

Domestic violence

Representatives of 12 trusts gathered together to talk about grant-making and domestic violence in York in March. They were joined by two speakers from New Philanthropy Capital and Professor Marianne Hester from the University of Bristol. **Fiona Ellis**, Northern Rock Foundation, reports.

The seminar had been set up by ACF in conjunction with the Northern Rock Foundation because the Foundation has recently taken a very keen interest in the area and had commissioned research from Professor Hester into domestic violence and the Criminal Justice System. This was an opportunity both to share some of that research and to raise the wider issues for grant-makers who might be interested in funding in this area. We found the presentations from New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) particularly helpful because of the depth and quality of their research. Of course the NPC research is not without controversy and this in itself provoked some fascinating debate. Rather than try to encapsulate a three-hour seminar in a very brief report, we thought we would offer fellow grant-makers some of our collective distilled thoughts on what grant-makers might do in the field. Here by way of a menu are some of the thoughts of the group.

Refuges

- There are not sufficient refuges throughout the country to deal with the numbers of people needing them. Nor are they well enough equipped to deal with urgent emotional situations, families and the rapid turnover of clients. There is also a need for specialist BME refuges and services. Charities might consider providing additional mental health workers, counsellors for women and children, in-house

solicitors and therapy workers. These could be shared between groups or clusters of refuges.

- Refuges get some of their money from the Government's *Supporting People* budget, but not all refuge users are eligible for supporting people. In particular, children are not assisted by this funding. Indeed children's counselling, play and help services are funded almost entirely by charities and there are by no means enough of them since children are severely affected by domestic abuse.
- Not all survivors of domestic violence want to go to refuges. Charities can help by assisting with making the home secure against the perpetrator, with providing outreach services from domestic abuse forums and refuges so that help can be brought to the victim in her own home. It is also important to note that any charity interested in homelessness would do well to tackle domestic violence since it is the single most common cause of homelessness in many local authority areas.

Moving on places

- Some women who have either been in refuges, or indeed stayed in their own homes after abuse, will feel the need to move on to safe places for new lives. At present the blocking in refuges is often because there are no suitable places available. Charities may be

able to help both by advocacy and by actively supporting the development of new housing units for women to move on and restart.

Children

- In addition to the services above, there is a need for supervised contact centres – safe places for abusive fathers to meet children so that courts are less inclined to give unsupervised orders.

Raising awareness

- We were all keen to see better education and awareness raising programmes, both to help identify early abusers and intervene quickly and also to prevent young people growing up with attitudes which will lead them to perpetrate or accept abuse. We also need a public campaign to make sure that domestic violence becomes as unacceptable as drink driving. There must be no tolerance and no notion of ‘only a domestic’.

Helplines

- Helplines and out of hours services are essential. Domestic abuse happens more often in the evenings, at weekends and during holidays when workers may be less available.

Research

- Research into what works and what changes attitudes is very important for perpetrators in particular, but also for young

people at risk of becoming abusers or people who have become serial victims. There is now a range of specialist services in domestic violence, but it is not yet clear because of lack of good, thorough evaluation if there are significant differences in effectiveness.

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Perpetrators

- Perpetrators are a subject in themselves, both in terms of preventing them from starting and then trying to evaluate better ways of stopping their behaviour. We simply do not know enough about perpetrators and so research and development must be patient.

BME communities

- In addition to what has been mentioned above there are many special issues to do with definitions of abusers who might not be just partners but other relatives. This is not exclusively a black and minority ethnic issue but can, because of family patterns, be particularly prevalent in BME

communities. Research and awareness development of specific issues is very necessary.

Joining up

- Assistance in joining up statutory and voluntary organisations dealing with domestic violence could be really valuable. Many organisations are working virtually independently and not doing enough cross referral. This is particularly true of, for example, the Criminal Justice System and Social Services, which simply do not always talk to each other.

Grant-makers

- Two further points were made which relate very specifically to the way in which we grant-makers conduct our affairs. First, it was suggested that there could be more co-ordination between funders on this topic and this led to the second suggestion, which is maybe there should be an ACF Issue Based Network. Since this latter suggestion appeared on more than one list of useful things, it looks like there is some possibility there for ACF.

Anyone interested in any of these issues is welcome to contact me, Fiona Ellis, at the Northern Rock Foundation (email: fellis@nr-foundation.org.uk). I have had to be a bit brutal in squashing a lot of ideas into a relatively short report, so if anyone in attendance does not see their ideas thoroughly reflected, they'll understand why.