients later in the year).

During late February and March, before lockdown started but as the pandemic's impact became more apparent, we had to raise safeguarding alerts with the local authority where clients at very high risk had been left without any support and could not elicit that support because they could not get through to or receive a response from the relevant service or provider. As a result of our involvement, clients have been able to access help via foodbanks, volunteer deliveries of food and essential items.

Through our national policy work, and through new networks arising from the need to respond to the pandemic, during February and March, our policy team gathered evidence and raised concerns about the impact of the pandemic on disabled survivors of abuse. This led to use sending written evidence in April to the Women and Equalities Committee <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Stay-Safe-East-Response-to-Consultation-Equality-Impact-of-Covid-19-final.pdf>

Our Hate Crime advocate in Waltham Forest and Newham saw a 100% increase in referrals in the last two weeks of the financial year. Sadly this proved to be the beginning of a significant increasing in 2020-21 in hate crime reports by disabled people across London, with rising numbers and intensity of incidents by neighbours, including several hate crimes against disabled children who were at home, incidents where visibly disabled people were deliberately spat on in the street or told to go home, and increased on-line harassment.

The domestic violence service did not see an initial rise in referrals in the early weeks of the pandemic. As services scaled down or shut down, disabled women isolated at home with the perpetrator or perpetrators would have found it very difficult to contact authorities, and abusers used the crisis to control the victim. We started to work with national domestic abuse and VAWG organisations to ensure that professionals in health, mental health, adult and children's social care who come into contact with disabled people who are self-isolating or shielding are asking questions about their safety from harm. We also believe it is likely that there will be a surge in the numbers of disabled victims reporting domestic abuse once they are able to make contact outside their family. Numbers of clients referred to Stay Safe East did begin to rise over the following summer as lockdown eased. Stay Safe East also raised concerns very early on about the possible rise in institutional abuse (human rights, sexual violence) during the lockdown, particularly in group homes and residential homes where external oversight ceased to happen once lockdown began. We will continue to pursue these issues and in the long term aim to develop our work with disabled people living in residential homes and supported housing.

## Sharing our expertise: training and capacity building

Stay Safe East has provided training for many years, but our role as an organisation which can offer expertise based on solid evidence has developed over the years. Our main focus in 2019-20 was on working with other Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations and with Victim Support.

### 1. Training and casework advice for Victim Support England

During 2019-20, Stay Safe East designed and delivered a programme of training for Victim Support across England as part of the Home Office funded Domestic Abuse and Disability project. We ran a total of 7 two-day training sessions on Disability, Intersectionality and Domestic Abuse and trained 79 Victim Support IDVAs, their managers and other staff who support survivors in Lancashire, Cumbria, Staffordshire, Bristol and Bury, Bedfordshire and 11 in London. Comments included:

"I found the training very engaging, the trainer's knowledge and experience was very motivating."

"The training was very clear, in depth and easy to follow and understand. I found it really useful."

Main barriers identified by participants were the time pressures on commissioned IDVA services, the lack of other local resources to support disabled people, especially in rural areas such as Cumbria, and parts of Lancashire and Staffordshire - from BSL interpreters to accessible housing or transport for victims. IDVAs are working on identifying and sharing knowledge of the accessibility of local resources e.g. refuges, disabled people's organisations and practical resources. Staffordshire Victim Support tweeted about the training and produced a press release to encourage more disabled victims to come forward.

The training had a direct impact on Victim Support's work with disabled survivors:

- a 6% increase in the number of disabled victims referred to and engaging with the service
- a 7% increase in take up of service by disabled survivors
- an 89% increase in disabled victims being identified at MARACs in the areas covered
- 79% of clients have positive scores in improved feelings of safety
- 76% of clients have positive scores in feeling better able to cope

Further 'mop-up' sessions were due to run in London for new London staff and the remaining Bedfordshire and Manchester staff but this was interrupted by the Covid pandemic. In 2020-21, Stay Safe East will be working with Victim Support's training

team and a consultant to transform the two-day training into an online package so that we can continue the partnership.

Our two casework managers provided casework advice to IDDVA and IVAs at Victim Support working in London boroughs (Islington, Barking and Dagenham and hospital based IDVAs) about complex cases and meeting disabled survivors needs.

