



Blaenau Gwent Domestic Abuse Services

An Evaluation of the Phoenix Programme

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This report was commissioned by Blaenau Gwent Domestic Abuse Services (BGDAS) in order to review the reception of their newly developed *Phoenix Programme* and to evaluate its effectiveness for clients, secondary users and the organisation itself. The *Phoenix Programme* is designed to be delivered to groups of clients in order that they may learn about the dynamics of abusive relationships and gain skills to maintain healthy non abusive relationships in the future.

BGDAS has seen a 200% increase in client referrals since its first full year of operation in 2004/5 and this has presented very real challenges to the organisation especially in maintaining a high quality service. The *Phoenix Programme* has a pivotal role in managing the growing number of client referrals and in this respect its effectiveness is of particular importance to the organisation. There are two specific areas for focus under which specific outcomes are identified and assessed; Client Development and BGDAS service delivery.

The findings can be used to review the outcomes for the dominant client group over a period of crisis and stress and in moving forward from an abusive relationship. Whilst it is clearly an ultimate aim for clients to form long term non abusive relationships, the more realistic aim is that clients are able to escape from immediate abusive and dangerous relationships safely and with the skills to form healthy relationships in the future.

This report comes as the programme delivery ends its third year in operation and evaluates how the programmes meet the needs of the community they are designed to serve and how they may develop in the future.

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1. Executive Summary

Analysis

The approach is primarily qualitative drawing from feedback collected from a number of interested parties and stakeholders including; clients, police officers, social workers and the BGDAS team

Findings

- The number of clients seeking help from BGDAS is increasing year on year and since its first full year of operation it has seen a 200% rise in referrals
- This is a trend reflected across Domestic Abuse services in the UK which is unlikely to change
- The Blaenau Gwent area has some of the worst economic and social problems in Wales and this may impact on future service use
- Most referrals come via the police, with Social Services, self referrals, and other charities forming a large part
- There is an increasing diversity in the pool of potential clients and the *All Wales National Strategy for Domestic Abuse* requires that service delivery is equitable, non-discriminatory and holistic
- The majority of the minority ethnic population in Wales reside in urban areas, but diversity is reflected across many more categories and the Blaenau Gwent area has an increasingly diverse population
- The opening of the Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan in Ebbw Vale may, through routine enquiries in its minor injuries unit, increase client referrals
- Results from the analysis show that the *Phoenix Programme* allows a greater throughput of clients and addresses the Welsh Assembly Government social policy ethos; that in issues of domestic abuse, the approach must be holistic, equitable, and non-discriminatory

Conclusions

- The *Phoenix Programme*, and indeed BGDAS, are delivering a very high standard of service which meets the needs of the community it serves
- The Programme Officer and the *Phoenix Programme* are pivotal in enabling BGDAS to support all clients who request help and in providing capacity to accommodate increasing demand
- The *Phoenix Programme* is designed so that it can support all clients irrespective of ethnicity, gender or sexuality and this prepares BGDAS to adapt to future challenges and prevailing social policy recommendations
- Secondary users were significantly positive about the programme and BGDAS and it was clear that they relied on the service as a key part of their institutional response

to domestic abuse. There is potential for awareness raising sessions with Police and Social Services

- BGDAS are particularly forward looking and there is potential for the Programmes Officer to expand the service to offer perpetrator programmes in the future as there is no such service in the area at present, but there is an identified need
- Some recommendations are suggested to strengthen the delivery of the *Phoenix Programme* and the holistic service offered by BGDAS – these are detailed below

Recommendations

- It would be beneficial if the problems facing women in particular continue to be given due weight by BGDAS in the *Phoenix Programme*. Women are the group who are significantly more likely to suffer prolonged and injurious, or fatal, violence
- The *Phoenix Programme* draws heavily from the common ground shared across multiple demographics in issues of domestic abuse. However, future development of the programme could be significantly strengthened by acknowledging the importance of the differences. This would prepare the programme for expanded use or future marketing potential
- Given that the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes were developed specifically to appeal to all demographic groups, feedback from some of those less standard clients should be sought where possible
- BGDAS should continue to lobby for a child worker and to consider developing a perpetrator programme for the future to further its aims to provide holistic domestic abuse services

