



Evaluation of The Online Freedom Programme
One to one online sessions conducted between May –
October 2020.

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Introduction

This evaluation examines the efficacy of The Freedom Programme. Through a quantitative assessment, this evaluation examines the impact and outcomes of the Freedom Programme for participants of the online 1:1 programme, which was conducted over Microsoft Teams video call and telephone between May and October 2020.

Impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown.

We were unable to facilitate the programme in its usual way due to the inception of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown. Instead, login details were purchased for £12 each and given out to women who had already been referred to the physical Freedom Programme which had been planned before COVID-19. Women were contacted, given their login details and instructions given to them as to how to access the online programme on the national Freedom Programme website. The women would logon, complete each session of the programme, read the 'Living with the Dominator' online and watch the videos. They would then complete worksheets which when submitted online would come directly into our inbox. We were then able to review before having a weekly telephone or video call meeting with the woman to go through the session and work completed. This worked very well. It took some women longer than others to complete the programme due to their children not being in school, as well as other general competing demands on their time. One of the women, who was Arabic and could not speak English, needed the help of an interpreter and her sessions were completed over 2 weeks instead of one.

Aim of The Freedom Programme.

The Freedom Programme is a support group designed for women who are, or have been experiencing domestic abuse. The Freedom Programme is designed as an intervention to empower women to make positive choices about their lives by providing information and support, ideally within a group setting. It gives women an opportunity and space to develop ways of thinking and behaving to protect themselves and their children from harm.

The aims of The Freedom Programme are:

- To help women understand the beliefs held by abusive men and in doing so, recognise which of these beliefs they have shared
- To illustrate the effects of domestic abuse on children
- To assist women to recognise potential future abusers
- To help women gain self-esteem and the confidence to improve the quality of their lives
- To introduce women to other women who share similar experiences

The Freedom Programme comprises 11, 90 minute sessions held weekly and run by a qualified facilitator.

The Freedom Programme was developed in the UK by Pat Craven who works in the area of domestic abuse.

Evaluation Methodology

The information was collated using client questionnaires with qualitative and quantitative questions. For the purposes of evaluation, we added a section in relation to completing the programme online and on a 1:1 basis using Microsoft Teams and telephone discussions.

Process

- The client questionnaires were sent out via email after a woman had completed 10 sessions online.
- Participants were told there was no obligation to complete the forms.

Response Rate

There were 9 women who completed all 11 sessions. There were a number of women who had been referred but that either did not engage or could not engage due to not being able to access the programme online. There was a 100% response from all 9 women who completed the programme and attended consistently.

Main findings

The analysis was very positive. The main quantitative findings are outlined below.

- 100% of participants said The Freedom Programme had a positive impact on their lives/
- 100% of participants said that they found The Freedom Programme helpful, with 88% saying they found it very helpful.

Because of their participation in The Freedom Programme:

- 100% agreed, of which 77% strongly agreed, the programme has resulted in a positive change in their lives.
- 100% agreed, of which 66% strongly agreed, they are now more hopeful about the future.
- 100% agreed, of which 55% strongly agreed they were more assertive.
- 100% agreed, of which 33% strongly agreed, they were more confident.

- 100% agreed, of which 55% strongly agreed, they no longer blame themselves for their abuser's behaviour.
- 100% agreed, of which 66% strongly agreed, they can now make more sense of their abuser's behaviour.
- 100% agreed of which 66% strongly agreed, they now feel less alone in their experience of domestic abuse.
- 100% agreed, of which 77% strongly agreed that they now expect to be respected.
- 100% agreed, of which 66% strongly agreed, that they can now recognise and identify abusive behaviour.
- 100% agreed, of which 55% strongly agreed, that they feel they have the ability to respond to abusive behaviour.
- 100% agreed, of which 77% strongly agreed, that they could now recognise an unhealthy relationship.
- 100% strongly agreed, that they understood more about the impact of Domestic Abuse on Children.

As well as the quantitative findings, women had an opportunity to explain their reasons for selecting their answers. The main themes that emerged from the qualitative questions were:

- Greater strength and confidence – all the women felt their confidence had grown since attending the programme.
- More awareness of controlling behaviours towards them and signs of abuse.
- More hope for the future – all the women felt that they had more hope for the future.
- Boundaries – all the woman felt they now had more awareness that the abuser was responsible for his own behaviour and no one else is.
- Rollout of the programme – many of the women commented that they hoped the programme would continue for other women. One woman said she would like social workers to attend the last session of the programme to get feedback regarding service delivery. Another woman said that she felt social workers and their managers should come to an introductory session so that they had stronger awareness of how domestic abuse effects women and children.

Detailed Analysis

Overall impact of The Freedom Programme

The overall impact was very positive with 100% of those who completed the questionnaire saying that The Freedom Programme had a positive impact on their lives.