## **2. Training on Supporting Disabled Victims of Hate Crime**

We continued to provide occasional training to other service providers on hate crime against disabled people:

- Two training days for Merton Centre for Independent Living, one for local voluntary sector organisations, the other an intensive induction day for their new Hate Crime Advocate
- A one-day training course for staff and Board members of the East London Communities Against Hate Partnership which was well received

## **3. Capacity building for Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations**

Stay Safe East was a founding members of the Deaf and Disabled People's (DDPOs) Hate Crime Partnership<sup>5</sup> with Inclusion London and Merton Centre for Independent Living. The partnership aims to build the capacity of DDPOs across London to work on hate crime. our role has been to share our expertise as a specialist provider of hate crime advocacy, develop resources for other DDPOs to use, provide training and support hate crime advocates in other DDPOs. Our work for the partnership in 2019-20 involved a range of activities:

### **Training for Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations**

Stay Safe East ran three training courses during the year:

- Safeguarding: how can DDPOs make best use of safeguarding procedures to get the best for disabled victims of abuse?
- Cuckooing (with an expert speaker from Waltham Forest Council who is the lead on cuckooing and gangs)
- Housing rights of disabled victims of hate crime, which also included advice about legal aid eligibility (with a speaker from Deighton Pierce Glynn solicitors, who are housing experts)

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/training-and-support/partnership-working/disability-hate-crime-partnership/disability-hate-crime/#:~:text=The%20London%20DDPO%20Hate%20Crime,Disabled%20People's%20Organisations%20\(DDPO\)](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/training-and-support/partnership-working/disability-hate-crime-partnership/disability-hate-crime/#:~:text=The%20London%20DDPO%20Hate%20Crime,Disabled%20People's%20Organisations%20(DDPO))

The training was aimed at DDPOs with an interest in hate crime, as well as those who employ specialist advocates. It was attended by paid staff and Board members and was well received. The training sessions also give space for participants to raise questions about case work

### **Secondment to other DDPOs of our hate crime advocate**

Since 2018, our experienced Hate Crime Advocate has been seconded two days a week to 6 different DDPOs to train their staff to understand hate crime and its impact and to support and advocate for disabled victims. In 2019-20 the advocate supported the DDPOs in Tower Hamlets (Real) and in Richmond (RUILS). We have worked with each DDPO and with Merton Centre for Independent Living who lead on the secondment project to review each DDPOs' policies, procedures and monitoring processes so that there are fit for purpose for hate crime work. This could not have been done without evidence from our hate crime casework.

The increased expertise and commitment to working on hate crime amongst DDPOs led to Real, the DDPO in Tower Hamlets being invited to join the CATCH partnership alongside Stay Safe East and Choice in Hackney, thus increasing CATCH's capacity to work with disabled victims of hate crime.

'It is lovely and such a great pleasure for me to work with the Stay safe East Hate Crime Advocate 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. He is a perfect tutor and a magnificent supporter, the very best one!

*Member of staff, Disabled People's Organisation to which our Hate Crime Advocate was seconded in 2019-20*

### **Hate Crime Advocates' Forum**

Stay Safe East was commissioned to organise and facilitate quarterly meetings of the hate crime advocates network. The sessions were facilitated by the CEO or the Hate Crime Team Manager and enabled hate crime advocates working for London DDPOs to share expertise and discuss case studies, seek guidance and offer each other support. Issues discussed included:

- How we support clients who are 'criminalised' and treated as a problem rather than as a victim of crime
- Using 'Community triggers' - Community triggers are a mechanism for victims of persistent anti-social behaviour to request that relevant bodies

undertake a case review. Any individual, community or business can make an application for a case review.

- Dealing with high risk cases involving cuckooing
- Collating casework evidence in anticipation of the Law Commission review of hate crime law.

#### **4. Public speaking and presentations, social media**

Public speaking is still mainly the role of the CEO but is gradually being devolved to the policy officer and other staff whose skills and confidence are growing:

- The Stay Safe East Domestic Abuse Team Manager ran a workshop at the National Women's Aid conference on housing and domestic abuse in January 2020
- Our Hate Crime advocate made presentations at police events
- A presentation to Redbridge Safer Neighbourhood Board on Hate Crime against disabled people (which led to an audience member self-referring tour service - she told us she was 'inspired' by our work)
- A presentation (jointly with our CATCH partner Choice in Hackney) at the Metropolitan Police event for National Hate Crime Awareness Week in October 2019
- A presentation on 'Our right to inhabit this space: on-line hate against disabled people' at the Equally Ours and Oxford Brookes University Conference on Understanding and Responding to digital hate in September 2019

Our social media officer (who is also the CATCH hate crime advocate) runs out Twitter feed and Facebook site, and updates our website. We have further developed our on-line presence during the year.