Limitations of the Evaluation

- Focus on the perceptions of interested parties reflects a point in time of the life of the organisation and its programmes
- It does not measure the long term effects of the programmes; this would require a longitudinal design. A maximum two year period is covered by this evaluation
- All clients interviewed were females abused in heterosexual relationships so it was impossible to measure the effectiveness of the programmes for other demographic groups such as men, minority ethnic, or gay or lesbian clients, though anecdotal evidence was considered

2. Evaluation Aims and Approach

The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the newly developed three stage *Phoenix Programme*, and in particular stages one and two, the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes, designed and delivered by BGDAS, effectively meet the needs of the community they are designed to serve. Therefore this is an outcomes based evaluation with a clear focus on identifying preferred outcomes and assessing whether they are achieved. It is also important to assess how the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes could develop in the future and allow BGDAS to adapt to evolving policy, legislative, funding and community requirements. In this respect the report will consider the current delivery of the programme and its future potential.

The approach is primarily qualitative drawing from feedback collected from a number of interested parties and stakeholders including: individual clients, Police Domestic Violence Officers (DVO), voluntary workers, Social Workers, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor's (IDVA), Youth Workers and social work students.

In addition, quantitative data detailing the client load of the BGDAS and a breakdown of the nature of client referrals was provided along with documentation detailing the delivery and content of the programmes. This approach covered a range of stakeholders' views and experiences and, limitations notwithstanding, constitutes a comprehensive and in depth gathering of data to enable evaluation of the achievement of desired outcomes.

3. Background: History and Context of the Programmes

Historical context

Domestic abuse or violence is defined as physical, psychological, sexual or financial bullying by a relative or intimate regardless of gender or sexuality, though ACPO¹ are specific in their definition that victims and offenders should be over 18 years of age (Richards 2006). Despite the inclusive nature of the current definition, it was the work of Feminist activists and researchers who were fighting for the rights of women in particular which saw domestic abuse and violence on the political and policy agenda. As a result, domestic abuse was for the first time transformed from a private to a public issue (Dobash and Dobash 2002, Bevacqua 2000). The 1970's saw the consolidation of a movement to liberate women from what was described as a particularly oppressive set of social requirements which encouraged violence against them, especially within the domestic sphere. It was in this context that various charitable agencies began work to help women escape from abusive relationships. Over the intervening period they have enjoyed much success and are now somewhat part of our social care landscape. This explicit focus on violence against women in

¹ ACPO: Association of Chief Police Officers

particular addresses a problem of some magnitude and seriousness which still exists in the UK and across the world. However, it is now also necessary to address the growing responsibility of agencies like BGDAS to develop services which acknowledge that domestic abuse occurs across multiple demographics with some responsibility to be non-discriminatory.

BGDAS is a relatively new charitable agency having been in existence for only 6 years. As a consequence, it is more inclusive and equitable in its approach to victims of abuse than many of those services which explicitly focus on violence against women. The more long standing and traditional focus on female victims, whilst still acutely relevant, must as a result of the human rights and equality agendas, evolve to give support to male victims and those victims in gay or lesbian relationships. It is the case however, that women in abusive heterosexual pairings still form the majority of victims and this will probably remain true for the future.

The problem of domestic abuse

In the UK, domestic abuse is a significant social problem and it is still the case that on average two women are killed every week by their intimate partners. Serious domestic abuse is also gendered and in 89% of cases where there are repeated assaults, the victim will be a woman (Walby and Allen 2004). The cost to society is high in both human and economic terms; on average the police in the UK are asked to respond to a call of domestic abuse every minute (Stanko 2000) and the financial cost more generally is estimated at £23 billion per annum (Harne and Radford 2008), with each domestic homicide costing £1.1 million (Richards 2006). The need for organisations like BGDAS has not diminished over the years, in fact with higher levels of abuse being speculated as a result of prevailing economic conditions, and the acknowledgement of male, gay and lesbian victims, it is more likely that demand for service will increase.

The most significant impact of this situation for organisations like BGDAS is the content and philosophy of the group programmes in existence which support victims through the process of changing their lives and relationships. As noted most of the popular programmes were written with reference to the research and theories which address violence against women in particular and are very focused in their delivery. Whilst those theories and philosophies remain true they are not easily transferable to those victims from non standard abusive relationships. It is not the case that male victims of female violence are merely swapping traditional gendered roles with a concomitant assumption that to attend a programme designed for female victims would be appropriate or desirable. Similarly, those victims from gay and lesbian relationships are also experiencing different dynamics and problems. It is a specific stated aim in the *All Wales National Strategy* for tackling domestic abuse that the principle of equality is central to the strategy. Whilst they are absolutely clear that most victims will be women and children and most perpetrators are male, they are also explicit in their requirement that all victims, male or female must be treated equally

and supported. The Welsh Assembly Government, whilst not having responsibility for criminal justice, does have devolved responsibility for Welsh social policy which includes domestic abuse, and their policies should be implemented by organisations like BGDAS.

