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CREATING SPACE FOR FAITH AND 'RACE' IN THE COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

SAFE Communities
Impact Report

FEBRUARY 2020

Jamie Pett with Huda Jawad



**STANDING
together**
against domestic violence

GENEROUSLY FUNDED BY

ef Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION

Acknowledgements

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Huda Jawad, SAFE Communities Project Founder

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ACRONYMS:

BME - Black and Minority Ethnic

CCR - Coordinated Community Response

DVA - Domestic Violence and Abuse

DVCN - Domestic Violence Coordinators Network

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

SAFE Communities - Safety Across Faith and Ethnic Communities

STADV - Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

VAWG - Violence Against Women and Girls

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Safety Across Faith and Ethnic (SAFE) Communities project has brought together groups who would not otherwise meet and is the primary source of expertise on the interconnections between VAWG, faith and ethnicity in London. Hosted by STADV, it has been running since June 2016, with core funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation since 2017. SAFE Communities is now entering a transition as it matures and seeks follow-on funding.

It has been led by Huda Jawad, an intersectional Muslim feminist. The project builds the capacity of voluntary and informal networks within faith and BME communities to respond to domestic abuse and VAWG safely and appropriately and amplifies their voices in policy discussions.

The project has worked on a complex issue in a range of difficult contexts. This meant it was impossible to know what would work at the outset. Therefore, the project has experimented with different interventions – for example giving training to community groups, coaching social media influencers and working with local authorities – and used quick feedback loops to assess their relative effectiveness. Over time, the project has evolved from one focussed on raising awareness and delivering training to grassroots groups towards one that engages different parts of the system to influence it towards better outcomes.

For this report, the TI Group interviewed and surveyed a range of partners the project has worked with. Across those partners, there was a deep appreciation for the project. The project articulated its understanding of 'what good looks like' near the beginning. This includes elements of integrity, consideration, meaningfulness, bridge building, empowerment and holism.

We found that the project was well-trusted and listened well to those it worked with. It adapted its activities accordingly and its training, advice and convening was highly valued. SAFE built a broad range of relationships and networks culminating in the Faith and VAWG Coalition. Through this work, the evidence suggests that more people feel empowered to take more effective action in response to domestic violence and abuse. As well as increasing the capability of grassroots groups, it has intervened to address weaknesses in formal provision for women from BME and faith communities playing the role of knowledge hub, broker and influencer.

The factors that have influenced the effectiveness of the project include:

- An individual who can work with diverse groups in a sensitive way, building a great deal of trust;
- A charity willing to incubate the project and give space to the coordinator;
- An existing and growing network of individuals and groups ready to learn and change;
- An understanding and patient funder;
- An advisory group who can listen and give a nudge on direction;
- A learning partner to help the project to reflect and see itself; and
- A willingness of all parties to respond to opportunities and feedback.

The project has faced challenges in responding to the demand it has generated. It has been difficult to balance working with grassroots groups with influencing the wider systems, without stretching the single member of staff too far. While there is plenty of potential for expansion, to continue this work requires sustainable funding.

“SAFE has the ability to think big. Bigger than any one organisation or cause within this area.”

ABOUT THE PROJECT

SAFE Communities is a three-year project run by Standing Together Against Domestic Violence, seeking to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls by working with and learning from grassroots BME and faith communities. Building the capacity of institutions, communities and women means these groups could become better equipped and more effective in tackling domestic violence and abuse (DVA). The only staff member is Huda Jawad, the project founder. She was joined in 2019 by part time administrative support from Sandra Madej. She is advised by colleagues at Standing Together and sporadically supported by interns.



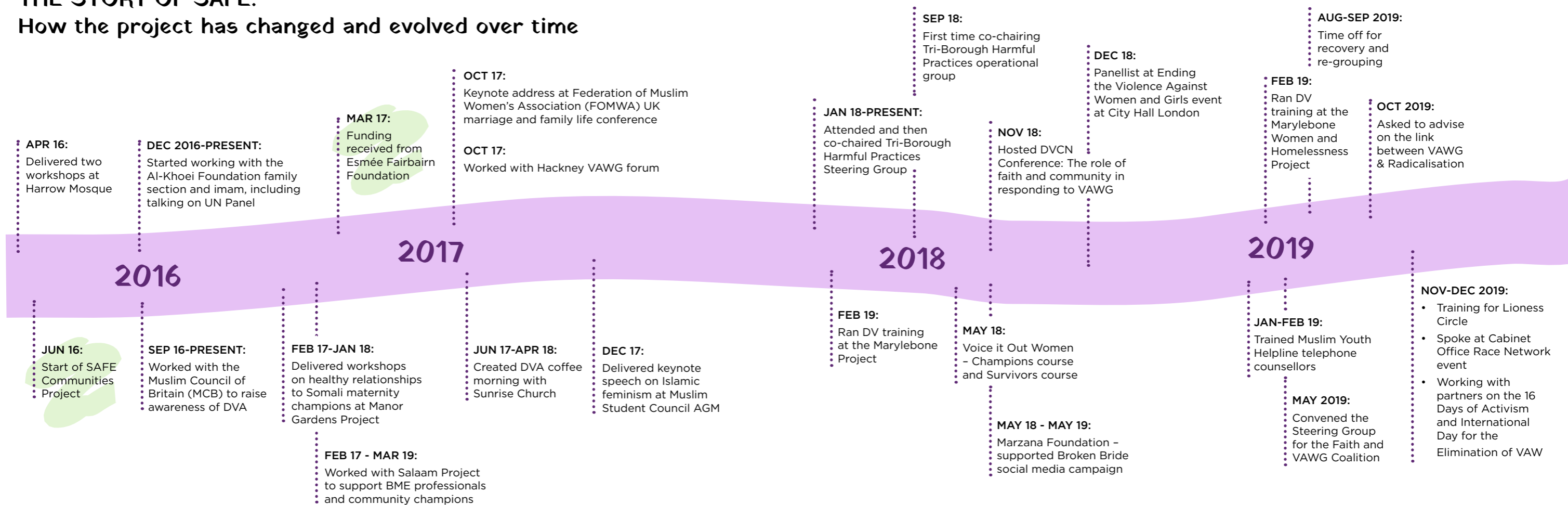
THE WOMAN BEHIND THE PROJECT: HUDA JAWAD

Huda Jawad was born in Baghdad and left Iraq at the age of two. She travelled the Middle East throughout her childhood eventually arriving as a political refugee and settling in the UK in 1988. She has a combined Honours Degree in Sociology and Psychology from Roehampton University and a Masters in International Studies and Diplomacy from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Huda has held various positions in local government, national and international NGOs and charities tackling a range of issues including social exclusion, justice, equality. From 2001-2010 she worked in the field of international relations, politics and conflict resolution.