## Working for change: Policy work

From its inception, Stay Safe East has had a policy role. Over the years, this has grown from a local role in Waltham Forest and Newham to London wide interventions advising the Metropolitan Police and MOPAC on disability and hate crime practice and strategy. Policy work was originally the sole responsibility of the CEO, with support from Board members. In February 2019, we were told we had been awarded a grant from the Home Office for policy work (jointly with Victim Support) for a year. We were able to start on the Domestic Abuse and Disability project very promptly as initially an existing member of staff took on part of the role. In July we appointed a new member of the team as our Policy Officer to work alongside the existing member of staff and the CEO. By March 2020, we had secured three-year funding for our policy work from Three Guineas Trust. We are proud to have in post the first Policy Officer in a DDPO whose role focuses primary on violence against disabled women.

### 1. Domestic abuse and disability project

Though the project focuses on domestic abuse, it is part of a wider context of violence against disabled women and girls, which we aim to place at the centre of the national agenda on tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG):

- To increase the awareness and knowledge of key players in the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector of how VAWG impacts on disabled women and on the barriers faced by disabled survivors, particularly of domestic abuse.
- To work to ensure that the specific issues and barriers faced by disabled women survivors are addressed by government, policy makers and support agencies, and uphold their human rights.
- To influence national VAWG/domestic abuse policy and strategies.
- To increase the capacity of Victim Support's domestic violence advocates to work with disabled survivors through training and casework advice provided by Stay Safe East (see previous section of this report)
- To share the learning from our casework with a wider audience of services providers and policy makers.

### Project Advisory Group

Our first step was to set up an Advisory group for the project. The aim of the group is to ensure the voices of disabled survivors are heard, to advise on the project, share good practice and input into policy work. Our longer term aim is that this

group becomes a source of expertise and advice on Violence against Disabled Women and Girls at a national level. Membership of the Advisory Group includes

- The three key services run by and for disabled survivors (Disabled Survivors Unite, Deaf Hope and Stay Safe East)
- Disabled Women's/People's Organisations/networks: Sisters of Frida and Respond Action Group
- Mainstream VAWG/DV services: Solace Women's Aid, Cheshire without Abuse, Victim Support
- National Violence against Women and Girls organisations: Action against Violence and Abuse (AVA) and Safe Lives
- Individuals with relevant expertise: Marai Lasai, former CEO of Imkaan, now a freelance consultant; Dr Susie Balderston, Research Fellow, School of Social Policy, University of Birmingham and expert on violence against disabled women
- a representative from the Home Office Domestic Abuse team.

The group had its first meeting in August 2019 and met 6 times during the year. Group members were keen to input into national policy and share their expertise. Members of the Advisory Group had a far-reaching discussion about the issues which they felt were paramount for disabled survivors:

- Abuse by carers and why this is not included in the definition of domestic abuse
- Exclusion of disabled women by refuges
- The needs of neuro-diverse and non-binary survivors
- Low rates of referral to local MARAC multi agency forms on domestic abuse
- The lack of knowledge of domestic abuse amongst professionals who deal with disabled people
- The failure of the adult safeguarding process to keep disabled victims of domestic abuse safe, and in some cases increasing the risk
- Lack of knowledge amongst disabled people of what they can do about domestic abuse
- Power imbalances between victims and professionals who are supporting them
- Barriers for Deaf survivors
- Assessment processes for witnesses who need an intermediary
- Deaf and disabled mothers who are survivors of domestic abuse, and the risk of them having their children removed

The group suggested the following:

- An action plan to improve policy and practice: this could be incorporated into the Home office VAWG strategy 2020-24
- Ensuring that standards are set for national and local commissioners so as to ensure that disabled survivors can use those services (IDVA services, refuges etc.) An example was the guidance provided by the Refuge for All project led by disabled women<sup>6</sup>. Commissioners should have flexibility to commission alternatives to refuges (e.g. Shared Lives, extra care, sanctuary safety measures at home) for disabled and other survivors for whom 'standard' solutions don't work
- Incorporating disability equality training into training programmes on domestic abuse
- Data to identify who the abusers of disabled people are, including disabled perpetrators, and people who groom and target disabled women and men.
- An assessment of how the Care Act can be made to work in practice for disabled survivors. This is a longer term project which will look at partnership working with CQC, ADSS, the Local Government Association etc. as an initial step, it was agreed to invite the Safeguarding Lead for CQC to the January meeting of the Advisory Group.

The group discussed these issues as well as the Stay Safe East Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment and to work on the Domestic Abuse Bill. Participation in the advisory group is already enabling mainstream VAWG services and policy makers to reflect on improving practice to in order to better respond to the experiences of disabled survivors.