The Freedom Programme

In October 2007, when the BGDAS took on a Programme Officer, they began delivering group programmes to their clients. These are structured sessions delivered to groups of clients which help them address their problems in a supportive group setting. Group sessions are generally recommended after a period of one to one support with a named Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA). When the client feels ready they will be encouraged to participate in the group programmes. The first programme began running in September 2007 with 10 attendees. At this time BGDAS was using the *Freedom* Programme - an 'off the shelf' product designed as a rolling programme of individual sessions delivered weekly to raise awareness of the issues involved in abusive relationships.

The *Freedom* Programme was one of those designed for use with women in particular and specifically focuses on the problems women encounter drawing from the theoretical foundations of violence against women. In June 2008 a second programme: the *Pattern Changing* Programme, designed to help women make positive life changes, commenced delivery and was intended to be for those women who had completed the *Freedom* Programme. This two stage programme was run successfully for the following 18 months.

It was as a result of their own observations in the group sessions that the Programme Officer and the manager identified what they perceived to be clear shortcomings with the *Freedom* programme. It was felt there were contradictions to their organisational aims and ethos, which were also having a negative effect on clients. It was in this context that BGDAS sought to develop group support programmes to better suit their needs and the evolving needs of their clients. As a result, and with consultation, the new *Phoenix Programme* was developed.

The Phoenix Programme

After a period of consultation with various stakeholders and past clients, a new three stage programme was developed and written. Stage one is known as the *Knowledge Programme*. This was specifically designed to 'help individuals understand what domestic abuse is and how it affects the lives of all those involved'. Stage two is the *Changes Programme* and was designed to 'help individuals move forward and to start to look at their behaviour and life patterns'. Stage three, the *Advance Group*, is client driven and provides a supportive environment for those who have completed stages one and two but feel they would like to maintain links with other clients and the organization. The *Advance Group* is focused on activities organized by clients who aim to help with the development of BGDAS, raise funds, and maintain supportive relationships.

The focus for this evaluation is the three-stage *Phoenix Programme* with a specific focus on the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes to evaluate the extent to which they meet the needs of the community they are designed to support and their wider role in the broad range of services provided by BGDAS.

4. Programmes: Rationale

The *Freedom* programme, as noted, was designed to be used exclusively with female victims and thus the content was seen as in need of development in two key areas: first, it should address the needs of clients in a diversity of relationships; second; it should promote healthy relationships rather than focusing on the negative aspects of some heterosexual partnerships. The rationale, content and structure for each stage could be described as:

1. **Knowledge Programme:** an eleven week rolling programme designed to help individuals understand what domestic abuse is, addressing such issues as; blame, denial, isolation, power, threats, effects of abuse on children, and sexual abuse and privilege. The rolling nature of the programme means that clients may join at any point in its delivery
2. **Changes Programme:** a ten week programme delivered in consecutive sessions which are designed as a logical progression from the *Knowledge* programme providing life skills and includes such sessions as; assertiveness, decision making, feelings and healthy relationships
3. **The Advance Group:** a supportive group for clients who have completed both programmes but seek to maintain relationships with BGDAS and its clients. This is a client driven group and is not a particular focus for evaluation but is important in placing the ethos of BGDAS in context

BGDAS are clear in their intention with the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes that they should be more inclusive and support clients who may not be female or heterosexual ensuring that no individual feel alienated or need be turned away. They were also clear that they wished to update the programme content to embrace a more modern ethos of promoting healthy relationships in general rather than focusing on the very particular problems of women's subjugated status, which is encouraged in traditional heterosexual relationships, and significantly addressed in the *Freedom* programme.

