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Independent Choices

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and Community Helpline Language Service
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I am delighted to report that Independent Choices through our hard work, excellent relationships with partners and funders, and the dedication from our supporters has ensured that we continue to advance our objectives to end domestic violence and abuse, support those affected and improve services.

Amongst our achievements have been strengthening our relationships with partners from the Greater Manchester Freedom From Abuse Consortium and especially Manchester Women's Aid and Saheli in delivering new services. We have been awarded with Women's Aid Federation's Quality Standards Award for our work with the Helpline. We continue to nurture existing and increase partnerships with Manchester City Council, police and health professionals. We have actively participated in the development of Delivering Differently programme and provided a series of training to PCSOs and Health practitioners.

We had an increased number of donations but I'd like to mention one in particular as it was such an unexpected surprise - from Alfred Broomhead who included Independent Choices in his will.

I would like to dedicate this annual review to all our volunteers and supporters for their commitment and contributions for all these years to our helpline and our mission. You have enriched our work and capacity as well as our engagement with the communities we support.

It is truly motivational to see new volunteers coming on board and especially some of our long standing volunteers supporting our



helpline sessions. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I'd like to thank you all and especially Lynn Richards, a survivor herself, who has volunteered for 30 years at first on the Helpline and subsequently as Trustee on Independent Choices Board. Lynn you have been the guardian of our legacy, reminding us of our feminist basis and providing good advice at difficult times.

Thanks to Independent Choices' staff, volunteers and supporters work and dedication to our mission. We have achieved so much this year again and are committed to continue through our collective approach advocating against domestic violence and abuse, providing services and working with all who share our vision.

And finally, 2015 saw the introduction of Coercive Control becoming a criminal offence with a prison sentence of up to five years. Coercive Control lies at the heart of domestic abuse. We see this as a vital step forward to protecting women and their dependent children. It sends out a very clear message that domestic abuse in all its forms will not be tolerated.

In solidarity,

Alex

The Helpline service was delivered for 30 hours per week, Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm and was staffed by paid workers and volunteers. As part of the service, we provided a non-urgent email service and our own website as well as the End the Fear website. The key themes for this year have been expansion and partnership.

Expansion due to increased short term funding opportunities that we have secured this year we have seen our paid staff team increase from 2.25 full time equivalent posts to 3.5 full time equivalent posts. This has meant that a part time helpline worker became full time, a volunteer was successful in becoming a paid helpline worker and in the later part of the year we were able to appoint a part time volunteer coordinator. This has been a great boost to the team and has meant that we have been able to spend more hours on the helpline and have had the capacity to deal with more complex calls.

Partnership we have worked in partnership with Manchester City Council delivering training in Stepping Hill and Wythenshawe hospitals. We have also worked in partnership with Manchester Women's Aid and Saheli to help devise and deliver training to the Early Help Hub teams across Manchester. With Manchester Women's Aid we have also delivered training and provided a domestic abuse drop-in service for the Safespots volunteers in Wythenshawe.

Independent Choices has played an active role in Manchester City Council's Delivering Differently programme attending workshops and giving input to the process.

We were successful in our bid to Manchester City Council to be the leading partner in the Victims Champion Network and Strive programmes.

We have worked closely with Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) across the city supporting them to work with standard risk, no crime cases. This has involved us delivering briefings and training across the city to PCSOs and making call backs to victim/survivors three months after the initial call was made to the police. Our partners in this were Manchester Women's Aid, Saheli, Relate, Young People's Support Foundation, Broken Rainbow and LGBT Foundation. The activities were evaluated by Manchester Metropolitan University.

One of the highlights of the report was a questionnaire that we devised and circulated through End the Fear and our partners. The questionnaire went live for a month and we received over 50 detailed responses from people who had experienced domestic abuse.

The top reasons given for experiencing services as helpful were...



The top reasons cited as barriers to receiving support were...



Our staff and volunteers also benefitted from training provided by our partners in a wide range of subjects including working with male victims, "honour" based violence, working with young people, LGBT training and risk assessments.

This year we have recruited volunteers in a different way by specifically recruiting women who have previously been impacted by domestic abuse either directly or indirectly. We offered the Recovery Toolkit Programme over twelve sessions which is a psychoeducational programme to help women recover from the abuse and to develop techniques to heal and move forward. We did this as part of our duty of care to volunteers as we often attract volunteers who have experienced domestic abuse in the past and want to give back to others.