She came into her feminist consciousness in 2011 when she was the coordinator for a research project that tracked the lives of 100 women who had left their abusive partners, for three years. She set up the SAFE Communities Project in 2016.

Huda describes herself as an intersectional Muslim feminist and is a member of Musawah, the global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. She is also a 2017 Clore Social Fellow and Co-Chair of End Violence Against Women Coalition, a leading coalition of specialist women's support services, researchers, activists, survivors and NGOs working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms in the UK.

THE STORY OF SAFE: How the project has changed and evolved over time



CONTEXT AND CHANGE: SAFE'S PERSPECTIVE

SAFE Communities Project was born out of the belief that a coordinated multi-agency response to domestic abuse is the only effective way to support survivors and hold perpetrators to account. This model is known as the Coordinated Community Response (CCR), championed by American scholar and activist Ellen Pence. This method of working with local specialist and statutory agencies is spearheaded in the UK by Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (STADV). The faith and grassroots community (as opposed to the professional community) was a missing component of the CCR model.

Analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) conducted by STADV indicates that when consulted, friends, family and other support networks often feel unable to guide, signpost or support victims. This adds weight to the view that engaging grassroots communities in building awareness of specialist support services could potentially mean the difference between life and death.

Women from black and minoritised¹ ethnic and faith communities were identified as partners in this work because they face multiple barriers to support. STADV felt that the SAFE Communities Project could be a pilot to explore these issues and engage with communities who have traditionally been seen as the sites of oppression by the majority of the women's sector. In contrast, one of the project's central assumptions is that faith and culture can be used as tools of emancipation and empowerment - not just oppression - akin to the assumptions of 'liberation theology' that was central to fighting the apartheid regime in South Africa.

One of the distinguishing features of the project is its intent to build long-term relationships with groups and communities to build their capacity to respond to DVA and VAWG safely and appropriately. In addition, the project saw these communities and groups as partners of equal power that could teach the project about how best to support survivors and work with perpetrators.

RACHEL KREngle ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER, SOCIALIST AND INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST ACTIVIST

"I am incredibly grateful for my involvement with the SAFE Communities project. The project's work training and empowering faith communities to identify and support survivors of domestic violence is desperately needed. I think what makes this project so exciting was the **approach towards faith communities. It was one of solidarity and inclusion that viewed faith and community leaders as potential partners for service providers rather than obstacles** and took an intersectional² view of the challenges facing survivors from minority faith and ethnic groups.

The **relationship-based approach taken to building networks** is something I've taken to my activism. Valuing trust, compassion and empathy as tools to build new partnerships has massively expanded my skills at building networks.

I've been consistently impressed by the scope of this work and I think it really is **only the beginning of the work that could be done**. Huda always seemed to have to decide what to focus on as there was so much demand for this kind of training and support. I sincerely hope that the sector takes notice of the learning from the project, it has the potential to revolutionise service provision for women of faith."



External Environment

The impact of the political environment on the sector and in particular Black and Minoritised community-led organisations has been well-documented (see Imkaan's ['State of the Sector'](#) 2015, and ['Capital Losses'](#) 2016 reports). Austerity, the legacy of the global economic crises and the ascendancy of nationalist politics have resulted in the loss of up to 70% of domestic abuse and VAWG led organisations. This has meant survivors have fewer lifelines of support and places of refuge.

The commissioning environment has led to further competition for scarce resources between women's organisations. The trend of illustrating what local authorities are commissioning for each pound awarded has led to an emphasis on short-term, high-risk reduction 'triage' services rather than sustained mid- to long-term support work to ensure the safety and re-building of women's lives. As a result, many bigger non-BME-led or specialist organisations have either taken over smaller specialist BME-led services or projects or created partnerships and consortia that replicate the unequal and unjust power dynamics found in society.

Another feature of the impact of austerity and the commissioning environment is the increasing erasure of specialist women-led domestic abuse and VAWG services which are replaced by non-specialist and much larger, therefore less financially risky, charitable enterprises and associations like the housing and victims-of-crime sectors.

The increasing normalisation of racist and far-right narratives within the political and the social sphere has undoubtedly had an impact on the experiences of VAWG, particularly for women from BME backgrounds. As the case of Shamima Begum illustrates, the language of feminism and women's liberation has been weaponised by far-right movements such as the EDL and the Football Lad's Alliance. Increasingly women and survivors of sexual and domestic violence are used to score rhetorical political points and win popular following by MPs, councillors, far-right and so-called liberal activists.

This is coupled with an assumption of a correlation between radicalisation and domestic abuse where it is argued that men who are likely to commit violence in the name of a political or ideological cause are also likely to be perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence. This perversely erases the visibility of women, their needs and the support they require and instrumentalises them in a bigger showdown between the 'goodies' and the 'baddies'.

All of the above is taking place in the global political context of increased hypermasculinity as a reaction to the popularisation of the #MeToo movement and the ascendancy of white supremacy as a political and cultural ideology.

