



Impact Report

April 2015 – March 2016



Liberty Facilitators

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Helen's Story – In her own words

My name is Helen. For years I was a victim of domestic abuse. Today I am a survivor of domestic abuse. This is my story and how I came to change my status regarding domestic abuse.

It was summer, I was young. I met a man and fell in love. During the months that followed we moved together, etched out and life and planned the future. We both worked full time. He was loving, caring, attentive and protective. Life was sweet.

Slowly over time though things started to change. Attentive became suffocating, Protective became jealousy and the once loving and caring comments became hurtful and insulting. The changes were slow. The argument started. Small at first, then his anger grew and grew until one day his fist met with my face. He was remorseful and tearful, full of apologies. I forgave him. The loving, caring man I'd once known returned but didn't stay. And so my continuing circle of abuse began.

The loving, caring man started nit picking and moaning, then insulting and cruel. Then arguing and shouting, then whack. I was hit again. Over the eight years that followed, that was my life.

For the first couple of years we followed this pattern virtually to a T. Sometimes would take a couple of months to go full cycle. Other times just a few hours. After those first few years he stopped apologising, what was the point he didn't mean it anyway, I knew that. Then we started skipping out the nice guy section. It was a relief really. I had no more hope of change. The violent attacks though they intensified.

After a couple of failed attempts I finally broke free. I'd like to say it was easy! That it went smoothly! But I'd be lying. With two small children and a back pack of clothes I walked out. I know nothing of refuges or even where to go to find help. That was 13 years ago. The abuse didn't stop after I left but after three more incidents of violence the abuse changed more to threats, harassment and stalking.

13 years after I left that relationship my Social Care Worker forced me to do the "Liberty Programme". I was sceptical to say the least. What could I possibly gain from a domestic abuse programme 13 years after the fact? I argued my case, I lost.

So a few weeks later I attended an introductory meeting with Holly. I was hesitant and nervous. Holly greeted me with a smile and her calm and easy manner put me at ease a little. Holly explained what Liberty was all about. She answered my questions and spoke to me like I was an individual rather than another number of abused women. I left still a bit unsure what I'd gain after this time but I felt comfortable with starting the programme. So, in April 2015 I started Liberty.

That first week I was so nervous, apart from introducing myself and saying goodbye I didn't say a word. Over the weeks and months that passed I started to talk more and more and my confidence grew.

The abusive cycle I mentioned before was one of the "valuable lessons" I learnt at my time at Liberty. I learnt a great deal, not just about the abuse and my abuser, but also about myself. I started to look forward to the weekly sessions, and what I really loved about each week was that although we learnt something we had time and discussion, where we women were given the chance to "feel".

We were given time to relate if to our very own personal situation, and we able to reflect on how that made us feel then and now.

During my time at Liberty I went through a whole range of emotions. Some lessons were a shock and left me feeling, others were comforting. In the way I realized I was not the only one. Liberty didn't start at 10am and end at 11.30 am, which was just the session times when we all got together.

The two women that ran the Liberty programme always let us know they *were* 5 but a phone call away. It was an offer I never needed but it was a comfort all the same. I never felt alone.

Liberty has given me a knowledge and confidence to look at my situation differently. With my completion of the full 24 weeks Liberty Programme I am ready to call myself a Survivor. Liberty has given me back my confidence. Liberty has helped to restore my faith in myself. Liberty has reassured me, I am important, I have worth.

I would urge any professional that knows of a women that has or is experiencing domestic abuse to guide them to the Liberty Programme.

I would tell any women out there that has lived or is living with domestic abuse: "If you are offered a place on the Liberty Programme to take it, to grab it with both hands."

The experience for me has been life changing. I have completed the full 24 week course and I believe in it so wholeheartedly that I now volunteer at the Women's Only Group and my goal is to be trained up to the point that I can one day deliver the Liberty Programme and all its benefits to the women out there that have suffered the way I have. Together I would like to see survivors of domestic abuse.

Background

'Liberty' was created nearly 14 years ago by Kate Martinow (Centre Director) and Mandy Conlon (Specialist Services Manager) when the Charity was known as 'Goldington Family Centre'. It was developed after the creators identified an increasing need for services which support women who have been victims of abuse. Originally a 2 year programme, within its first 10 years of delivery 115 women attended Liberty and only 4 (8.7%) were known to have returned to an abusive relationship.