Taking calls on the helpline and listening to others' stories of abuse can be re-traumatising. The courses were really well received and those attended reported feeling empowered. Some of the women

who attended have gone on to support callers on the helpline and one attendee was successful in gaining paid employment in the DA sector after completing the course and the helpline training.

Independent Choices have continued to play an active role in the Greater Manchester consortium, Greater Manchester Freedom From Abuse and were part of a small group of Women's Aid Federation England members who took part in the "On Track" pilot to test a new database.

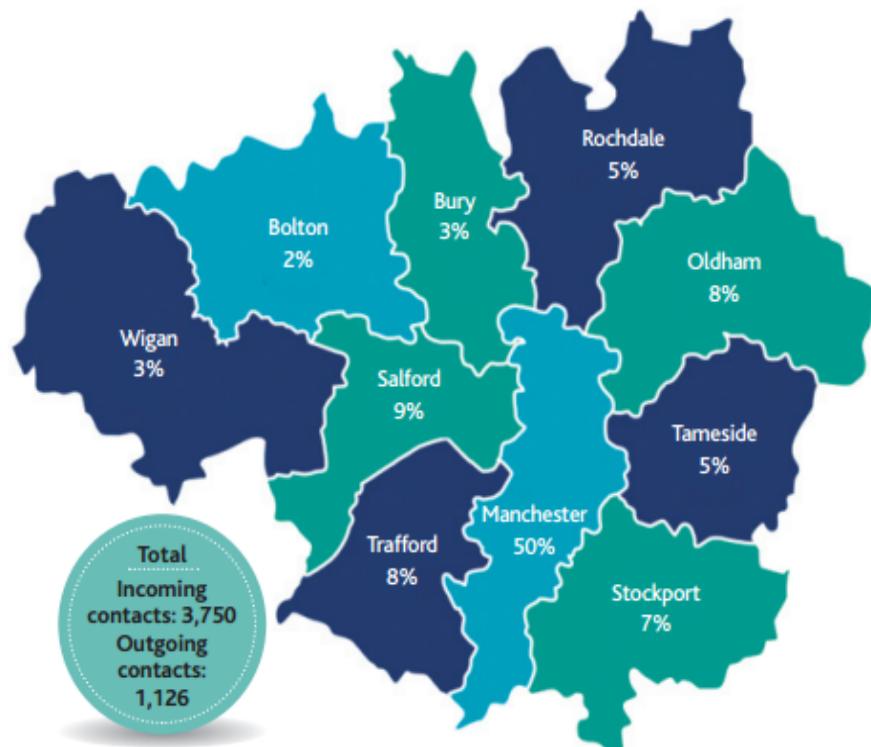
This year we were honoured to be Northwards Housing's charity of the year. This involved staff and residents raising funds for us through cake sales and dress down days for staff at work. We were also very grateful to receive an inheritance which has helped to boost our reserves and has helped provide some financial security.

We continued to have stalls at a variety of events and locations across Greater Manchester and we also appeared on Legacy FM and Granada Reports whilst promoting Greater Manchester Police's third party reporting campaign.

Inspired by the three wise monkeys, the Third Party Domestic Abuse Reporting Campaign with Greater Manchester Police; if you see it, if you hear it, speak out!



Helpline statistics



Ethnic origin where known

Any other Asian background	63
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	14
Any other ethnic group	72
Any other white background	111
Arab	46
South Asian	602
Black - African	152
Black - British	33
Black - Caribbean	29
Chinese	6
White British	1,624
White Gypsy or Irish Traveller	20
White - Irish	32
Mixed Race	74



Callers with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)