What were the impacts of The Freedom Programme?

- “Showing me the characteristics of the dominator and what they each mean”.
- “I think The Freedom Programme would be helpful pre-covid to become aware and recognise the patterns and the problem so that it can be worked on. But during the lockdown it became that much more vital to have that support and to not feel all alone during an already isolated and highly stressful time. I know how helpful the Freedom Programme has been for me! I can only imagine that for some people it helped them keep their sanity and saved their life!”.
- “Coming out of the fog and understanding the impact my ex abuser had on me and how I got into the situation I was in. It helps me understand the patterns and the signs predators look for so I can make sure I never lose track of my voice again”.
- “It helped me have a better understanding of my ex’s behaviour”.
- “Learnt about the dominator and the effect on victims and children”.
- “Getting a closer look at the Dominator’s behaviour and tactics and understanding why the Dominator behaves the way he does”.
- “I feel empowered, informed and educated about the many faces of abuse and abusive behaviour. I feel stronger and confident again. And most importantly, it has shown me that there was nothing wrong with the strong, confident woman that I used to be before my abusive relationship”.
- “The programme allowed one the opportunity to gain insight into their experience of the abuse and begin to understand why a partner may continuously behave in such an abusive manner. The programme provides knowledge and is based on research and the experience of women who have had to live with such behaviour. It therefore can make one understand that they are not alone and such tactics are common traits amongst dominators”.
- “It gave me the knowledge and tools on how to live a safer life and protect my children and myself from abuse.”.

Overall rating of the usefulness of the programme by participants

100% of course participants listed the programme as either helpful or very helpful.

Why?

- “The programme was very helpful because it provides one with information regarding what has happened to them. It is an opportunity to discuss their experiences based on the literature provided and also allows one to hear experiences of others and share their own experiences. The discussions are important even on a 1:1 basis”.
- “The Freedom Programme has been an invaluable educational tool for me. I have learnt about the many traits of an abusive person’s tactics, excuses and approaches. It has equipped me with ample knowledge of what to look for and also to have a better understanding of my experiences of abuse and what constitutes as abusive behaviour”.

- “Because it gives survivors a platform to build confidence, get support from the tutor and access any further support required by relevant agencies where possible. It also gives a better understanding of DV and why the dominator uses certain tactics to achieve control over women”.
- “I found it helpful to look out for the warning signs”.
- “I was able to identify the different characteristics and behaviour”.
- “The programme saves lives!...imagine how a victim thinks and feels when they do not know that others are going through this same abuse and they do not know that there are recognisable patterns of these abusers...then you lose hope and you think that you are the only one going through this or that you are all alone through it and often the abuser makes you believe it is your fault. If you are feeling like you are alone and the cause of the abuse you are receiving then you not only lose hope of how to find a way out of it, you do not have the perspective to stand back and see that you are not the problem and that these are recognisable consistent abuse patterns and that you are not at fault and that there are others who understand it and who climbed out and who are willing to help you out of it”.
- “Helped me recognise a bad partner”.
- “I am aware of my rights. I feel strong. I know the difference between bad man/father and good man/father”.

Which session did you find most useful?

Participants were asked which of the 11 sessions they found most useful and why.

- “They were all very insightful and useful, however, the one covering the effects on children was particularly useful due to my current situation”.
- “The Persuader”.
- “I found The Liar and King of the Castle most useful”.
- “All of it but mainly Warning Signs and Effects on Children”.
- “I found all of them useful”.
- “They all made me realise in some way or another that my abuser’s behaviour had been abusive and that these were techniques he had used to manipulate me and try and keep me prisoner”.
- “The first lesson that drives home the statistics of how frequent abuse is and how lethal it can be is an eye opener for one’s own safety and for that of one’s daughter and for other women whose life might be in danger. It creates an awareness of how wide spread the problem is and raising awareness and recognition is the first step to helping”.
- “All of them were useful and equally important”.
- “Bully, Jailer and Bad Father”.

Which session did you find least useful?

- “None!”.
- “The sessions were all helpful. There might have been more patterns I recognised as more prevalent in some of the aspects of the dominator”.

- “Not sure”.
- “None”.
- “I found it all useful”.
- “There was no session where I didn’t find useful”.
- “The Sexual Controller”.
- “I thought all the sessions were useful”.
- “None”.

Other suggestions/feedback

Participants were asked for any other comments or feedback.