Initially delivered to women experiencing abuse in the Goldington and Putnoe wards of Bedford resulted in a demonstrable reduction in domestic abuse incidents over a 3 year period compared with the rest of the Borough;

In the period 2009-2012 Bedford Borough saw an overall 8% increase in domestic abuse incidents. Goldington and Putnoe wards saw a decrease in domestic abuse incidents over the same period of -24% and -21% respectively. There are a number of other factors which would have contributed to the reduction in incidents but the Liberty Programme was considered as a contributory factor to talking domestic abuse in the immediate area. In 2012 the Charity was asked to develop a shortened version of Liberty to cater for women who have escaped an abusive relationship who have children aged 5 years or under. 'My Choice' was developed with the same ethos and principals of 'Liberty' and was delivered over 10 weeks within Bedford Borough's Children's Centres. Funding cuts in 2014 resulted in 'My Choice' being "paused" for a period of time whilst the Charity sourced additional funds to continue the programme.

'Liberty' is delivered by appropriately qualified staff who have training in counselling skills and are supported by a qualified counsellor who specialises in domestic abuse. The programme offers a therapeutic approach to addressing all relevant issues regarding Domestic Abuse. The group's aim was to support women who have/are experiencing domestic abuse to help them develop understanding and skills to make changes, protect themselves and their children from further abuse, to enable them to move forward positively. The outcomes for the women are to understand the impact of Domestic Abuse on themselves and their child, develop protective behaviours for the whole family to prevent further abuse and to live in homes free from violence or abusive control.

POST 2012

'Liberty' continued to be delivered in the Borough now extending its reach to all wards in Bedford. In 2015 the Charity was successful in an application to 'The Harpur Trust' for a 2 year grant to continue delivering the 'Liberty' programme and a review of the aims, outcomes and delivery framework was carried out to update and refresh the content.

We were fortunate to have a link to a research specialist, Dr. Neha Sharma, who supported us in reviewing the last 13 years of evaluation data to create a set of 7 studies which were accepted for presentation at 8 international conferences. Results from the studies can be found at [appendix 1](#).

REVIEWING THE 'LIBERTY PROGRAMME'

Following the retrospective studies we made a decision to reduce the programme to 24 weeks with a 12 week review cycle for participants to continue or leave the group. This was in line with the

impact scores the studies identified; that after 6 months of attending Liberty women made significant progress from their starting points in areas of stress, depression and hopelessness.

We also reviewed the aims and desired outcomes for Liberty keeping as close as possible to the original concept but tightening up the evaluation methodology. The aims and desired outcomes for Liberty are;

Aim:

The aim of the Liberty Programme is to improve the safety and wellbeing of women and their children who have experienced or are experiencing abusive relationships.

Outcomes:

1. Women report improved psychological and physical wellbeing.
2. Women will have an improved knowledge and understanding of the effects of domestic abuse on themselves and their children.
3. Women will have an improved understanding on how they can keep themselves and their children safe from abusive relationships.
4. To empower women to determine their own futures and to make positive decisions resulting in improved life chances for themselves and their children.

As from April 2015 we also agreed our evaluation tools for the Liberty Programme;

- [McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire](#)
- [Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale](#)
- [Empowerment Star developed by 'Triangle Consulting'](#)

We decided the use of academically proven methods of evaluating our work to be the most beneficial in evidencing nationally the impact of the 'Liberty Programme'. Further information about each evaluation methodology can be found by clicking the above links.

LIBERTY PROGRAMME – THE LAST YEAR (APRIL 2015 – MARCH 2016)

Since April 2015 we have received 54 referrals for Liberty of which 30 women (55.5%) fully participated in the programme and 24 (44.5%) were not able to proceed.

Reasons for women referred who do not take up the programme include;

- Living in temporary housing at the time of referral and place in permanent accommodation out of area
- Not the right time for Liberty due to more extenuating issues such as mental ill health, drug and alcohol misuse or pregnancy (these women are likely to attend Liberty once other issues are under control or resolved)
- Working patterns do not allow attendance at Liberty as it is offered during the day

In addition to this 10 women are currently on the waiting list for the next programme which will begin in the summer term.