A self review was completed in 2009 drawing from feedback from clients who had attended the three stages and formed the *Advance Group*. Feedback was positive, and the negative issues raised from the running of the *Freedom* programme appeared to have been addressed. Clients reported that they had managed to positively change their lives and their relationships with comments like:

‘I’m much more assertive whereas before I was either passive or too aggressive. It has helped me break the habit (my ex). I’ve started looking at people differently and realized that everyone behaves in certain ways due to their own personal lives’ (from self review)

‘This really helped me understand what was preventing me from moving on both practically and within myself. Once I understood why it was so hard to let go, letting go became easier’ (from self review)

Observations of positive client engagement and satisfaction led to the continuation of the delivery of the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes. This evaluation comes as the provision of programmes reaches the end of the third year of delivery and serves as an independent review of their effectiveness at meeting the needs of the community they serve.

Staffing

The Programme Officer is critical to the development and delivery of the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes. Other members of staff help in delivery and maintenance of the programmes.

5. Problem Statement

BGDAS is an inclusive and equitable organisation which serves the needs of individuals who are in abusive or violent relationships. Domestic abuse or violence is a serious social issue and the Blaenau Gwent area suffers from a high incidence of domestic abuse and has some of the worst economic and social problems in Wales (NPI 2009). Statistics specific to Wales for domestic abuse are difficult to obtain largely because most crime statistics are collected on an England and Wales basis. However, it is known that: from a single one day count in 2000, over 400 women and children were living in refuges in Wales as a result of domestic abuse; every day in Wales, on average, 49 women contact Women’s Aid and between 2002 and 2003 26,854 incidents of domestic abuse were reported to the police. Given that the majority of domestic abuse goes unreported the extent of the problem can be seen.

As with the rest of the UK, the demographic breakdown in Wales is undergoing significant change and the Black Association of Women Step Out’s (BAWSO) is an all Wales organization which, as a result of demand, now employs 67 paid staff and 47 volunteers. BAWSO is dedicated to helping black and minority ethnic women and children who have homelessness issues as a result of domestic abuse. They reveal that of their users: 47 percent are Asian, 17 percent are White European, 13 percent are Black African, 10 percent are Middle Eastern, 10 percent are Afro Caribbean and 3 percent are of mixed parentage’ (NWCSP 2005:12) revealing a diverse mix of ethnicities and race across Wales. The *All Wales National Strategy* states that ‘A co-ordinated network of services that meet the needs of all victims including children and young people, people with disabilities, men, people who live

in a rural part of Wales, people who do not speak English, and those from BME communities', is essential (NWCSP 2005:13).

Taking into consideration these two statements the problem to be addressed by BGDAS is a large potential client base and an ever increasing diversity in that client group with a concomitant requirement that that diversity is both recognised and supported.

In their first full year of operation (2004/5) there were 144 referrals; in the year 2008/9 this had risen to 430 referrals and this reflects a year on year rise. Over the full 6 years the BGDAS has received 1317 referrals from a number of sources. Most referrals are from the police (316 in 2008/9) with Social Services, self referrals and other charities also forming a large number. Women form the largest single client group, though over the life of the service there have been 45 referrals of male clients.

Statistics provided by *Women's Aid*, which has a nationwide presence, reveal that they too have experienced year on year increases in service use (Barron 2006) and this trend is supported in Sylvia Walby's (2009) *Cost of Domestic Violence update*. Walby reports that despite a slight dip in recorded violent incidents, service use has increased, reasons suggested for this include; policy which encourages victims to use the services available; the high quality of those services; the identification of more violent incidents as domestic abuse through routine enquiries; the development and extension of civil remedies and a significant change in media portrayal of domestic abuse victims (2009:1). It should be considered also that in respect of referrals through routine enquiries that the opening of the new Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan in Ebbw Vale may increase identified abuse in its minor injuries unit and therefore referrals to BGDAS. Given that it is estimated that only 35% of domestic abuse is reported to police the potential for increased service use remains.

This presents very particular goals for BGDAS extra to its commitment to supporting clients through the challenge of leaving or changing an abusive relationship.

So to summarise, the problems for the organization which are at least in large part addressed by the inclusion of the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes are:

- An increasing throughput of clients year on year
- An increasing potential pool of clients
- An increasing diversity in that pool of clients
- A need to provide clients with the skills to create and maintain healthy relationships

6. Evaluation Goals

The evaluation seeks to answer specific questions:

- Are the identified desired outcomes for primary clients of the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes being met?
- How do the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes address the mission of BGDAS in the context of the All Wales Strategy for Domestic Abuse
- How do the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes fit in the framework of services offered?
- Do the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes achieve best value for funders and the BGDAS?