Hours spent on calls



HOPES, FEAR AND CHANGE

Survivors of domestic abuse

All is well I am safe
 I feel I am in control of my life
 I fear of failure, all mice's and insects.
 My fears are that my ex-husband cannot be consistent
 I fear that when the restraining order finished I won't be granted a non-mol and he will try and contact us again.
 But I am confident I will deal with this the correct way.
 I hope my children won't be affected by it
 I hope my children won't grow up to be like their dad in relationships.
 I always tell them how special they are and how much I love them
 I hope my life remains calm and happy for myself and the children.
 I hope for a fulfilling career where I could assist people to the best of my abilities as well as having a brighter life.
 My life has changed for the better as my family is whole and complete.
 My life has been changed when I started volunteering,
 I finally understood where I belonged too and what was my purpose in life.
 My hope for the future is to be successful in all that I do (work, family & relationships)
 Our lives have changed for the better we're all happy and content in our new lives.
 It's been a long hard journey but it has paid off
 I hope my life continues to improve,
 I continue to make more and more positive choices and steps in the right direction and make most of opportunities given for a better life for me and the girls,
 as I love life now.

We provide a Community Helpline Language Service (CHLS) for South Asian callers who want to speak in Urdu or Punjabi or to someone who understands their culture and background.

We are continually increasing our involvement with local communities across Greater Manchester in order to raise awareness about the Helpline and the services we provide. In addition to this, it is an opportunity for us to learn about the services other Black Minority Ethnic Refugee (BMER) agencies provide. We have visited African & Caribbean Mental Health services, Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH), River Manchester in Openshaw and AFRUCA. We have assisted by providing input with an Honour Based Abuse Play that Manchester Grammar School and Levenshulme High School delivered, called "Not in my Honour".

We have delivered bespoke Honour Based Abuse and Forced Marriage training sessions to the Community Safety Partnership, Stepping Hill Hospital, Wythenshawe Hospital and with our partners to Early Help Hub employees.

Our CHLS team has increased with additional Urdu and Punjabi speaking paid staff and volunteers joining the team. There has been a massive increase from callers regarding No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Essentially this applies to people with insecure immigration statuses and means that while they are in the UK the conditions of their stay stipulates that they are not able to gain access to public funds, a range of income related benefits, together with housing and homelessness support. This can often lead to financial abuse and the perpetrators may use immigration

status as a threat to control their partners or family members.

In relation to control, the new law around Coercive Control came into force in December 2015. This is a huge advantage for women that have NRPF as often they are being controlled by family members and/or their partners.

The most common ways of control are:

- Checking mobile phones/email/social media sites
- Threats around immigration status/issues
- Not being able to work or educate yourself
- On surveillance from extended family/community members
- Using Cultural/Religious beliefs
- Manipulating family & friends to get information
- Pressures to stay in marriages
- Being chaperoned to appointments
- Threats of harming /killing family members abroad
- Fear of family abroad being told lies/ being manipulated
- Being ostracised - while family/relatives stick together
- Bounty Hunters - to track victim/survivor
- Family Honour - must keep to rules

This law carries a maximum of 5 years imprisonment.

There has also been a rise in the interest of Islamic divorce (Khula) by Sharia law amongst Muslim women and how important their faith is to them, therefore it's vital we acknowledge their decision and safety plan around it. We at the Helpline have gained a depth of understanding around this procedure and explain this process to callers and they are signposted accordingly.

I have been involved with Independent Choices since 2009, originally as a volunteer then as a member of staff, before returning to volunteering, finally leaving to have a baby. I have a real interest in women's issues, in particular I am passionate and committed to the work, vision and aspirations of Independent Choices. When ready to return to work I was thrilled to see the Volunteer Coordinator role advertised and I feel fortunate to have been successful.

Volunteers are an integral part of Independent Choices and complement the organisation in delivering the Domestic Abuse Helpline. Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds bringing their own skills and experience. What we have in common and unites us, is the desire to support and empower women.

As a volunteer, in fact in all three of my roles, the training and support I have received and regularly access is excellent and second to none. It underpins everything I do. It has helped me to progress and enables me to maintain the high standards that the Helpline has and is known for. This is what new volunteers can expect.

We are committed to providing an induction and ongoing training to support the development of volunteers so they can carry out the role to the best of their ability. Not only is this motivating and facilitates personal development and growth, it also provides a clear framework to work to.

As the volunteer coordinator I hope that new volunteers will find the experience rich and rewarding and that they feel good about volunteering. This is the feedback we receive from our current volunteers, some who have been with us for years and all of whom are invaluable members of the team.

Our Candlelit Vigil in 2015 outside the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester City Centre, honouring the memory of all women who have been murdered.