## 2. Domestic Abuse Bill

On 21st January 2019, the government published its [Draft Domestic Abuse Bill](#). In April Stay Safe East made a presentation to the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill. Stay Safe East wrote to MPs to inform them of the issues. The Bill had its First Reading in the House of Commons in July 2019 and was then delayed due to the national elections. The Bill was further delayed by Brexit being the parliamentary priority and then by the Covid pandemic and did not come back to the Commons for its second reading until April 2020. Stay Safe East made use of this prolonged delay to put together our amendments to the Bill. This is the first time we have been involved in doing this, so we have had to learn as we went along, but have had advice from partner organisations. Over the summer, we met with

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/resources/our-resources/all-publications/local-violence-and-abuse-services-work-with-shaping-our-lives-to-improve-access-for-disabled-women>. Stay Safe east was on the advisory group to the project.

representatives of the Equality and Human Rights Commission who agreed to look at the proposals regarding the 'Carer's Clause' in the 2015 Act and the definition of domestic abuse. We consulted with our Advisory Group and put together a Briefing on our amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill. Our amendments aim to redress some of the inequalities in the responses to disabled survivors of domestic abuse. We have also supported amendments on equality and intersectionality put forward by other organisations.

### **Stay Safe East's Amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill**

#### **Amendment 1: the carer's defence (*New Clause*): Repeal of provisions relating to defence for controlling or coercive behaviour offence**

In section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 (controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship), omit subsections (8) to (10) (which make provision for a defence in proceedings for an offence under that section)

*This new clause seeks to repeal the 'carers' defence' for the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in intimate or family relationships.*

#### **Amendment 2: Domestic abuse by people to whom the victim is personally connected but are not partners or family members**

##### ***Additional sub-clauses to Part 1, Clause 1, sub-sections (a) to (g)***

- (h) **Unpaid carers** (neighbours, friends or other individuals) who perform caring duties for the disabled person and with whom the victim has a 'personal connection'
- (i) **Paid carers** – Personal Assistants, paid care workers and other paid individuals in a position of trust who perform caring duties for the disabled person and with whom the victim has a 'personal connection'.

The relationship should be of significant duration. The alleged abuser should have been providing emotionally or physically intimate support necessary to enabling the person to live e.g. by providing intimate personal care, communication or other support relating to the person's impairment or their being Deaf, or by having access to the person's body, money, medication, food, equipment or other personal matters

#### **Amendment 3: Disabled survivors and Welfare Benefits**

The Domestic Violence Easement available to survivors claiming Job Seekers' Allowance or Universal Credit should be extended to disabled survivors claiming Employment Support Allowance or in the support group for Universal Credit.

#### **Amendment 4: Hate crime and domestic abuse (*New clause*)**

Domestic abuse which involves hate crimes or incidents based on hostility from someone with a personal connection towards the victim because of the victim's personal characteristics (disability, sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity, faith, age) should be recognised in the Domestic Abuse Bill.

We will continue to work on these amendments until the Bill becomes law and to push for equality for all survivors of domestic abuse.

### 3. Policy work: Hate Crime and Victims' Rights

We wrote a **Response to the Online Harms White Paper**<sup>7</sup> on behalf of the London Hate Crime Partnership in September 2019 which addressed the following forms of on-line harm against disabled people which we argued amounted to hate crime:

- a. Organised hate speech and incitement by organisations and individuals with a specific political or other agenda including extremist right wing and faith groups but also 'mainstream' politicians and media
- b. Grooming of adults and children for sexual, financial and other exploitation
- c. Hate targeted against individuals who have a high online profile
- d. Opportunistic hate crime against individuals e.g. hate speech against people who disclose they are Deaf or Disabled

We also included examples of domestic abuse related and misogynist/VAWG related harassment of disabled women and argued to stronger protection for victims of online misogynist harassment.

We hope that this document will help influence the forthcoming government Bill on Online Harms.

Stay Safe East provided the casework evidence for Inclusion London's comments on housing providers' role to support Deaf and Disabled people exploited by gangs.

Work on hate crime policy remains the remit of the CEO. It was originally part of our role within the London DDPO Hate Crime Partnership but after June we had to pull back so that the CEO could focus on her core role. We continue to contribute casework evidence and comments to the Partnership's policy work on hate crime, and to work alongside Inclusion London, the Equally Ours network and other DDPOs on changing Hate Crime law and other key policy matters.

