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Dewis Choice

Promoting justice for older victim/survivors of domestic abuse: Dewis Choice -A Welsh initiative

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This 'not very brief brief' explains the development of Dewis Choice, a Big Lottery funded project piloted between 2015-2019 in an urban and a rural area in Wales.

As a response to a gap in provision, Dewis Choice Project is unique in the approach it offers, it aims to learn how older people can be empowered to make informed choices about their civil, criminal and restorative justice options. In addition to the service provision, there is an ongoing qualitative longitudinal research study, which is distinctive insofar as it captures the experiences of older victim/survivors at different stages in the justice-seeking journey and illustrates how their conceptions of justice are subject to change over time.

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As noted above Dewis Choice is comprised of both a service and a research strand. The initial model for the service was developed through community- based PAR. However, as so little was known about the needs of older men and women in the context of domestic abuse, the model is a work in progress informed by the rich qualitative data from the longitudinal research element of the project.

The service Dewis Choice provides is client-centred, working with individuals, families and where it is safe to do so, harmers to support people aged sixty and over to make informed choices about their 'justice options' in the context of domestic abuse. The principal ethos of the approach is to be client-led, to integrate justice, wellbeing, prevention, and recovery work and promote empowerment through listening to older victim-survivors.

The service element of Dewis Choice consists of two Choice Support workers and a Wellbeing practitioner. Co-located within third sector specialist domestic abuse settings, referrals to Dewis Choice come via social services. Working within such

infrastructures reduces the likelihood of clients left without support and improves information sharing and inter-agency communication.

The two Choice Support workers are trained IDSVAs (Independent Domestic Sexual Violence Advisor- Safe Lives Ref), like IDSVAs their purpose is to address the safety of victim-survivors working within a multi-agency framework. However, the role is distinct from an IDVA, as workers not only address immediate safety needs, they may work together in parallel with harmers, clients and other family members adopting a whole family approach. In addition, the service involves intensive support for up to a twelve-month period for clients deemed to be standard risk according to the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour-Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist (DASH- RIC) (Safe Lives, 2014) . However should the risk increase, a safeguarding concern will be made and/or clients are referred onto IDVA's in the services within which the Choice Support workers are co-located.

The Choice Support workers not only explore civil, criminal and restorative options, they also introduce the client to a Wellbeing practitioner. The Wellbeing practitioner identifies how harmers have negatively influenced either directly or indirectly, a client's wellbeing and provides strategies to help them and their families overcome the impact of domestic abuse. The wellbeing element of the service was developed from the Community-based PAR, focus groups and analysis of client's and practitioner's qualitative data.

The Dewis Choice service provides support for all people aged sixty years and over including those who lack mental capacity. It does not, at this stage in the pilot offer support to those in institutional settings such as care/nursing homes or hospices.

On completion of the pilot project , a book will be published providing an insight into the lived experiences of the clients, two short films will be produced to raise awareness of older LGBTQ+ victim-survivors and a practitioner guidance handbook will be created which includes a wellbeing assessment tool based on the learning from Dewis Choice.

The Project is funded by the United Kingdom Big Lottery '*Big Innovation*' grant, Comic Relief and the UK Portfolio Community Fund. Big Lottery projects prioritize community involvement during the development and implementation of any initiative; hence, the funder's approach is well aligned to the client-centred ethos integral to Dewis Choice. People aged 60 years and over, victim representative groups and survivors were involved in the preparation for the proposal; the design of the service and included in Dewis Choice national advisory group. Older people provide input to the data analysis and awareness raising about domestic violence and abuse in later life.

The project has trained over three hundred volunteers of which a third are people over 60 years of age on domestic abuse and help seeking. The team have delivered training workshops and shared their findings to date with 1,437 practitioners, managers and policymakers. The project is working with Safe Lives to deliver Older People Violence and Abuse (OPVA) training across England and Wales in the coming 12 months. Follow us on @choiceolderppl on Twitter.