7. Methodology

Types of data collected

A broad range of data was collected to provide as much in depth information as possible. Primarily the data was qualitative in nature including: interviews with various stakeholders and interested parties; a focus group with some 15 clients; and observation of a programme in session. In addition statistical data was provided by BGDAS of client throughput and referrals, and documentation of the programme content.

How data was collected

The author visited BGDAS over two days and collected the qualitative data through meeting directly and in private with police officers, social workers, IDVA's, youth workers, placement students, primary clients, volunteer workers and BGDAS staff responsible for development and delivery of the programmes. A focus group was formed consisting of some 15 clients who had either been through the programmes or were in the process of attending group sessions. The author was also able to observe a group session in progress.

How data was analysed

The data was analysed to assess whether identified outcomes were being met. Outcomes were identified with reference to the stated goals of BGDAS and the goals of the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes. A simple matrix can be seen in figures 1-3 below.

Limitations of the evaluation

This evaluation, though quite far reaching in the parties consulted, has some limitations. First, its focus on the perceptions of interested parties reflects a point in time of the life of the organisation and its programmes. Second, it does not measure the long term effects of the programmes. This would require a longitudinal design where clients are interviewed or canvassed at given time periods to follow their progress. Alternatively previous clients could have been contacted to ask them about their current relationships. Although what are

referred to as *long term effects* were measured, this time period is relative only to the *short term* and *medium term* time span of the programmes and a maximum two year period afterwards. Finally, all clients interviewed were females abused in heterosexual relationships so it was impossible to measure the effectiveness of the programmes for other demographic groups such as men, minority ethnic women, or gay or lesbian clients. Given that equality is of particular importance in the All Wales Strategy and to BGDAS this would be an important group to canvass in future evaluations.

The findings can be used to measure the outcomes for the dominant client group over a period of crisis and stress and in moving forward from an abusive relationship. In this respect the main aims of BGDAS programmes are measured, as whilst it is clearly an ultimate aim for clients to form long term non abusive relationships, the more realistic aim is that clients are able to escape from immediate abusive and dangerous relationships safely and with the skills to form healthy relationships in the future.

8. Outcomes and performance measures

Identifying Outcomes: There are two broad areas under which specific outcomes will be identified in this evaluation; *Client Development* and *BGDAS service delivery*:

Client Development

In the context of the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes it is a desired outcome that clients will gain the knowledge and skills to achieve a fundamental change in their approach to relationships. Clients should be able to recognise abusive behaviours and relationships and expect that they be treated with respect in future healthy relationships.

An outcome will indicate a true change in the client's behaviour and values, and the outcome indicator will be an *observable* change in behaviour or values which can evidence a successful outcome. It is almost impossible to measure the extent to which an outcome has been achieved or to estimate the potential longevity of the change so outcome indicators can only reflect success at a point in time. Outcome indicators were collected using a time frame for which gathering meaningful data was seen to be achievable and was organised thus:

- Short Term: 0 – 6 months: what specific knowledge do clients identify having as a result of the programmes?
- Medium Term: 3 – 9 months: what specific behaviour changes do clients identify as the result of attending the group programmes?
- Long Term: 6 – 12 months: what specific values and skills do clients identify having that are different to those they had before attending the programme?

The following three tables illustrate the general desired outcomes for those attending the programmes over the short, medium, and long term - with examples provided from the data

of specific outcome indicators which indicate that the outcomes have been met. These specific examples do not constitute the only outcome indicators recorded. A more detailed analysis follows in the discussion.

Figure 1

Short Term Outcomes: Knowledge	
Outcome Indicator (general)	Outcome indicator (specific)
To help client recognise abusive behaviours	'I now realise that pushing and shoving are abusive actions'
To help client recognise an abusive relationship	'The constant telephone calls were to control me and make me do what he wanted'
To help client recognise they are not to blame	'I now know this was about him, none of it was my fault'
To help client become more assertive and confident	'I know the difference between assertiveness and aggression'

Figure 2

Medium Term Outcomes: Behaviour	
Outcome Indicator (general)	Outcome Indicator (specific)
The client can be assertive	'I will now telephone the police when necessary'
The client can retain control	'I will now refuse to react to provocation, if he threatens to walk out, I say go on then'
The client does not try to please at their own expense	'I will now say no to people'