During the year we continued to attend the London Hate Crime Board and the Metropolitan Police Hate Crime Diamond Group and its disability working group, though we felt that little progress was being made on hate crime against disabled people, in part due to the impact of the restructuring of the MPS. These meetings came to a halt as a result of Covid and did not continue online.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/index.php/policy/>

## **Response to consultation: Proposals for Revising the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime**<sup>8</sup>

In September 2019, Stay Safe East prepared a detailed response to the Ministry of Justice consultation on the Victim's Code. We gave examples of how our clients had been repeatedly failed by the criminal justice system, and the role SSE advocates have had to play in ensuring their basic needs are met by the police, CPS and courts. SSE argued that disabled victims need the following:

- A right, enshrined in law, to support throughout the criminal justice process from an advocate, friend or supporter, including an IDVA if they are victims of domestic abuse
- Accessible information about their rights/entitlements as a victim and witness
- Access to an intermediary where appropriate, from police interview through to the court
- To be dealt with by suitably trained officers and legal representatives ( we argued for an increase in the number of trained ABE and Enhanced ABE officers and basic training on dealing with disabled victims for all officers)
- To be kept updated on a pre-agreed basis as frequently as the victim needs
- A trained Single Point of Contact officer or civilian member of staff who keeps the victim update on the case
- More frequent contact for some victims who need additional reassurance, or for example have memory issues or severe anxiety
- The right to make a Victim Personal Statement in a way that is appropriate, timely and accessible
- The right to reasonable adjustments in relation to disability needs throughout the process
- The same automatic rights to special measures for victims of domestic abuse and hate crime as for victims of sexual violence

### **Working with government department and other policy makers**

- Presentation to Sarah Newton MP in February and her successor as Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health Justin Tomlinson in June at meetings with Ministers supported by Women's Aid on coercive and controlling behaviour, domestic abuse and disabled survivors. We will continue to work with Women's Aid on this issue.
- We met with the Home Office Domestic Abuse Team on 1<sup>st</sup> August to talk about the project and held a further meeting to discuss how the VAWG strategy can address the needs of disabled survivors

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<sup>8</sup> <http://staysafe-east.org.uk/index.php/policy/>

- The CEO was part of an advisory group to MOPAC on the priorities and accessibility of the VAWG grants process; this has led to MOPAC identifying a specialist fund that will be targeted at small organisations, and particularly those run by and for BAME or disabled women and LGBT communities.

#### 4. Some policy achievements to date

- Working alongside Inclusion London and other DDPOs, we have provided the casework evidence and a specific perspective for policy responses and in particular towards changing hate crime legislation so that there is parity between all victim groups. This is ongoing work as the Law Commission is not due to report until mid-2020.
- Having a full-time policy post means that we are able to respond to developments and engage with key players at national level
- Stay Safe East has established a national role as experts on violence against disabled people, and in particular against disabled women. We are now engaging with the Home Office about their Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- As part of our work on the Domestic Abuse Bill, we have led on putting the issues on the national agenda: the report of the Parliamentary Scrutiny Panel on the Bill agreed with our proposal that abuse by carers who are not family members should be recognised as domestic abuse.
- We have the support of disabled women's organisations and a number of mainstream Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisations to campaign for removal of a discriminatory clause in the previous domestic violence bill.
- We have contributed to greater awareness of the funding issues for services working with disabled victims, including a national review by Women's Aid aimed at commissioners which identifies the true cost of VAWG services, in which we and Deaf Hope (now SignHealth Domestic Abuse service) highlighted the costs of providing a holistic accessible service to disabled survivors.
- We are working alongside other disabled women to make the link between domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based abuse against disabled women- from cuckooing to sexual and institutional abuse to forced marriage.
- Our Advisory Group on domestic abuse and disabled people will help influence Home Office policy and increasing the awareness of the needs of disabled survivors amongst key national organisations.

## Stay Safe East's plans for 2020-21

Due to the Covid pandemic, our original plans for 2020-21 were partly put on hold so we could focus on immediate support to our clients. Stay Safe East's priorities for 2020-21 are:

- To support our clients, staff and volunteers through the pandemic, reduce social isolation and ensure they are as safe as possible, and have access to basic necessities
- To continue to provide services as accessibly as possible to victims and survivors of abuse
- To work with partner agencies to ensure that the human rights of disabled survivors are taken account of when planning for lockdown and other measures to address the pandemic
- To work on the Domestic Abuse Bill, Law Commission review of hate crime laws and any other legislation which benefit disabled survivors
- To continue our work on hate crime against disabled people, violence against disabled women and on all forms of abuse against disabled people
- To continue to provide training, advice and capacity building to our partners
- To work to ensure that Stay Safe East's funding is sustained throughout the pandemic and beyond
- To work to ensure that Stay Safe East continues to grow sustainably in a way that maintains our ethos and approach to supporting disabled survivors

Signed:

Savi Hensman, Chair

Date:

