

" Like a bird that has been freed from my cage,  
I can finally fly "



Social Impact Report 2015

# Ascent Advice and Counselling

For women and girls affected by domestic & sexual violence





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# Executive Summary

**The study shows that Ascent Advice and Counselling (A&C) has generated real social value for the people of London in the first two years of its operation, providing valuable services to thousands of women and girls affected by violence across every London borough. It also provides a platform for further learning to ensure all women and girls have the best possible support and clear choices and pathways to aid their safety, well-being and recovery.**

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## Findings

### Service Model

- Delivering Pan-London advice and counselling services to women and girls affected by Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is effective in widening the reach of services.
- A partnership approach is an effective way of delivering specialist advice and counselling services to women and girls affected by all forms of violence.
- The hub and spoke model increases access for women and girls who need to move between borough boundaries for safety and other reasons and offers more choice around how and when they can access services irrespective of borough connection.
- Effective outcomes and high beneficiary satisfaction are largely due to the professionalism and expertise contained within the Partnership.
- This partnership of specialist VAWG and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations creates a vital additional resource at a borough level which enhances the borough's ability to respond effectively to all forms of VAWG.
- An approach to service delivery based on service user needs enables more responsive services. Recovery is not a linear process and services users' experiences are all unique so it is vital that support is tailored according to need.

**The Partnership of 14 organisations enabled delivery of specialist services, ensuring survival of specialist BME organisations.**

### Data collection/research recommendations

- Systematic stakeholder consultation, especially with service users and ex-service users, should be integrated into monitoring and data collection methods as this provides the vital qualitative data needed to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of services.
- Data collection to show the number of women who are parents and the outcomes for them and their children would provide useful additional data which is currently absent.
- Further research on the impact of Ascent A&C services on the children of service users would be beneficial.
- Consideration should be given to the streamlining of data collection methods and the use of data collected. A focus on qualitative data over quantitative would enable greater flexibility of service delivery. Any new model should be widely shared to inform a more outcome-focused approach to data collection across services.

### Service Delivery recommendations

- It is vital to ensure that routes into Ascent A&C are as clear and simple as possible for all service users and that these are well advertised.
- Collecting and sharing good practice across the Partnership and beyond would encourage shared learning and foster continuous improvement.
- Extended delivery including greater evening access and childcare would increase accessibility and reduce isolation.
- Strategic integration of Pan-London services, such as Ascent A&C, to maximise effectiveness at a local level would be beneficial. The Partnership is in a unique position to collect evidence of the implications of service reduction and to work closely with London Councils and borough strategic leads to identify the gaps and to lobby for more and complementary support services.

## Background

**Ascent Advice and Counselling (Ascent A&C) is a Pan-London partnership funded by London Councils within the London VAWG Consortium.**

The Ascent A&C partners bring considerable experience and expertise of working with women and girls affected by sexual and domestic violence, and in particular includes a number of organisations run by and for BME women. Solace Women's Aid is the lead partner, responsible for project development and management, as well as for liaison with the funder, London Councils. The partners include:

- Ashiana Network (Ashiana)
- Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC)
- Chinese Information and Advice Centre (CIAC)
- EACH Counselling and Support (EACH)
- Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)
- IMECE Women's Centre (IMECE)
- Jewish Women's Aid (JWA)
- Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)
- The Nia Project (Nia)
- Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (RASASC)  
(South London Rape Crisis)
- Rights of Women (ROW)
- Solace Women's Aid (Solace)
- Southall Black Sisters (SBS)
- Women and Girls Network (WGN)

Between April 2013 and March 2015 Ascent A&C provided free, confidential advice and counselling services in every London borough. The Partnership supported 24,206 women and girls who had experienced, or were at risk of, domestic and sexual violence, generating a social value of £26,992,554. This equates to £5.99 for every pound invested through improved outcomes for service users.

Two advice hubs provide a first point of contact, by phone and email. 'Spokes' in each London borough provide local services, including advice and support, group work, one to one counselling, financial support for women with No Recourse to Public Funds, legal support and advice and specialist services delivered by BME organisations in a variety of languages. Rights of Women (ROW) provide legal guides and training to professionals working with women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

This study considers the first two years of the Partnership from April 2013-2015. During this period the Partnership received £2,695,642 (£1,347,821 funding per annum) from London Councils. This was supplemented by around £1.39 million of resources from the Ascent A&C partners; £850,000 of rooms and space provided by other organisations who worked with the Partnership and around 13,000 hours of volunteer time.



The Partnership supported  
**over 24,000**  
women and girls



Social value of  
**£26,992,554**



For every £1 spent  
Ascent A&C created  
approximately  
**£6 of social  
value**



## Methodology

Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology was used to assess the social value created by Ascent A&C.

This involved an analysis of the project monitoring data for over 24,000 service users, as well as carrying out in-depth interviews and focus groups with over 50 service users who had used the full range of Ascent A&C services.

Some service users were still accessing services, while others had ended support up to 20 months earlier. Partners were also interviewed as a group and other stakeholders were consulted by email or electronic survey.

Stakeholders described the outcomes they had experienced as a result of Ascent A&C, how these had been produced and how important they were to them. Their feedback was used to construct 'chains of change' and to define the outcomes. This was then combined with additional data from the consultation, monitoring databases and other studies to assess:

- How long each outcome would last and the extent to which it would decline over time
- The extent to which the outcome might have occurred without Ascent A&C
- The extent to which the outcome was created at the expense of other people/organisations
- How far other people or organisations contributed to the creation of each outcome.

Information from Global Value Exchange [www.globalvaluexchange.org](http://www.globalvaluexchange.org) and similar sources was then used to produce a final value for each outcome, using SROI methodology.

A Value Map was constructed from the data, showing a value for each outcome as well as a total value. This was then refined based on feedback from Ascent A&C partners to produce the net social value of the impact over 5 years amounting to £26,992,554.



## Impact for service users

Service users identified three main outcomes from the services they received. The value of these is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. These were:

- Increased autonomy, independence and capability – **Value £10,463,254**
- Improved mental health and self-care - **Value £11,225,394**
- Better parenting and relationship with children - **Value £7,235,452**

The vast majority (90%) of those women, who had left Ascent A&C services some time prior to the interviews, said their new confidence and agency had increased their resilience and they were better able to deal with life as a result of their support. Women who had experienced depression, stress and anxiety, as well as those with serious, diagnosed mental health issues, reported they were

better able to manage their own stress/ mental health conditions, were more relaxed and had a better sense of self-worth. They were taking less medication; able to recognise when their condition became acute and to take appropriate action, leading to fewer episodes of illness. Women with children said Ascent A&C provision had improved their ability to parent effectively, which had been damaged or inhibited by the violence and abuse they had suffered. The support received had improved their confidence and communication skills and reduced the stresses and tensions within the family unit.