- “A very well structured programme which has been delivered with empathy, understanding, facts and professionalism”.
- “It could be worth exploring to have some sessions one to one and others within a group zoom setting?”.
- “I feel this course will be of benefit to survivors of DV, or anybody experiencing DV, as it covers a lot of useful information. The Facilitator of this programme was excellent, in understanding and listening and also provided suitable access of required support where needed. Which was a great help and I am very thankful for all the help”.
- “Loved the programme. I think anyone in a dv relationship or not should do the programme. I benefitted a lot from the programme. Sharon is the best teacher ever”.
- “Sharon is so understanding. She has supported me through all my situation. I could not have asked for a better teacher. I am thankful I have met Sharon. She has given me strength and made me a stronger wiser person”.
- “Sharon has been an immense source of support. She has made me feel incredibly comfortable and safe for me to learn, question and share my experience as well as understand my experience. My weekly sessions with Sharon have been a major part of my post-abuse emotional recovery”.
- “The programme can make it seem that the abusive traits of a person are explicit and obvious but my experience was that of a very subtle process that happened over a long period of time. I think it is very important to reiterate that towards the beginning of the programme. In my opinion,, the chapter of The Persuader could be the first chapter to be introduced as it reflects how abuse usually starts and eventually perpetuates through emotional manipulation. Also, I did the programme during lockdown which meant that the group setting that I had initially signed up for was not able to happen and therefore had to be done virtually on a one to one basis. So, if future classes continue virtually then may be there could be a way of co-ordinating a virtual group class?. Not that I didn’t find the one to one sessions valuable but it would have been beneficial to share experiences with others as that was the initial set up of the programme”.
- “I felt very supported by my facilitator and was also able to contact her regarding any advice and support. My facilitator also took on the responsibility to check if I was OK after a session where I was quite emotional. I believe it is very important due to the sensitivity and nature of the situation and provides that further client care which is invaluable”.

- “My facilitator was very helpful and understanding. The pace and discussion during the sessions reflected my feelings and emotional well-being”.
- “I found the programme really helped and completing it online allowed me the time and space to complete it in my own time. I felt supported by the checking in calls with Pam and felt I was on track. Although I didn’t mind completing the programme online on my own, there were occasions when I may have found it helpful sharing resonated feeling and experiences with other women to gain and offer support. This could have been done online or on a group chat, such as whatsapp”.
- “I think there are pro’s and con’s to having one on one sessions and zoom sessions. I currently work remotely and have to attend zoom meetings all day long so I am glad in some ways this was not another zoom but it would have been nice to hear others stories”.
- “Thank you for making this available to me and other women. The information may sink in at different times for everyone, but I truly believe it makes a difference in helping us coming out of the state of confusion we have been in and helps give us tools to rebuild ourselves”.
- “I would like to see the programme extending further by adding a list of coping mechanisms. Tangible and actionable coping mechanisms”.
- “I would recommend that this programme continue and that more awareness of its existence be offered to more people. How could it be made accessible to more people without having to get so far into the Social Services system before it is offered as a help?”.
- “I would emphasis that the existence of this programme should be made common knowledge so that those who are abused can opt to seek help and so that those who know of someone who is being abused they can suggest this programme. I have had so many visits over periods of time when no one let me know that this programme was available!?. When my children were very young the social services did not let me know about it? Then later there were two more cases that we were investigated for before this programme was offered. If women could receive help it would help their children as well and there would be fewer damaged citizens out there in the world. Hopefully it would decrease the propagation of handing down abuse from parent to child and onward”.
- “Facilitator is very supportive, understanding to my situation and patient with me”.

Extra questionnaire questions relating to the online programme and 1:1 support given throughout.

- All participants said they found the initial information given to them about accessing the online programme - easy.
- All participants said they found the explanation of how the programme would be delivered, what was expected of them and what they could expect from their facilitator – very clear.
- There was a mixed response to the question of whether the participants would have preferred the programme to be run as a virtual group programme. Most participants said that although they were fine with the 1:1 sessions they would

have liked to have met other women and learnt from them. Two participants firmly stated that they would not have participated if it had of been a group as they prefer 1:1 work and would have felt uncomfortable in a group and one participant said she would have felt embarrassed because she doesn't speak English. This participant was Arabic and the programme was done over a longer period of time, with an interpreter.

- However, interestingly, all but one participant stated that having done the programme online, that they would like the opportunity to attend a physical group programme in the future.
- All participants stated that they would recommend the Freedom Programme Online to other women who had experienced or were still experiencing domestic abuse.

Conclusion

This evaluation of The Freedom Programme, is extremely positive. The programme had a deep resonance with participants and had very positive impacts on their lives. The group nature of the programme is usually a key to its success, and friendships are usually formed amongst all of the women who had previously not known each other. However, this was not possible currently due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Obviously, with the nature of the topic we were discussing, there was inevitably some women who became distressed whilst talking about their own experiences. There was no obligation for any of the women to talk about their own situations and the programme is designed so that, that is not necessary. However, all the women choose to share their experiences with the facilitators.

The women who completed the programme online were sent certificates of completion via email.

The suggestions and feedback in this evaluation are very useful when planning any future programmes. It was heartening to see how all the women, became more empowered during the programme.

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