We have trialled the revised Liberty Programme and the evaluation methodologies and the results of the impact and discoveries we have made can be found below;

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

The WEMWBS is a 14 item scale of mental well-being covering subjective well-being and psychological functioning. The scale is scored by summing responses to each item answered on a 1 to 5 Likert scale.

WEMWBS results are defined as the following;

0-32 points – Your wellbeing score is very low. You may want to begin by talking to a friend or health professional about how you can start to address this.

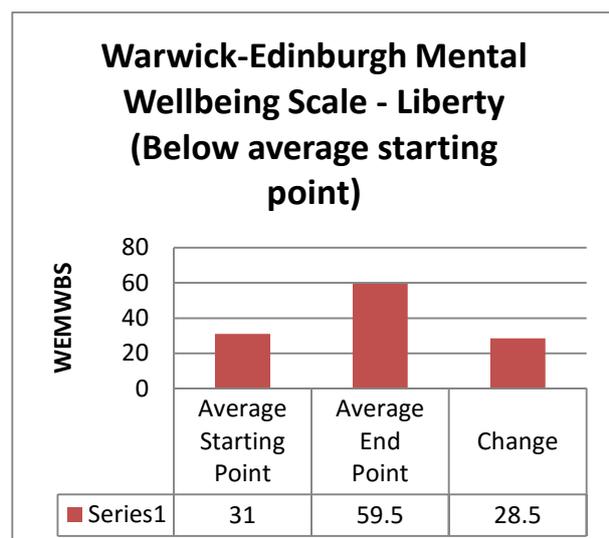
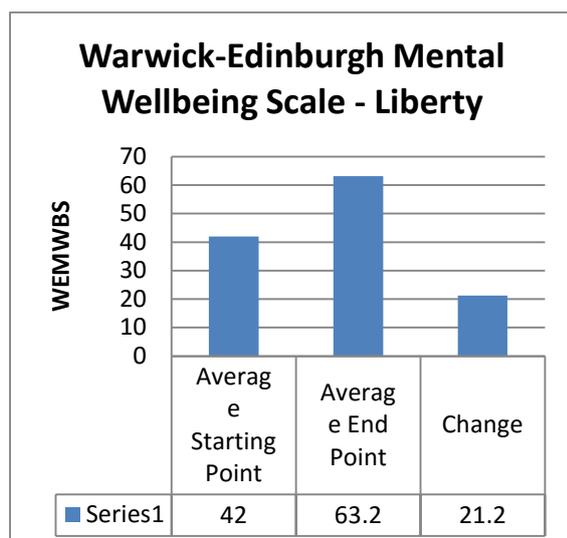
32-40 points – Your wellbeing score is below average. Why not take action to improve your mental wellbeing.

40-59 points – Your wellbeing score is average. You can still improve your mental wellbeing by taking action.

59-70 points – Your wellbeing score is above average. Continue doing the things that are keeping you happy.

The average starting point for the women attending Liberty who used this evaluation methodology was 42 (average) with an end score of 63.2 (above average). This was a 21.2 point change or over 50% improvement from their starting point.

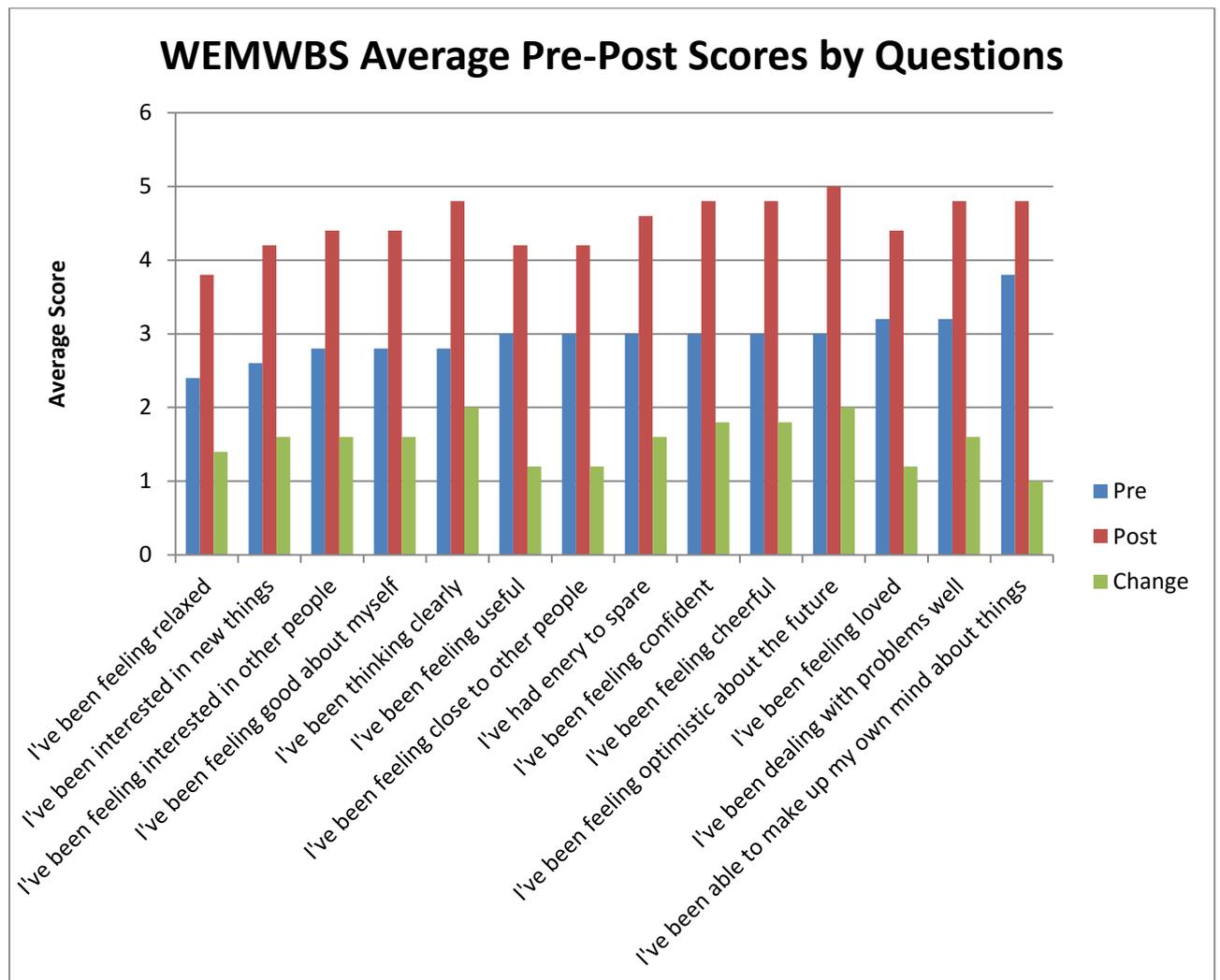
Women attending Liberty who had a score lower than 40 points (below average or very low) showed further distance travelled between pre and post results;



The % change for this cohort of women was nearly 92% which correlates with the study 7 carried out by Dr. Sharma; *“Program effects were unrelated to demographic or baseline characteristics but strongly related to initial status. Participants who entered the program with high levels of emotional*

well-being or good self-control tended to change little, if at all, at later measurements. On the other hand, people who entered the program with low levels of emotional well-being or with poor self-esteem and control improved substantially.” (Sharma, N. 2015).

When we analysed the scoring by question we noticed that questions in relation to relaxation, and self-worth scored the lowest. These average pre-scores improved the most at the end of intervention. Highest pre-scores included questions around decision making which correlates with the demographic of the group (most women had removed themselves and their children from the abusive relationship). This question showed least improvement compared to the rest. Thinking clearly and optimism showed the most significant progress with a 71% and 67% (respectively) improvement between pre and post scores.



McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire

“This questionnaire differs from most others in three ways: the existential domain is measured; the physical domain is important but not predominant; positive contributions to quality of life are measured. Principal components analysis suggests four subscales: physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, outlook on life, and meaningful existence.” (Cohan. S et al, 2015).

Staff struggled with encouraging women to complete the McGill questionnaire due to the length and complex construction of the questions. We found that women with low levels of literacy were unable to accurately self-assess themselves against the criteria and by the end of the first cohort we made a decision to cease using the McGill Questionnaire and continue using the WEMWBS. The sample where we achieved a pre and post score (3) would not provide a valid evaluation for the purposes of this report.

Empowerment Star

The Empowerment Star is part of a portfolio of Outcomes Star’s developed by Triangle Consulting. It was developed over a long period in partnership with 5 partners consisting of housing foundations, Women’s Aid and several London Local Authority areas. The Empowerment Star looks at nine areas which have been identified as the most important factors for women when rebuilding a life free from abuse. They are;

- Safety
- Accommodation
- Support Networks
- Legal Issues
- Health and well-being
- Money
- Children
- Work and Learning
- Empowerment and self-esteem

Women assess themselves, with a practitioner, across a 10 point scale referred to as the ‘Journey of Change’. The ‘Journey of Change’ is broken down into 5 sub-sections;

1-2: Not ready for help

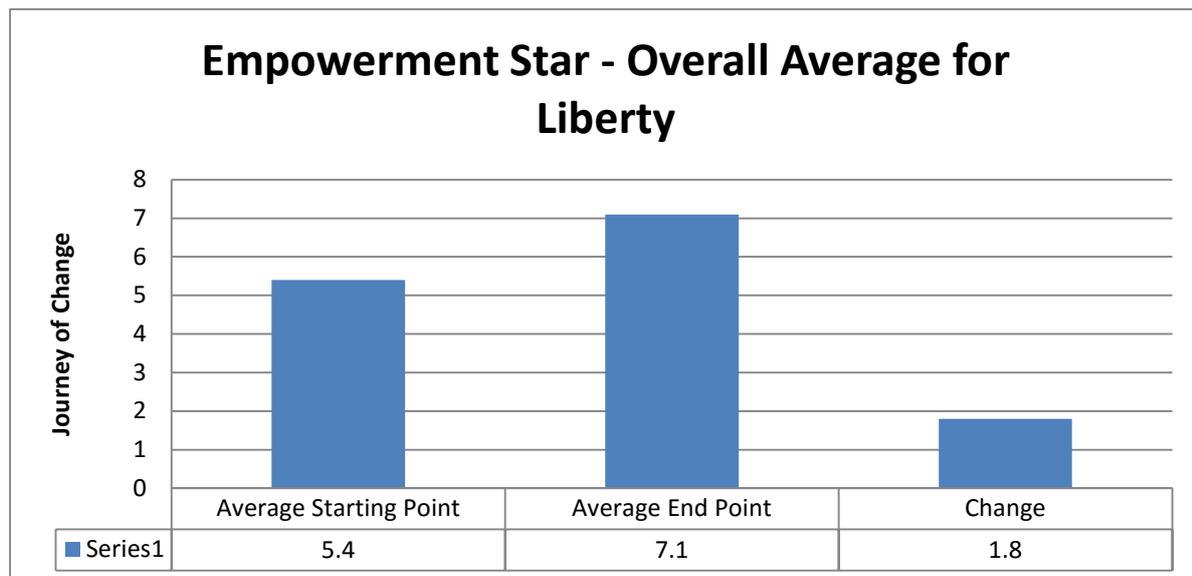
3-4: Accepting help

5-6: Believing

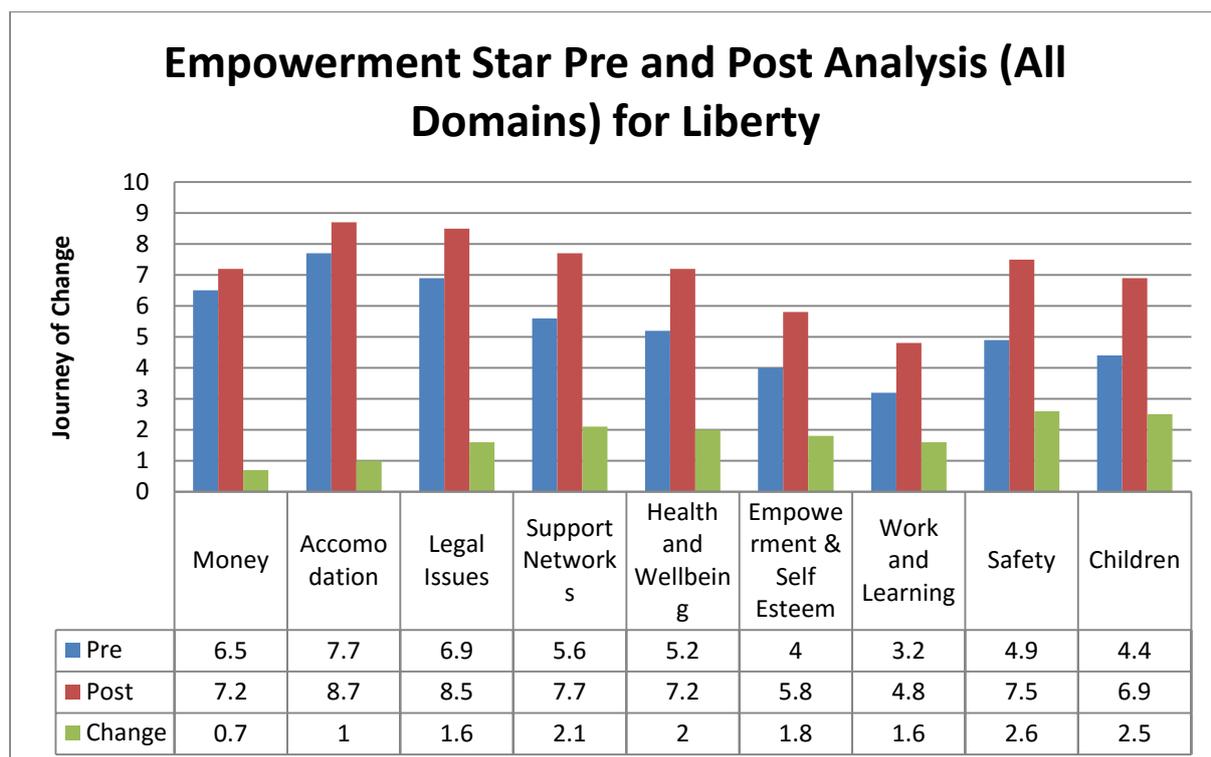
7-8: Learning and rebuilding

9-10: Independence and choice

Pre and post Liberty results are as follows;



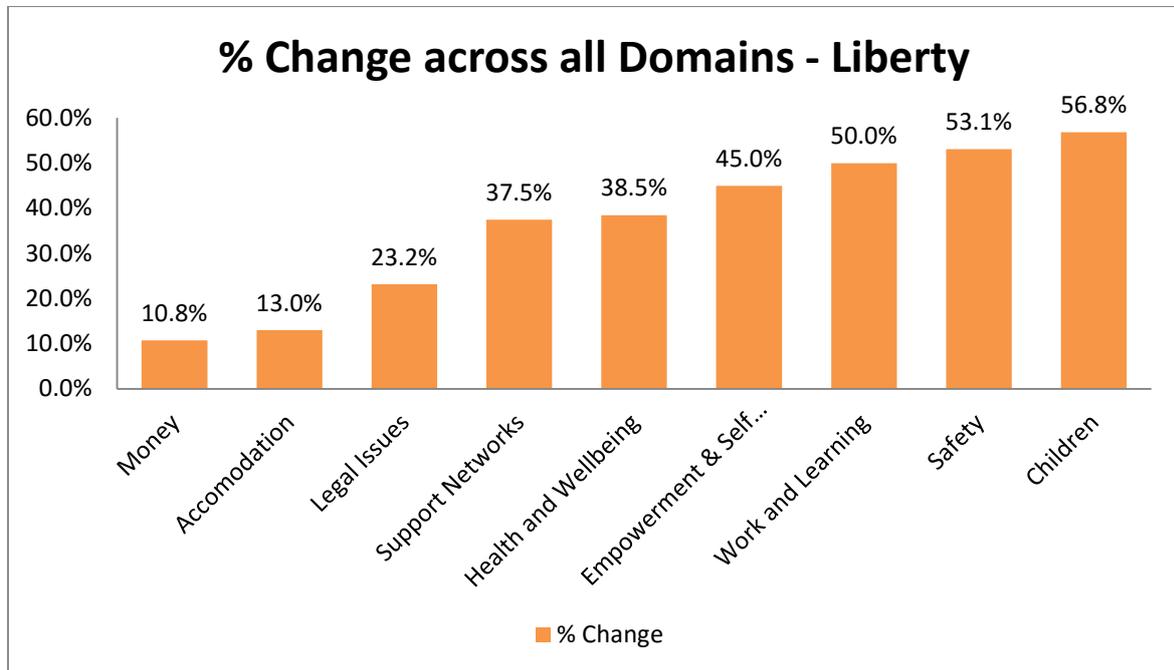
Average starting points were at 5.4 (Believing) with review scores (at 12 weeks) of 7.1 (Learning and rebuilding). This is a change of 1.8 or over 33% positive change across all domains.