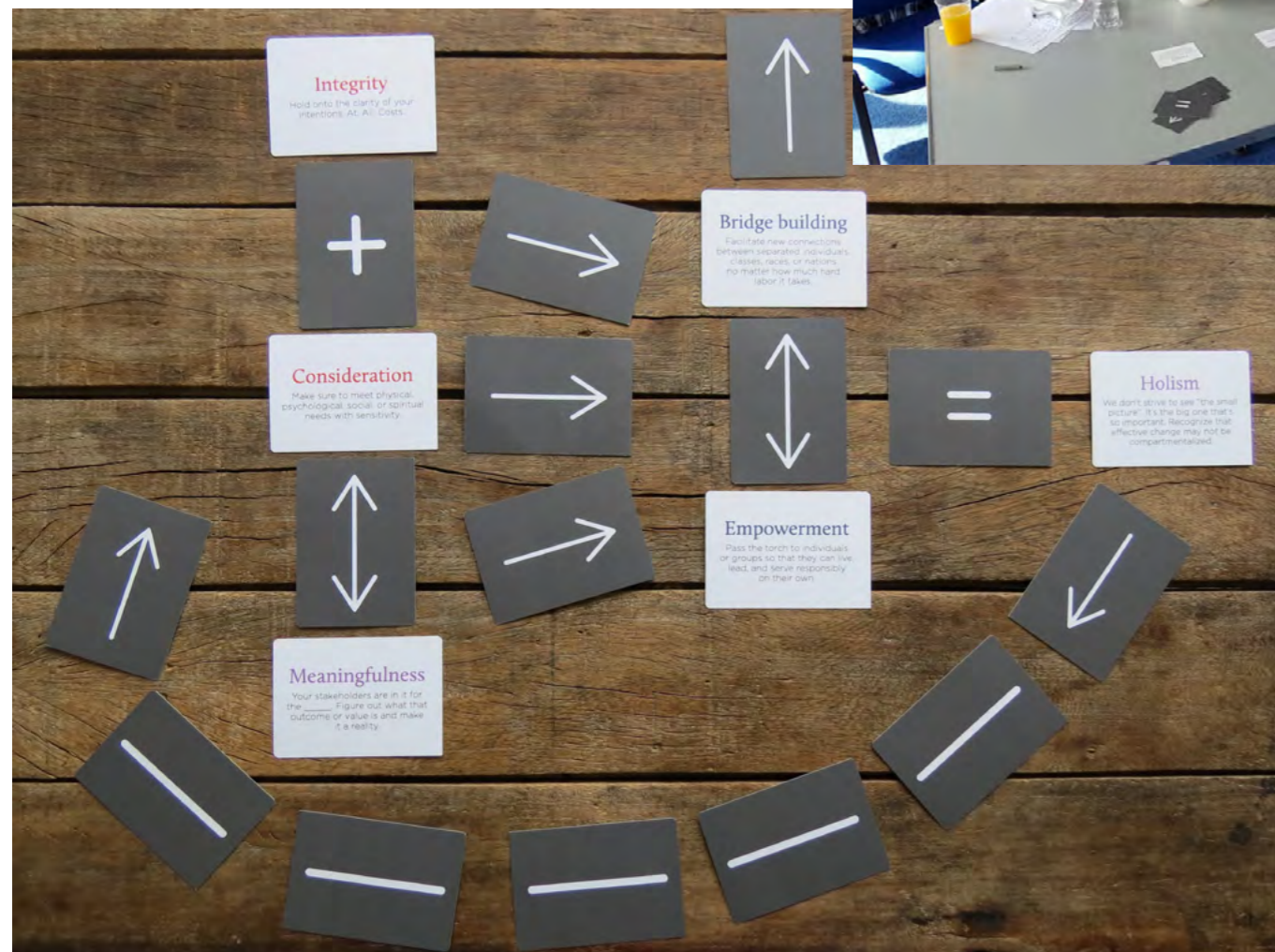
¹ Minoritised groups are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality, and gender and as a result of social constructs have less power or representation compared to other members or groups in society

² An intersectional understanding of oppression recognises that experiences are shaped by intersecting and compounding structural disadvantage, discrimination and oppression, related to sex, race, class, sexuality and ability.

APPROACH TO IMPACT AND LEARNING

What Good Looks Like for the SAFE Communities Project

The diagram shows 'what good looks like' for the SAFE Communities project. This was developed with support from the TI Group at a workshop in September 2017. Each card (integrity, consideration, meaningfulness, bridge building, empowerment and holism) has a meaning unique to this project. This is shown in the "What does good look like?" boxes in subsequent pages. The measurement and learning framework and therefore this report are built upon this foundation.



IMPACT STATEMENT: What Good Looks Like

A combination of **INTEGRITY** – honest and deep relationship building – **CONSIDERATION** – meeting the full range of needs of those affected by DVA – and **MEANINGFULNESS** – connecting with communities in ways that matter to them – are the basis for **SAFE** building trust in communities. This enables the **BUILDING OF BRIDGES** between and within community groups and DVA service providers in order to empower communities so that individuals gain confidence and know where they can receive support, help communities work together to respond to DVA and enable leaders to act on social justice issues. Thus, the project forms the final piece of the **WHOLE** Coordinated Community Response puzzle, learning what works and sharing this with humility.

THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING PARTNER AND ADVISORY GROUP

The TI Group has been the project's learning partner since the summer of 2017 when they co-developed the measurement and learning framework with a group of STADV staff. Since then, they have held regular catch-ups with Huda, offering a space for reflection, challenge and practical support. The TI Group produced learning reports in October 2018 and March 2019 that were then discussed at Advisory Group meetings and used as fodder for decision-making.

The Advisory Group consists of trusted individuals in the women's, faith and BME sectors. The purpose of the group has been to be a critical friend to the project, offering insight, advice and influence. The group met every six months, often considering a learning report developed by the TI Group. The meetings helped the project coordinator to take a step back to reflect on the project, talk about what she had learnt and deliberate on priorities for the coming months.

Sources

This report is based on:

- Interviews with partners and allies
- Survey responses (6 partners in 2018, 7 partners in 2020)
- Records of activities, including workshop feedback
- Learning Reports produced in October 2018 and March 2019.
- Notes from Advisory Group meetings

A note on numbers: Some figures in this report mix anonymous survey responses with semi-structured interviews because we wanted to understand the overall effects and reception of SAFE Communities as an intervention. It is possible that in a small number of cases the same person may have answered both survey and interview questions (the questions were consistent), but we don't think this has distorted results. As the rest of this report shows, there are consistently high levels of support for the work so there are no signs that more enthusiastic people are responded multiple times.



BUILDING ON A FOUNDATION OF INTEGRITY

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

INTEGRITY: Building trust over time, going deep with honest conversation to form relationships.