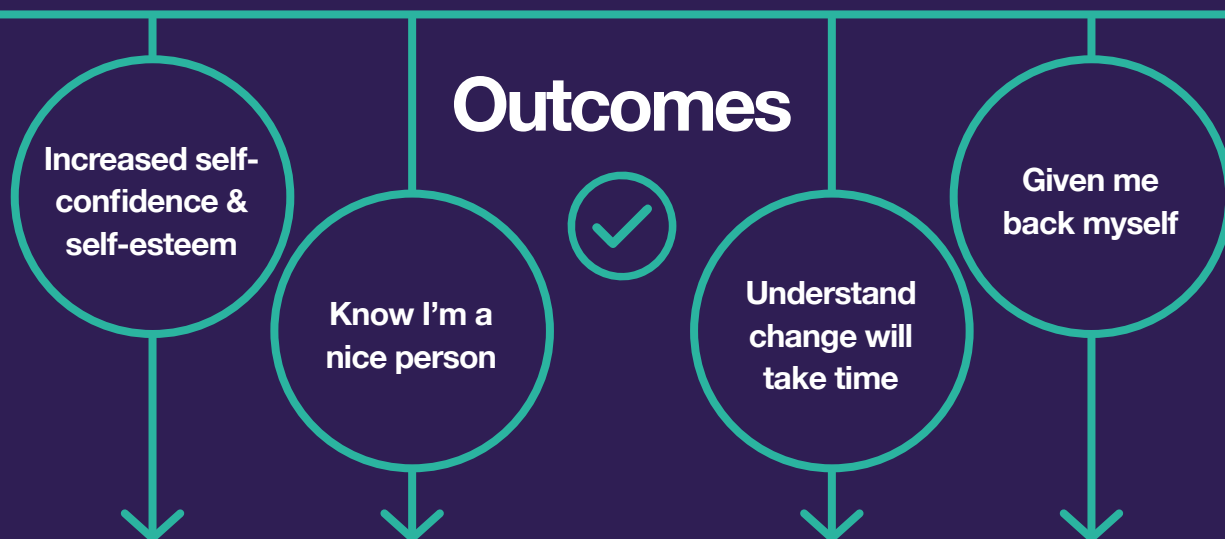
The diagram on the right summarises the chain of change which service users described as leading to these outcomes. The process of change differed from person to person, was complex and generally not linear. Changes which seemed negative in the short term generally led to positive outcomes in

# Chain of change for service users



## > Change Process >

Hope	Classes	Worse family relationships	Understanding rights
Don't trust other people	Recontacting friends	Speak better English	Powerless
New friends & better relationships	Hard work as a single parent	Financial problems	Better family relationships



- ✓ Increased autonomy, independence & capability
- ✓ Better mental health & self care
- ✓ Better parenting & relationship with children

## 90% of the women interviewed said their new confidence and agency had increased their resilience and they were better able to deal with life.

the longer term and these were broadly similar regardless of the provision which had been accessed, and the immediate outputs from it.

The women interviewed learnt about the help Ascent A&C services offered through various routes, but not all had chosen to access help straightaway. Most of those interviewed had accessed the advice service along with other forms of help, such as counselling, casework and/or advocacy. For women with limited knowledge and experience of the UK cultural norms and criminal justice system (younger women born and educated in the UK, as well as those who had migrated into the country) the practical and legal advice Ascent A&C partners supplied was pivotal. The trusted relationships which women developed with the staff and volunteers were very important in achieving the outcomes, as was the specialist knowledge and expertise brought by the staff.

Women interviewed described their experiences of Ascent A&C as continuous journeys, rather than a string of different, disjointed services and attributed the outcomes they experienced to the organisation they had worked with most closely, even where they had clearly been supported by more than one Ascent A&C partner. The size and scope of the Partnership enabled women to access the services required whilst remaining attached to the primary partner organisation. Women reported that Ascent workers had also effectively coordinated other services for them, such as help from the Police, solicitors, other counsellors, Social Services; local mental health services; Housing Associations and other housing providers; local faith groups and Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs). This was vital to women's ability to navigate their

way through the system as women described limited confidence, skills and knowledge of these processes.

Women whose support had recently ended were usually still in the process of recovery from the abuse and their circumstances had not always changed for the better. Even though women's safety had often improved, financial and personal issues, child contact with the perpetrator and immigration problems often remained unresolved. Some regretted that Ascent A&C support had ended, particularly those who had accessed counselling or 1-1 support. Despite this, most reported that their lives had been improved by Ascent A&C's help and support. They had learned to trust; were more relaxed; less isolated; spoke better English; could communicate better; had become stronger; knew where to get help and had their own home or a safe place to live. Many were excited by their new found independence and autonomy.



### Impact for the participants of Rights of Women (ROW) legal training

ROW training participants identified one main outcome from the training they received. The value of this is described below and within the report, using SROI methodology. This was:

- Increased ability to provide more effective legal advice to service users. **Value £70,514**

Professionals trained by ROW said that the training, and particularly the high quality training materials, had enabled them to understand changes to



legal processes that they then shared with their colleagues and volunteers. Trainees reported that as a result of the training they felt competent to deal with the most straightforward legal cases themselves and were able to identify and quickly refer women with more complex needs to appropriate, specialist legal help. This assistance was particularly useful at a time when options for access to affordable legal advice for service users had become severely limited.