Biggest improvements were seen in safety and children which is in line with the desired outcomes identified for the Liberty Programme. Work and learning showed the lowest pre score result (3.2 accepting help) and end results did not progress into the next category of 'believing'. Accommodation was the most secure at 7.7 (learning and rebuilding) which is representative of the cohort who had left the abusive relationship. Money showed the least progress with only a 0.7 (10.8%) improvement between pre and post scores. This identifies to us there is a need to be

looking at post course interventions which build upon improvements in the 'work and learning' domain to improve their employability skills therefore leading to better financial security.

An analysis on average % improvement across all domains can be found below;



APPENDIX 1

Study 1

Exploring role of liberty program on Negative Emotion in Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence: Shame, Guilt, and psychological distress

Background

Previous studies have found significant association of shame and guilt with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among women who had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). Studies have found shame, guilt distress, and guilt cognitions as relevant features of PTSD. Despite the argument for significant correlations addressing these issues, the evidence regarding intervention strategies for dealing these symptoms is lacking.

Methods

Present study retrospectively examined the impact of liberty program on the shame, guilt and psychological distress in female victims of intimate partner violence. Thirty-eight victims of IPV attended liberty program from 1994-2004 in Goldington Family Centre (GFC), Bedford, UK were analyzed. Scale assessing guilt, shame and distress used 0-6 score where lower score represent lesser severity of variable. Group sessions were delivered by trained counselors and therapists and all the participants completed the assessments before and after the group sessions.

Results

Negative emotions and symptoms were assessed before and after 12 weeks attending liberty group sessions. Results revealed that Shame and guilt proneness had significant reduction ($p < 0.001$) with psychological distress ($p < 0.0001$). Our results suggest that avoidant symptoms might decrease earlier than other distress symptoms during the initial phase and acceptance play an important role in the initial change of negative emotions.

Conclusion

Liberty support group is an effective approach to deal with negative emotions and distress among female victims of IPV, and is likely to be an important component of any evidenced-based approach to intervention.

Study 2

A quasi-experimental retrospective evaluation of liberty support group on Stress, depression, and hopelessness in women who are victims of domestic violence.

Abstract

OBJECTIVE:

To evaluate the impact of liberty support program on stress, depression, and hopelessness in women experienced domestic violence.

METHODS:

This retrospective study, in which the self-administered stress scale, the depression and the hopelessness scale were used, included 67 women at before and after the 6 months of liberty

support group. Liberty programs aim to improve overall wellbeing of female participants who are victim of domestic violence.

Results

In the first assessment, 63% of the women had moderate or very severe stress; 52.2% had moderate or severe depression; and 62.4% had moderate or severe hopelessness, which decreased to 21%, 20% and 10%, respectively, at 6 months. All scores decreased in the sixth month. There was a statistically significant improvement favouring participants for stress score ($p = 0.000$), depressive symptoms ($p < 0.001$) and hopelessness ($p < 0.001$).

CONCLUSION:

The findings of reductions in stress, depression and improved hopefulness suggest that liberty programs can have a significant positive impact for women with high need for mental health service usage, as well as saving costs for mental health services.

Study 3

Changes in negative beliefs following liberty programs for facilitating recovery after assault.

Abstract

BACKGROUND:

This study examines whether changes in negative beliefs about oneself, others, and the world occur as a result of support group intervention aimed at preventing the development of chronic mental conditions and further explores whether changes in negative beliefs during early intervention mediate long-term changes in psychology and functioning.

METHODS:

Sixty eight female assault survivors were analyzed to 24-week intervention programs. Changes in negative beliefs were examined from pre-intervention to post-intervention.

RESULTS:

Negative beliefs improved across the group. As expected, before intervention more severe negative beliefs were associated with higher initial trauma reactions and these negative beliefs generally improved from preintervention to post intervention. Moreover, for the brief intervention, changes in perceptions of self and one's safety mediated longer-term changes in trauma-related symptoms.

CONCLUSIONS:

The present results highlight the potential importance of changes in negative beliefs in long-term adjustment of recent assault survivors.