Figure 3

Long Term Outcomes: Values	
Outcome Indicator (general)	Outcome Indicator (specific)
To help client recognise they have value	'I now buy things for myself'
To help client come to expect to be treated with respect	'I now expect help with the housework from my family'
To help client recognise what a healthy relationship looks like and aspire to that	'I would not accept that treatment ever again, now I know it was not normal'
To provide client with skills to live a positive life with healthy relationships	'I now know how to recognise the signs of control and I will not accept it'

BGDAS Service Delivery

The second area for focus is the impact of the programmes for the BGDAS. This will be measured by:

1. Assessing the programme's impact on service delivery; that is how they may support other areas of service provided by BGDAS
2. The number of clients who can be supported; that is how many clients can be accommodated on the programmes
3. The programme's impact on BGDAS responsibility to support clients from diverse backgrounds and demographic groups; that is their impact in BGDAS ability to address the needs of diverse clients

9. Interpretations and conclusions

The analysis of the data is grouped to organise the issues that have been raised and specifically address the questions asked:

- Are the identified desired outcomes for primary clients of the Knowledge and Changes programmes being met?

Data was collected from individual interviews with clients of BGDAS, from a focus group and from a group in session. It was a specific aim to assess whether the long, medium, and short term outcomes were being achieved so clients were asked if they could recognise or give examples of any changes in their knowledge, behaviour and values since beginning and/or completing the programmes. The most significant and high impact changes, according to the data, were across three key areas. First; all women agreed that in the first three or four group sessions they experienced a profound sense of the abuse in the relationship which they had hitherto not recognised. Most described it as 'a real eye opener', or a 'smack in the face'. There was an overwhelming agreement that this recognition of the abuse as abuse was a milestone in their development and that this occurred quite early:

'I didn't realise that slapping, pushing and shoving was abuse. I thought as long as he didn't punch me it was okay'

'I only realise now that when he kept phoning me all the time, telling me to come home and stopping me seeing my family that he was trying to control me'

'I thought it (violence) was normal, I didn't know it was abuse. It's all I knew'

'Now I know what it is, I will not let it happen ever again'

Second; clients reported definite changes in certain behaviours which indicate that they were no longer accepting abuse and violence as part of their lives.

‘Now I’ll phone the police. Before I wouldn’t, I would have felt it was wrong or I’d be too scared, but now I will. I’ll phone the police’

‘I don’t react. It was really hard mind, really hard and I nearly died doing it but when he would take my son and say he was going to walk out with him, now I say ‘go on then, I’ll go out for a bit. He doesn’t do it now, but it was hard. I just won’t react to him now’

‘Now I can say no to people. I don’t just give her (daughter) money anymore just because she wants it and I expect help with the tidying’

‘I walk with my head up’

Third; clients felt that since completing the programmes they recognise that they have value as people and have a strong sense of their own entitlement to a healthy and respectful relationship or relationships, not just confined to intimate relationships but across many other areas like, for example, with their children, family members and colleagues.

‘I will not accept that treatment ever again, not now, I know my bill of rights now, I’ve seen it, it’s up on the wall’

‘I buy things for myself, I never did before I would always think I should spend the money on someone else, for something they needed. Now I will treat myself’

‘I bought myself a chocolate éclair and I ate it in the street. I would never have done that but I really wanted it and it felt good’

‘I go to bed and read a book, I can read again now’

‘I draw smiles in the dust’

- How do the *Knowledge and Changes* programme fit in the framework of services offered?

BGDAS offers a holistic service which addresses a range of problems clients may face when confronting issues with an abusive relationship. As well as pastoral care, all clients are offered advice which may be on the telephone or in a one to one visit; an IDVA will help clients with any issues related to the court process; advice and help is also given with housing, financial and other issues; a youth worker is available to deal with problems which may be encountered by younger victims or witnesses of abuse; there are acupuncture sessions to deal with stress. BGDAS takes a flexible and individual approach to each client and there are numerous examples of this which will be discussed in this section which were raised in interviews with outside agencies. This individual approach is particularly helpful in dealing with very certain issues and may help when clients are disabled or living in rural locations.

The *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes are an integral part of the range of services offered and are pivotal in the BGDAS maintaining its ability to deal with its increasing client base. The group programmes allow the service to help a larger number of clients, and more effectively than they could if only one to one sessions were offered; clients attending the group sessions become less reliant on the one to one contact.