## Impact for Volunteers

Volunteers identified two main outcomes from the services they received. The value of these is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. These were:

- Increased work skills leading to improved career prospects: **Value £134,308**
- More fulfilled: **Value £53,288**

Volunteers in Ascent A&C partner organisations worked in a variety of roles: as volunteer advisors and counsellors; on the phone line; legal advice line and in administrative roles. Regardless of role, all those who responded reported similar outcomes. Volunteers said they had gained valuable, transferable knowledge and work skills as a result of being trained and trusted to carry out crucial, responsible roles within Ascent A&C partners' teams. They also said they had experienced personal changes as a result of volunteering, becoming less judgemental; understanding more about other cultures and people from different backgrounds and making new friends with similar values.



## Impact for all Ascent A&C partners

Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the Partnership. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Platform for more joint working and future partnership working. **Value £34,186**

Partner organisations said that the experience of establishing and developing the Partnership had been challenging but that, by delivering services together, they began to realise that they had shared, feminist principles and a shared mission. Partners had changed and adapted their views and positions and learned to listen to and mutually respect the voice and views of others. As a result, partners felt that plans and projects had increasingly incorporated all partners' views; they had become jointly accountable and developed shared principles and passion, enhancing their response to service users. The Partnership had helped make all the organisations more sustainable, providing a good basis for future joint working.



## Impact for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations

Ascent A&C partners from BME organisations identified one main outcome from the Partnership. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Specialist BME organisations are better able to preserve services under commissioning - **Value £208,000**

**Ascent A&C services enabled enhanced access for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) service users, led by and for BME groups. 77% of all service users were BME.**

Ascent A&C partners from BME organisations identified that negotiations had led to improved communications between all partners resulting in a more equal dialogue, with partners feeling they had become valuable, trusted and respected. This had resulted in better processes, standards and structures in their own organisations as they became more accountable to the Partnership enabling them to secure long-term funding for their services. The Partnership had also given them better access to the other consortium members, leading to improved joint working. This had enabled them to continue to provide culturally specific domestic and sexual violence services led by and for BME communities.



### Impact for organisations working with the Ascent A&C partners

Organisations working with Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the services they received. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Reduced pressure on other services.  
**Value £589,850**

Many organisations, including children's centres, housing providers and charities, working alongside Ascent A&C often provided rooms or space from where partners could deliver services. In return they reported that they received practical help and advice from the Ascent outreach workers who were located there. Respondents from these organisations said that Ascent A&C had improved support for their own service users and enabled the development of new working relationships and the sharing of expertise. It had become easier for their staff to refer their clients to Ascent A&C for help and support and they had

increased confidence in the services their clients received. The close working relationships which evolved across a variety of organisations across London fostered closer, cross-sector collaboration and the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise which eased pressure on their own services.



### Impact for boroughs and commissioners

Commissioners and stakeholders from London boroughs working with Ascent A&C partners identified one main outcome from the services they received. The value of this is described below and within the report using SROI methodology. This was:

- Improved response to service users adding value to locally commissioned services -  
**Value £3,453,516**

Commissioners and stakeholders from London boroughs reported that their relationships with Ascent A&C partner organisations had improved markedly over the lifetime of the project and they had seen a real commitment to make the service work. This had led to greatly enhanced services, particularly for women who move between boroughs and for those who were not previously able to access appropriate and effective help and support locally. As a result, commissioners and stakeholders from boroughs were able to provide much better services which respond more effectively to the needs of their residents.

The full report is available at [www.solacewomensaid.org/social-impact-2015](http://www.solacewomensaid.org/social-impact-2015) and provides a more detailed explanation around the outcomes for each of these groups and how they were produced.

**Stakeholders identified that Ascent A&C improved services locally, enhanced working relationships and enabled the sharing of expertise.**



