

Supporting those affected by domestic violence

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and we've been sharing stories with our employees on how people experiencing violence and abuse can access support. Some of that support comes from organisations that we support through our social impact multiplied programme.

One of those organisations is the Freedom Project West Cumbria. In 2019/20, we provided £75k to help with counselling and running costs.

Their project manager, Vicky Pike, explains the role of the organisation and the challenges they face.

She said:

We've been providing support to those people whose lives have been affected by domestic violence since 1997. We started out providing counselling to adult victims of domestic violence.

Over time, we've been able to extend the services we provide, and we now also offer services to children who have experienced domestic abuse, as well as working with the perpetrators of violence.

We have a team of professionally qualified counsellors who provide both one to one provision and group sessions. In fact, during 2019 we were able to support more than 500 people.

However, demand always outstrips supply, and even now we have a waiting list for our services. We never leave people without support though, so make sure to have regular contact with anyone who needs us.

Vicky highlights the impact the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns has had on their services. She said:

The first few months of lockdown were quiet, but sadly our experience told us this wasn't going to last, and after Easter, our referrals went through the roof. We went from having around 25 a month to more than 45.

We've also seen more male victims, which is always something that surprises people. It was clear that the attention on domestic abuse in recent months made people realise that they were the victims of abuse.

Vicky has been with the Freedom Project for ten years. She started in an admin role, and now leads the charity's fundraising efforts, with the need to raise £200,000 year to keep the service running.

During that time, she's seen lots of different people and some very challenging circumstances. She explained:

It can be a really tough job. Some of the things we see are really horrific. But at the other end of the spectrum, seeing people turn their lives around is really rewarding.

We've seen people contact us when they have absolutely nothing and nowhere to go. These people have gone on to live successful, independent lives. Some have even gone on to careers in care, completing college and university courses and working as nurses and social workers.

Our work with children is really important, because we don't want them to see domestic abuse as the norm, and nor do we want children to think they're to blame for any abuse they see.

Sellafield Ltd is one of the charity's partners, and the company's funding allows the charity to continue its important counselling work. Vicky said:

It's really helpful to have a three-year funding deal with Sellafield. This means we have more certainty about the services we are able to provide.

We're also working to train your domestic abuse contacts, which we know will make a huge difference to your workforce.

As well as with yourselves, we have strong links with the agencies we work with and other charities in the area. This is really important to ensuring people get all the support they need – for example in securing a new home and being able to provide for their children.

Head of community and development, Gary McKeating said:

Our investments through our social impact multiplied programme are always based on evidenced need. And while a lot of our support is directed at longer term strategic investments, we also continue to support organisations like the Freedom Project who provide an immediate life line to those who need it.

You can find out more about the Freedom Project [on their website](#) and [their](#)

[Facebook page](#). You can also contact their free support helpline on 07712 117 986.

The Freedom Project West Cumbria is just one organisation providing domestic violence and abuse support that Sellafield Ltd supports. Others include Women Out West and Copeland Borough Council.