Given the sensitive nature of DVA in communities, it is paramount for the project to be trusted by those it works with. This underpins all other activity; without trust, nothing else would be possible. Furthermore, given the relative absence of 'race' and faith groups from the CCR and wider cultural factors in how these groups are perceived, trust cannot be assumed and is often absent from their experience. Survey and interview responses tell us that those who the project works with feel listened to and trust the project, and the project has created safe spaces to be candid and vulnerable.

Many survey respondents phrased this in terms of their **trust in the project coordinator**, Huda Jawad, as an individual:

"I have so much faith in Huda and how she comes across"

"I trust her a lot. I didn't leave anything out of my life story and blurted everything out in training"

"I would always get Huda on board on committees to make events work. She has passion, and understands BME communities"

Others cited their **trust in Standing Together Against Domestic Violence:**

"We trust Standing Together from working together in the past. We brought Huda in because of it."

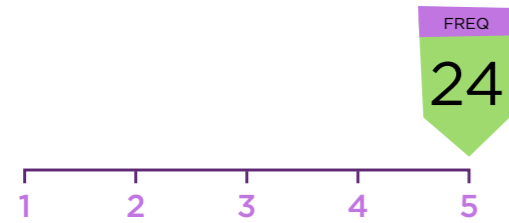
Not only did interviewees trust Huda, they suggested the project had helped them build trust with communities:

"Huda came and had meaningful conversations straight away. Huda represented a woman with the same faith background so they recognised that she understands their lives"

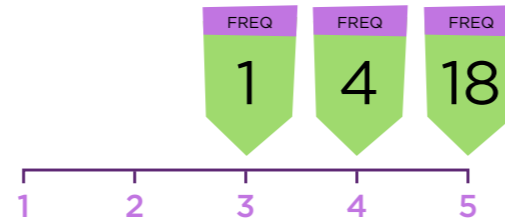
"They know the importance of understanding and listening. Obviously very important to participants, allowing them to discuss issues for the first time."

An interviewee from a **Local Authority** told us,

“The biggest barrier can be a lack of trust from communities, which can be valid. Huda helped us to hear those concerns and communicate in ways that address this. We need to work through partnerships to respond properly. It’s about framing the conversation differently. The project is strengthening the response to DVA by building links, involving a range of different stakeholders and strengthening the partnership between statutory partners and the voluntary sector. Huda is influencing who is around the table and how decisions are being made, building on a shared vision.”

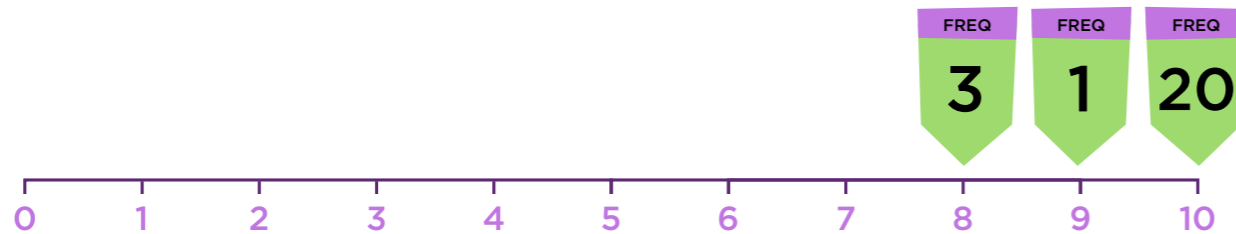


To what extent is this a project you trust?

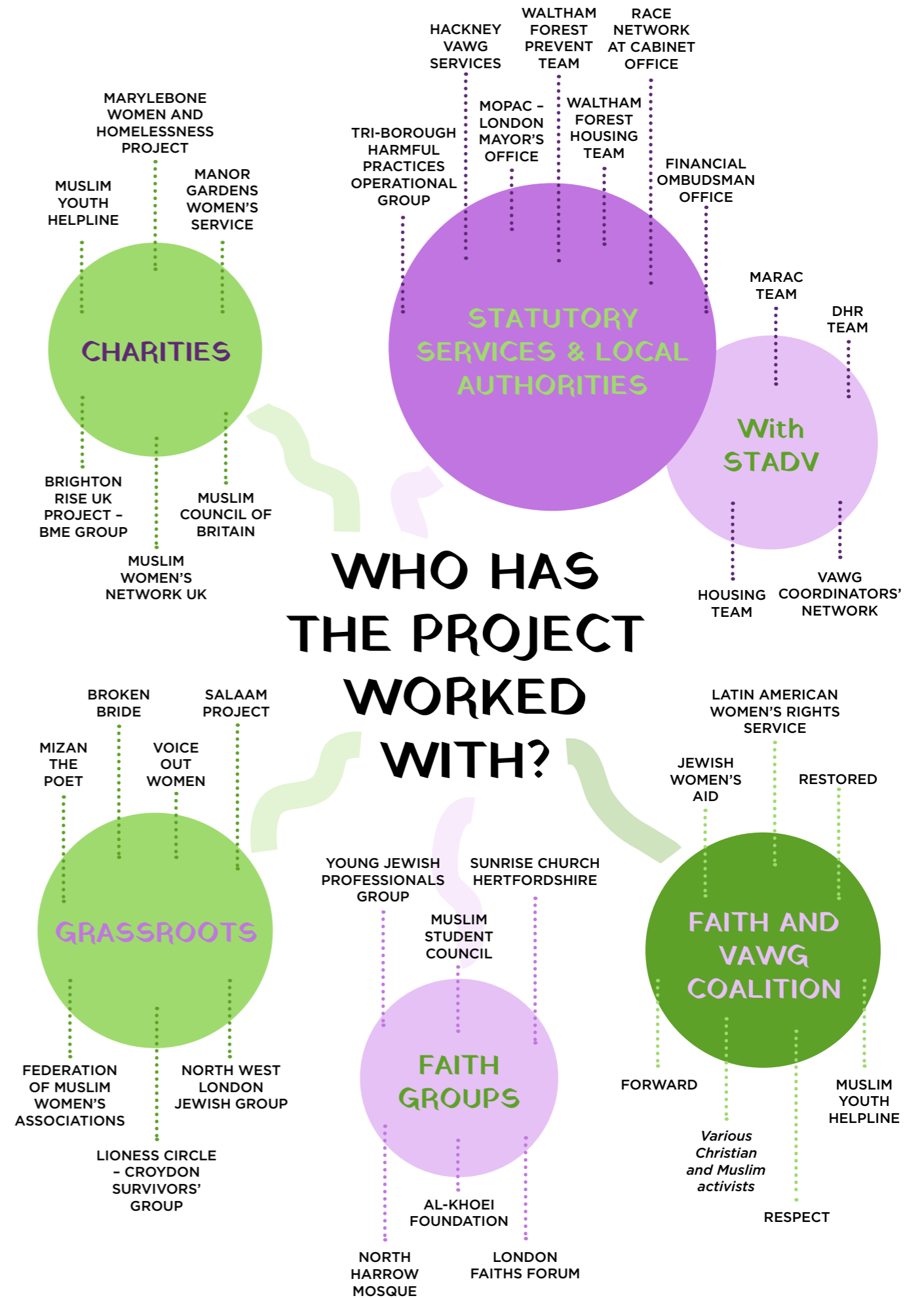


How well do you feel listened to by this project?

Everyone we asked said they were **highly likely to recommend working with the project** to other organisations like them. Interviewees could often give examples of already recommending the project, including to civil service networks, faith and survivors asking questions.



How likely would you be to recommend us to another organisation like you?



BUILDING BRIDGES

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

BRIDGE-BUILDING: Individuals gain confidence, communities work together and leaders act on social justice issues.

How do relationships start?

The project coordinator was proactive in finding people to work with in the first year. However, over time, relationships increasingly came about because of the work that SAFE was already doing, or through mutual connections.

Many people said they initially heard about the project from Huda and several others said they were introduced to the project by a friend or colleague. The Domestic Violence Coordinators Network Conference in November 2018 was the moment that some interviewees came across the project for the first time, as they were invited to speak or attend. The programme built on its own momentum: being an advisor on one project led to being asked to appear on a panel in the same part of central government, and one campaigner in particular introduced several organisations to Huda. Statutory services often got in touch via Standing Together Against Domestic Violence whereas grassroots and faith groups were more likely to know Huda directly or get in touch by word of mouth.

“Huda has been great at recruiting people, reaching out, being flexible. Sometimes leaders can be controlling and holding on tightly – but Huda is very open.”

- CHARITY DIRECTOR

CASE STUDY Mizan the Poet

Mizan is a young Muslim male activist and spoken word artist who was introduced to SAFE through The Salaam Project. In the first instance, Mizan made contact via email:

“Salaam Huda. My name is Mizan and I was referred to you by my good friend. I am emailing you because I am an activist and campaigner and recently I have organised events against gender based violence. I organised my first event on March 27th in the House of Commons on the theme of GBV [gender-based violence] and the role of men. I am looking to organise more events and I was wondering if this will be of interest to you as I am looking to work with different individuals and organisations to create more awareness about GBV, misogyny and the role that men can play in challenging these? I look forward to hearing from you.”

Huda set up a meeting with Mizan to explore his interest in gender-based violence, his experience of the topic and what led him to contact the project. After discussion, it was felt that building his capacity to be a male ally was the best course of action. This takes account of several of his intersectional experiences including the stereotypes around his ‘Muslim’ male identity, his ethnicity and his male privilege.

Mizan was mentored and supported to co-organise and host two events; a conference at City Hall, London Mayor’s Office and an event at the House of Commons. Both dealt with GBV, intersectionality and the role of men in supporting feminist-led advocacy and activism. Mizan has also undertaken several community-based satellite TV and radio shows to discuss the issue of DVA and VAWG and how to challenge the assumptions and behaviours that contribute to this in male-only contexts. Mizan was also integral in introducing the Broke Bride project to SAFE which worked collaboratively with him and received bespoke support from SAFE.

The work of Mizan was showcased at the first DVCN Conference where he was part of the panel looking at how working in a particular way with grassroots groups and individuals can lead to empowerment and lasting work to challenge and hold patriarchy to account.

What Happened?

Huda kept a record of 92 meetings and events over the course of the project. These records suggest that participants had a universally positive response to the project’s activities. Most of these meetings were with smaller groups: around two thirds of meetings were with groups of ten people or fewer, with half of these including up to five people. The majority of the meetings featured Huda in a proactive way: whether speaking on a panel, leading workshops or hosting training.



The project sits at the intersection of DVA, faith, BME and local government, as shown by the breakdown of those who attended the meetings and the network diagram on page 13.

In April 2019, as the project coordinator became much busier, the Advisory Group helped her to develop criteria to decide which groups to work with for training. This included that the activity has a clear purpose behind it, the participants being survivors and the group not otherwise being provided for. These criteria were felt to maximise the impact of training activities.

Domestic Violence Coordinators Network Conference

The project has built networks across the women’s sector, faith groups and BME communities. In November 2018, the project played host to a meeting of the Domestic Violence Coordinators Network (DVCN) on the theme of “The Role of Faith and the Community in responding to VAWG”. The conference demonstrated that the project has the ability to gather together practitioners from across a range of faith and community groups. In hosting the conference, they made a space for these individuals, groups and campaigners to highlight similarities in issues around VAWG. There were 13 different speakers, representing 12 different initiatives.

Dividing the panels into clear themes (bridge building, integrity and empowerment) helped identify areas of similarity and consensus. While the issues and contexts are different, **the theme that came up again and again was the need for all – people of faith, people of no faith, secular agencies – to educate themselves in cultural and religious nuances around VAWG.**

PARTICIPANTS SAID:

“It’s quite unique to come to an event like this. Often faith has been side-lined or excluded”

“I thought I was on my own but meeting so many different people has given me the ammunition to do this more.”

“[This has been] a space where we can look at the role faith communities can play in ending violence against women and girls”

CONSIDERATION AND MEANINGFULNESS

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

CONSIDERATION: Being flexible and learning to meet the specific needs of the communities we work with, recognising diversity in reality.

MEANINGFULNESS: Being sensitive to the community voices (not just experts), to “build a bulwark on which to land the bridge.”

Partners have experienced the project as a combination of formal events and training, and on-going coaching and advice. Both these elements have been adapted to the sensitivities of diverse groups, responding to their needs. Events and training included activities such as:

- Holding an event for a faith community around safeguarding vulnerable adults
- Reflective practice: inviting people engaged in volunteer and professional work on VAWG and GBV to talk and reflect on moral dilemmas where they were unsure on the best course of action.
- Co-chairing the quarterly Tri-Borough Harmful Practices Operational Group.
- Going to see the Home Office as the Faith and VAWG Coalition
- Speaking at the Cabinet Office about domestic violence including the extra barriers faced by non-white women.

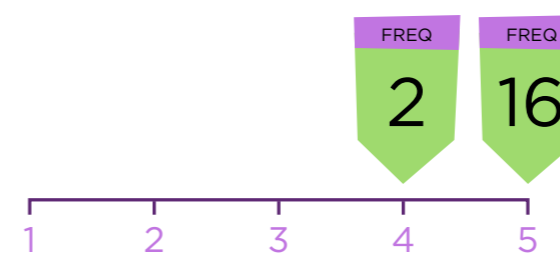
CASE STUDY: RISE Sewing Group

RISE, a Brighton-based charity that helps women affected by domestic abuse, built a relationship of trust with a group of Muslim women. They did this not by trying to raise awareness straight away, but by responding to the women’s desire to learn English through sewing. After a number of sessions, Huda visited the sewing group. The women were very engaged with Huda from when she walked in and keen to hear what she said. They saw that Huda was very knowledgeable and using the framework of their life. She was able to talk about their religion and interpretations of it, bringing a feminist perspective to the Quran. This empowered the women and built a connection between them and RISE.

There are a lot of phone calls and WhatsApp conversations which are highly valued by partners but not captured in the data. On-going conversations included:

- **Leaning on expertise** for advice and guidance on VAWG to understand how things would be received in faith communities, considering intersectionality.
- A **mentor/mentee kind of relationship:** Helping a campaigner to learn more about domestic violence and give constructive challenge to ensure the event they were organising event led to change.

Relevant and Responsive Training



To what extent do you value the training you’ve received from the project (if applicable)?

Training sessions and workshops have been the primary entry point for the project. Training feedback forms and survey responses demonstrate that participants valued both the content and delivery of training. In particular, they learnt about coercive control, different forms of abuse, the rights of survivors and their options to get help, how to engage with potential survivors by asking questions, how to refer to DVA services, the complexities of intersectionality with specific reference to BME women and some of the flaws of the support system.

What partners said:

“The presentation was fantastic... Her style of presenting was very friendly, approachable and interactive with the audience. What I liked the most was that the information that she presented was backed up with real case examples from her experience.”

“Specific, real-life based advice and information in support of the work I was doing that produced clear learning for the area.”

“It was amazing in raising awareness about DVA. Huda was fantastic and delivered the workshops to a high standard.”

What do partners value?

FACILITATION

Huda was able to make people take responsibility in getting conversations started and help them to express themselves and reflect. She was also able to change and adapt depending on where people wanted to go with a discussion.

KNOWLEDGE

Training participants appreciated learning about the different ways domestic violence can happen, including financial abuse, as well as hearing about the assistance available for survivors. One participant told us: “I now understand what happened in the past... I just thought it was normal. I now feel better equipped and can see tell-tale signs”

INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

A common refrain was that BME women and Muslim women in particular valued the perspective of someone who shared a common background. One grassroots organisation told us: “Huda just fits in with us”.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

The span of SAFE’s work meant that Huda could connect the dots. For instance, partners were happy to know others were doing something similar in a different faith setting.

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH IMPROVED PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

EMPOWERMENT: Survivors know where they can go to receive support, without losing their existing networks.

The SAFE Communities Project has helped people to feel empowered to take action to reduce domestic violence and abuse. There are examples of where there has been a DVA incident and the course of action taken was better than might have been expected before involvement with the project.

Charities and other professional groups improved their support to survivors and changed how they were working through engagement with the project. For example:

“Some support workers needed extra reassurance that they were probing in the right direction. We’ve noticed that they now speak up and share more. This makes them a lot more confident to give advice and signpost people. We used to be contacted by lots of survivors and took on cases but we were stabbing in the dark. We actually know what to do now, where to send them and what to say.” - CHARITY WORKING WITH REFUGEE WOMEN

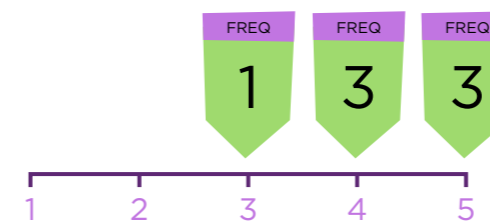
“We’re currently reviewing how to deal with DV cases in light of training. It was a bit of a lightbulb moment – we want to run a public awareness campaign about this. Huda and the team have a huge amount of expertise, while we have permission to go into communities and speak up.” - CHARITY WORKING WITH FAITH GROUP

“Your talk in February last year was the start of a drive to help get support to employees and help people deal with casework more effectively. We are also grateful for your participation in our panel event in May – ‘Everyone’s Business’, with a focus on economic abuse. This event was very well attended and help reach the important message even further” - FINANCIAL OMBUDSMAN SERVICE

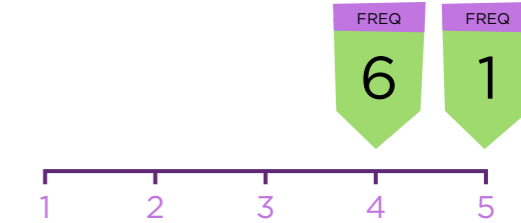
Building Pathways to DVA Services

People engaged by the project are at different points in the system and play different roles in pathways to support for survivors - from community BME groups to Local Authority policymakers. By working with a range of stakeholders, on a foundation of trust, there is anecdotal evidence that the project is unblocking routes to appropriate support and creating new pathways. For example:

“Huda gave a lot of contact details during training – even with counsellors, local ones. I’ve since done my own research.” - ACTIVIST GROUP



To what extent did our work help you create new pathways to DVA services/grow existing relationships?



How would you rate the new pathways /relationships in terms of their suitability for victims of DVA in your community?

“Anecdotally, I know the workshop led to referrals. Previously, when domestic violence was disclosed to some faith groups and youth groups, they didn’t know to link with existing services. The event has built trust that they don’t have to handle this by themselves.” - LOCAL AUTHORITY

Muslim Youth Helpline see themselves as a pathway to do this through signposting, training and professional services. For example,

“Where we do relationship counselling or engagement seminars it would be a great place to mention domestic violence support.”

How closely should we pay attention to the number of referrals?

Partners in the project recognise that referrals to DVA services are, at best, a lag indicator (it will take a long time to materialise) and, at worst, a misleading one (there could be a reduction in referrals because a community group is working in a more informed way). The project has evolved a lot since the start and worked with a number of groups, making it difficult to define which women we would hope to become more likely to disclose incidents of domestic violence. However, we can show that BME and faith groups are more aware of the options available to them, are more able to support women and have better relationships with specialist services. The project has also been working with Local Authorities to remove the perceived and real barriers to engagement with grassroots community and faith groups.

CASE STUDY: Muslim Youth Helpline

Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) is a charity working with Muslim men and women up to the age of 35. They provide a culturally and faith sensitive service on a range of issues including relationships, sexuality, porn and mental health.

After two scoping meetings MYH agreed that SAFE Communities project would provide bespoke training for their volunteer telephone counsellors on domestic abuse and some of the issues that may arise from callers in relation to domestic abuse, the Muslim faith and cultural context and how best counsellors can safely support and signpost callers towards specialist services. Huda designed and delivered two five-hour training courses to staff and volunteers. Feedback was very positive, and rapport was built with staff and the Chief Executive.

In November 2018, the Chief Executive was invited to take part in the DVCN conference. Following the conference, MYH expressed an interest in continuing the conversations, becoming a part of the Faith and VAWG Coalition.

HOLISM

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

HOLISM: The whole project functions best by connecting communities, in all their diversity, more strongly into the Coordinated Community Response. In turn, community organisations and those affected by DVA benefit from the full range of services that STADV and other bodies provide. Services also change and adapt to better meet the needs of the communities they serve, they become more aware of intersectionality.

The SAFE Communities Project is an intervention in a system that is currently inadequate for women from BME and faith communities. For example, faith groups are more likely to be seen as part of the problem and are often under-informed about how to support those affected by DVA. The project has tried to address the weakness in this system and has started to bring the voices from these communities into the discussion in local authorities and the women's sector.



Sally Jackson, Partnership Manager, Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

“Standing Together is proud to host the SAFE Communities project. All of our work centres on the **Coordinated Community Response (CCR) which recognises that domestic abuse and violence against women are everybody's business.** The CCR brings services together to ensure local systems truly keep survivors safe, hold abusers to account, and prevent domestic abuse. SAFE is an essential part of ensuring communities are integral to the response in any locality. Our work on Domestic Homicide Reviews has shown **the importance of social networks and community contacts** and we recognise that without the involvement of marginalised groups we miss both the learning from their experience and the opportunity to offer support to minoritized women.

It is often **grassroots community and faith organisations that are the only safe points of contact for survivors** and so it's essential that they are offered the knowledge and confidence to respond appropriately. There can also be specific barriers for women of faith and those from minoritised communities and we have learnt so much from our partners in this journey and continue to build on that learning through networks such as the Faith and VAWG Coalition.

Huda has **built trust and respect with community leaders and members** and we strongly believe this sustained investment has helped to develop learning both within and between minoritised and faith groups. Within Standing Together **we have been able to share that learning with our partners in health, criminal justice, social care, housing and across the voluntary and statutory sectors.**”

Where is SAFE in the wider women's sector?

Partners we spoke to suggested three main roles for the SAFE Communities Project in the women's sector:

- 1. At the centre.** In this version, SAFE's way of working with women of faith should be core of all women's sector work as it is relevant to all strands of VAWG. Having Huda at the centre (not a white European) means people come to the space with a more open, critical-minded approach. SAFE can be a hub of knowledge, an independent space, not biased by funding partners or a particular agenda.
- 2. As a broker.** SAFE can play a crucial role as an interlocutor between grassroots faith and BME communities and wider VAWG and DVA Sector. For example, the project can connect DVA services networking with survivors and charities and help different faith groups understand each other.
- 3. Influencing key players.** SAFE has influenced institutions such as local authorities who are trying to change their own culture. By building the Faith and VAWG Coalition, the project has helped to push back on negative views of faith, secure meetings with the Home Office Domestic Abuse Unit and lobby for the inclusion of faith in domestic violence legislation. Faith can emerge from a niche into an important part of the wider picture.

“It's important to acknowledge the framework in which women live their lives, including faith. I wonder what is the tension between religious feminism and secular feminism? There's a place for all of it. To work in a community-led way means working with women of faith, and interaction of faith with the rest of lives. That's why this is important.”

- CHARITY WORKER



CASE STUDY:

Tri-Borough Harmful Practices Operational Group

As co-chair, Huda has helped to rebuild the Tri-Borough Harmful Practices Operational Group (HPOG) to be a more cohesive and unified group of agencies.

The group is run by the VAWG lead at the three London boroughs of Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster. Previously dormant, when the current lead started in post in 2017, she re-invigorated it. SAFE was invited to attend and initially different representatives from different agencies came. Some agencies were absent and some, like the police, still are.

In June 2018, Huda Jawad was asked to be the co-chair of the group. It was felt that the experience and expertise developed by SAFE in working with communities and local statutory agencies placed it in a unique position to re-focus and support members to become more cohesive. In the last 18 months the HPOG has seen a number of challenges including the loss of some statutory members due to funding cuts and the reduced involvement of other partners due to lack of funds. The Group was led through a process of reflection, theory of change, problem solving, and developed a collaborative work plan to work out how each group member is best served in being part of the HPOG and what challenges arise for member organisations in being involved in this work.

The HPOG was able to award small grant funding to an organisation to carry out FGM work with men in the community. It also secured funding for a part time post to collect, classify and analyse data produced by HPOG members on work in the area of harmful practices so that it may evidence the need for further funding and strategic support,

The HPOG successfully carried out two annual conferences bringing together a diverse range of professionals, services and activists in the three boroughs to demystify practices, hear from those working with survivors and tackle issues around structural discrimination and unconscious bias in the support and specialist services.



CASE STUDY:

The Faith and VAWG Coalition

The Faith and VAWG Coalition is a partnership of organisations which seeks to build bridges between members of faith communities or faith-centric organisations and DVA specialists and organisations within the VAWG-sector. The coalition was created following the DVCN conference in November 2018. The overwhelming turnout and positive feedback suggested the need for a professional and strategic space where VAWG specialists and professionals working with faith and cultural contexts can come together. Although the work to end domestic violence at grassroots level is already rich and diverse, this coalition will allow a more strategic, regular, and structural approach to tackling the issue at hand.

The coalition aims to meet regularly and share good practice, as well as reflect on each other's experiences. The coalition has plans to raise awareness by organising events which include any professionals who regularly encounter VAWG (even if it is not their specialism), as well as launching campaigns through social media, and reaching out to relevant institutions. In the longer term, the coalition will additionally seek to establish an annual conference and generate funding for such events and campaigns. One member told us:

"I think the real magic of the project is the ability to start the Faith & VAWG Coalition. It is visionary and exciting."

Members: SAFE Communities, Standing Together Against Domestic Violence, Jewish Women's Aid, Restored, Respect, Latin America Women's Right Service, Forward, Muslim Youth Helpline, Natalie Collins, Sarah Hyde, Nikki Dhillon Keane and Marwa Belgazi.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT AND WHAT'S NEXT?

What might be the lessons for others working in this space?

A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. We cannot separate DVA from the other experiences of women such as racism and poverty. This means not imposing a framework or belief system on them and trusting them as experts in their own lives.

There have been pockets of progress in a wider system. Raising awareness and building the capacity of community groups is an important first step but is not enough to lead to a better response. The context of austerity means that if you build demand, there isn't an appropriate resource to respond to it meaning women will be let down. Sustainable funding is a luxury for generic DVA services, let alone BME services. This is compounded by the fact that there is little other work around this to build on. There are BME organisations that support or advocate for survivors but they don't do systems change or bridge building.

Sustainable change requires reform of working practice and structures within the sector, rather than relying on particular individuals in place in local authorities. The Faith and VAWG Coalition is one way to realign this response and feed into bigger change.

There have been **porous boundaries** between what is Huda, what is SAFE and what is STADV. This is a consequence of alignment but can make priorities unclear and lead to overwork. Building relationships generates further work, both in terms of activities and in maintaining those relationships. This is positive but means that it was not sustainable to continue to expand activities without further resources or more precise priorities.

The project works because of an **understanding of how power manifests in different groups and sectors across the system.** In statutory services, there is typically no organisational interest in change but there are individuals who want to shake up the system, who can be coached by the project. For example, while faith and grassroots groups are a challenge to the status quo, natural allies don't know each other and there is no mechanism (or desire) to talk to each other. The Faith and VAWG Coalition addresses this. However, even in a new coalition, there is always a need to work out power dynamics that emerge. This is why bridge building is hard; linking up is long-term, sustained work.

The **role of identity** will be important for others considering taking on this work. Huda's identity as a Muslim feminist gave her a particular affinity with Muslim women, but she has been able to work with people of other faiths and backgrounds due to cross-cultural skills. However, to specialise in these communities would probably require someone from within the community. Furthermore, there is a tension in the position of STADV in incubating such a project as a predominantly white organisation.

Recommendations

Sustainable funding to 'embed and fly': When asked what should happen next, interviewees mostly asked for 'more' - clearly showing the project has hit on a need. Thus, the challenge is not the quality of support but sustainability and scaling up the impact of the project. There is a perception that the project is only just getting started. In the words of one survey respondent the project needs "long term sustainable funding to enable the VAWG Coalition to embed and fly".

Respond to the demand created by the project: SAFE's work has generated more demand - for training, advice, convening and more - than it can reasonably meet. For example, Champions Training responded to a need and appetite from community groups but champions have nowhere to go next without support and money. Furthermore, there is a gap in equipping and enabling DVA service providers who do not have expertise to deal with faith groups.

Make the different parts visible to each other so they can link up. Some Partners told us they don't know what other work SAFE does with others or the extent of the project and would like to hear more about this. This might also mean that the issues than the project is currently holding can be passed to different parts of the sector.

If there is resource, **expand the scope.** We can see that a range of groups value the project. We don't know how widely applicable the approach is but our assessment is that, with funding, there is plenty of room for it to grow before it reaches limits. There is potential to work with other institutions and go beyond London. Recent work with public bodies and staff of government departments such as the Cabinet Office, Home Office and Greater London Authority are examples of what could happen. There are also similar needs across the UK. This could be through advocacy, training or sharing resources through a learning platform. There are already some examples of this, such as working with RISE in Brighton.

It only makes sense to publicise the project and expand its scope if it has the capacity (including funding) to respond to increased demand.

A Positive Challenge for the Evaluators

As evaluators, we have a slight unease as writing a glowing report like this. However, we have been surprised by how overwhelmingly positive everyone we have spoken to has been about the project. We didn't hear a bad word about it. This is partly a methodological challenge of working with enthusiasts for a different way of working. Innovation is by its nature different - we want to see if there is merit in this approach. We could have sought out people who would more fundamentally disagree with the project but judged that this would not help us understand whether it had served the needs of the target group well. We therefore accepted non-randomness in sampling. The weight of evidence means it's highly unlikely to be a fluke.

What's next?

STADV is planning to build on the impact of SAFE Communities by:

- Securing funding for 3-5 years;
- Hosting the Faith and VAWG Coalition: Coordinating it, building its governance and putting in place a work plan with an annual conference, resources for the sector and communities, and two annual policy briefings;
- Building capacity and supporting a further six community and grassroots groups per year for three years; and
- Building the capability and confidence of trusted and hand-picked trainers.
- All while maintaining the integrity of the project.