The group setting has its own particular benefits for clients and from their perspective it was particularly supportive. First, it allows clients to meet with other people in the same or similar situations and this was identified as particularly helpful to clients:

‘I realised I wasn’t on my own’

‘It was amazing to see that other people had been through this too. It was really good having others to share it with. I have made some great friends and we go out and support each other. It’s one of the best things’

Also the rolling nature of the programme allows clients at different stages in their journey to be in contact so that groups are not entirely constructed from first time users who may lack confidence to join in or, as in the case of some, have been coerced into attending by Social Services and may be reluctant to participate

‘I didn’t want to be here. I was really difficult, I didn’t want to speak. I didn’t think I needed to be here. It took me about five or six weeks before I joined in. It was interesting to listen to some of the others who had been coming for a while and I began to recognise how bad my situation was’

The benefits are also clear in the approach of the secondary service users who are able to place clients immediately - there being places always available on the rolling programme.

‘I have never had to wait to get a client a place on the programme’

‘I know that if I refer a client to the programme that I have done something positive. I know that when a woman goes to BGDAS that I can breathe a sigh of relief that something is being done’

‘I will coerce clients into attending the programme for the sake of their children’

A particular aspect to the delivery of services by BGDAS and of the programmes was the flexibility of the staff and the programmes. Secondary service users gave anecdotal evidence of the flexibility of the service

‘We had a woman who was so scared of her partner’s family that she couldn’t attend the programme. She couldn’t let them know she was being helped for domestic abuse. The BGDAS went to her house every week and delivered the group programme to the woman and a couple of her trusted friends. She got the courage to leave the relationship and face the family’

It should also be recognised perhaps, that the Police and Social Services, according to data collected, do not receive specialist domestic violence training. Social services are focused on child protection and welfare, and the Police on crisis management and criminal justice. In this respect the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes are the only source of structured information which addresses what domestic abuse is and how clients can make practical changes to their lives. There is potential and willingness for professionals to receive some structured information about domestic violence from BGDAS to help inform their professional decisions.

- How do the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes address the mission of the BGDAS in the context of the All Wales Strategy for Domestic Abuse

There are multiple things that BGDAS must achieve - all of which must address the interests of different groups. The primary group are, of course, the clients but their needs must be addressed in a particular way to fit with current social policy. The Welsh Assembly Government decides Welsh social policy including the approach to domestic violence. Of course, the Welsh Assembly Government does not decide BGDAS policy but they will need to consider local, national, and international policy in their service delivery. The Welsh Assembly Government is explicit in the national strategy for domestic abuse that issues must be approached holistically and with equality. In this sense the *Phoenix Programme* is part of a holistic approach employed by BGDAS and explicitly inclusive taking a position which does not discriminate:

First, a holistic approach: the three stage programme allows clients to attend on a regular basis and form support and friendship networks. As well as this there is one to one support from a named support worker, the youth worker, and volunteers. This provides practical crucial help but also a pastoral role. Some staff have also been trained in offering certain techniques which are designed to relax clients like, for example, acupuncture. BGDAS provide childcare and transport so that there are no practical bars to attendance. These benefits are open to any client.

BGDAS also have a clear vision for future development of services, for example, there is serious consideration being given to the possibility of developing perpetrator programmes in the future which has the support of the Police and Social Services and represents a gap in service provision in the Blaenau Gwent area.

Second; equality: The three stage programme has been specifically designed so that it is explicitly inclusive and non-discriminatory. The focus is primarily on providing information about abusive relationships irrespective of the demographic of those in the relationship. They have moved away from an explicit focus on women as victims of abuse so that they may accept male victims, lesbian and gay victims and those from minority ethnic groups.

Clearly most of their clients will be women and, given the relatively small number of male victims, each case can be approached individually. BGDAS have helped male victims from

both heterosexual and gay relationships. The men attended the group programmes in consultation with the group and the male client. This was a successful arrangement with individual differences being addressed within the one to one support. Flexibility is an important part of the BGDAS approach and secondary service users were clear that this was a significant benefit to them and their clients.