Study 4

Quality of life and symptom experience in domestic violence survivors after participating in psycho-educational support program: a retrospective analysis

Abstract

BACKGROUND:

Post-treatment survivorship has not been extensively studied, despite long-standing evidence that after domestic violence support services, women need continuing support to deal with their physical, psychosocial and safety concerns .

OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this quasi experimental pilot study was to examine the quality of life (QOL) and symptom outcomes of a psychoeducational support program for women in the first year of post domestic violence survivorship.

METHODS:

The sample consisted of 58 female survivors assigned to liberty support group. The psychoeducational support program consisted of individual face-to-face education, and small-group meetings. Study instruments were self-administered questionnaire ranging from 0-6 scale.

RESULTS:

Compared with the pre intervention, survivors in the group reported higher QOL overall and higher emotional well-being. The intervention group reported lower psychological symptom distress than the pre enrolment.

CONCLUSIONS:

A psychoeducational support program may promote a better overall QOL and symptom experience in transition to survivorship among female domestic violence survivors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE:

Support groups are in a position to provide education and support to assist violence survivors in managing their symptoms and adjusting to life after the assault. Research determines optimal strategies to improve survivors' overall quality of life.

Study 5

Change in knowledge, attitude and behavior of domestic violence survivors after attending liberty program: A retrospective study

This study investigated if there was any change in the domestic violence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of women after attending the support group intervention programme.

From a population of (N=108) women survivors, those who attended the liberty program in GFC, Bedford participated as quasi- experimental group.

Pre-tests were administered before the program while the post-tests were administered after the support group program. The results were analysed using pre-post analysis. The findings showed that there was a significant change in knowledge score after women have attended the liberty group for 6 months. There was however significant change in attitude and behaviour after the program. The study recommends that a support group play an important role to change attitude and behaviour.

Study also analysed the women follow up in the form of delayed post- to investigate if the behaviour of the members who promised to change positively had actually changed. Positive behaviour and attitude can only manifest in long term support provided.

This can also serve as a suggestion for further research.

Study 6

Evaluation of the effect of a liberty group program on self-esteem and life satisfaction in the women survivors of domestic abuse

Abstract

Objective

This study was aimed at evaluating whether a Liberty Group Program (LGP) improved the self-esteem and life satisfaction in the women survivors of domestic violence.

Methods

This retrospective quasi-experimental study consisted of 62 female participants from Goldington Family Centre (GFC) enrolled for liberty program. The group served as self as control. The subjects in the group participated in an 8-week L GP. Data were collected before and after the end of the program.

Results

The study subjects had a mean age of 36.81 years. The generalized estimating equation was used to compare alterations in the self-esteem and life satisfaction of the women before and after the intervention. The alterations in self-esteem and life satisfaction in the group after the LGP were significantly improved compared to the baseline. Six months later the LGP was completed, the self-esteem and life satisfaction of the experimental group continued to improve when compared with pre-intervention levels.

Conclusions

Based on these results, the LGP can potentially improve the self-affirmation, confidence, and self-esteem of the women and promote short-term life satisfaction. The results of this study provide a model for clinical evidence-based therapy, serving as a reference for related studies and evaluation of health-promoting programs, as well as improving the health and quality of care of the women experienced domestic abuse.

Study 7

Effect of Liberty support program on Self-esteem, self-control, and Emotional Well-Being

Abstract

Women participants ($n = 56$) entering a 24 weeks-long support group program completed a protocol measuring self-control, and emotional well-being. Emotional well-being was reassessed at the end of the program, and the entire protocol was completed again at 6 mo ($n = 124$). At the program's end, participants improved on all measures of emotional well-being ($P < .001$). Self-esteem and self-efficacy rose, whereas anxiety and depression fell. At 6 months, improvement in emotional well-being continued, and important self-control behaviours improved from pre-program levels.

Program effects were unrelated to demographic or baseline characteristics but strongly related to initial status. Participants who entered the program with high levels of emotional well-being or good self-control tended to change little, if at all, at later measurements. On the other hand, people who entered the program with low levels of emotional well-being or with poor self-esteem and control improved substantially.

Our findings suggest that the liberty program can promote long-term benefits in self-esteem and control, and emotional status if the program is specifically designed to provide these benefits.

Aspects of the program that contribute to its efficacy are discussed.