‘I had a woman who would not leave her pet dog. She had real problems with this but the BGDAS drove her and her dog to Birmingham so that she could leave with confidence’

It would clearly be difficult for BGDAS to deliver on Welsh Assembly Government policy, as well as national and international requirements without the *Phoenix Programme*. It allows all those referred to be seen and supported in a flexible and holistic manner; its new design allows for all referrals to be supported irrespective of demographic; it allows for BGDAS to continue growing offering value for money and clear economies. Clients have less need for one to one support when attending the programmes and this relieves pressure on the service.

- Does the *Phoenix Programme* achieve best value for the BGDAS and its clients?

Many different stakeholders gave up their time in very busy schedules in order to allow me to speak with them about BGDAS. This in itself is testament to the success of this organisation and the respect they have inspired. Social Workers and Police Officers expressed a clear confidence in the organisation and the ways it supports individual clients: it was explicitly told to me that:

‘When I hand over a client to BGDAS I can breathe a sigh of relief. I know that something will be done’

‘I have every confidence in the girls here, they can do things that I cannot. They are so flexible I know that when I refer to them that I am really helping the abused woman’

Social Work students told me how they are able to complete placements with the BGDAS which form part of their qualification. Clients were keen to tell me how their lives and values had changed as a result of their involvement with BGDAS. They were very positive about the group programmes citing this as a key part in their support and an environment which has provided ongoing friendships and informal support networks.

10. Recommendations

The overwhelming feedback on both BGDAS and the *Phoenix Programme* is that they exceed expectation and provide a gold standard in domestic abuse services. I have spoken at length with the Programme Officer and BGDAS manager about the ethos of the service and in particular the newly developed *Phoenix Programme*. As a result of those conversations it was clear that the *Phoenix Programme* was developed with a clear, well explicated mission which situates it in a forward looking and pragmatic framework which does differ from the customary approach. In this context, I have some recommendations for consideration in future development of the programme, as follows:

1. BGDAS are clear that they wish to distance themselves from what they see as a radical Feminist philosophy in the content of their *Phoenix Programme*. Their reasons for this are sound and address a growing requirement for all services to be non discriminatory and inclusive. However, this position must take into consideration the fact that the vast majority of violence, especially serious and injurious violence which occurs in the home, is committed against women by men. It would be beneficial therefore that the very particular problems facing women in particular continue to be given due weight by BGDAS
2. The ethnic breakdown of the Blaenau Gwent area is such that minority ethnic groups are not significantly represented at present. There is a strong possibility that this will be subject to change and this is something that could be given some attention in developing the Phoenix Programme. BGDAS are in contact with groups like BAWSO and expressed to me that they would seek advice from such groups in dealing with minority ethnic clients. It is acknowledged that the issues faced by gay men, lesbian women, men abused by women, and those in minority ethnic groups do share some common ground which is clearly shown in the Phoenix Programme, but there are also significant differences in the dynamics of those relationships and the aetiology of the violence. In this respect I would recommend that these differences are considered in future development of the programme; by this I mean that as the programme is developed in future there could be some sessions specifically geared towards the specific problems of certain groups, perhaps to be delivered only to those groups should the need arise. This kind of consideration would not only acknowledge the importance of those issues and differences in dynamics, but would prepare the programme for rigorous critique should BGDAS wish to pursue expanding its use or marketing it to other services.
3. It is one of the limitations of this evaluation that only white heterosexual women were interviewed. Given that BGDAS is explicit in its rationale for developing the *Knowledge* and *Changes* programmes that they are relevant to other demographic

groups, it is recommended that feedback from these groups is sought and considered.

4. Although not directly related to the Phoenix Programme but important in a holistic sense, it would be of value to BGDAS if they continue to lobby for a child worker for the service so that their holistic and equitable approach can be more effective. A youth worker is provided addressing the needs of 11 – 24 year olds affected by domestic abuse, but they are unable at this time to provide support for younger children of BGDAS clients.
5. To further their holistic approach it may also be beneficial to continue considering the development of a perpetrator programme. The Blaenau Gwent area has no such service at present.

Concluding Remarks

The diversity of people interviewed, along with their willingness to engage in the evaluation helped to gain a sense that there is genuine confidence in BGDAS, its services, and its approach. I have been impressed both with their dedication to a difficult and worthy cause, and their efficiency and flexibility in delivery of the services. There is significant potential for the service to develop in the future and the Manager and team have the foresight, business acumen and ability to enable BGDAS to expand and evolve into a more complex and multi-dimensional organisation.

11. References

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