

# ANGELOU CENTRE: SUPPORTING BAME VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A case study of a voluntary sector organisation in the North East

March 2016



# The Angelou Centre case study

## Supporting BAME victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence

### Introduction

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This case study focuses on a Black, Asian, and minority and ethnic (BAME) women's centre in Newcastle upon Tyne in the North East of England that supports survivors of domestic abuse. They are one of only a few similar centres across the United Kingdom providing an holistic service to women from a range of ethnicities. In this case study, we see that BAME women are some of the most vulnerable victims of abuse and violence and at the same time they experience multiple barriers to services which are meant to help and support them. The Angelou Centre provides a range of culturally appropriate services, which are informed by the barriers of race and gender that BAME women face in accessing services. These services, discussed here, are able to target those victims of abuse who need their support the most.

### About the Angelou Centre

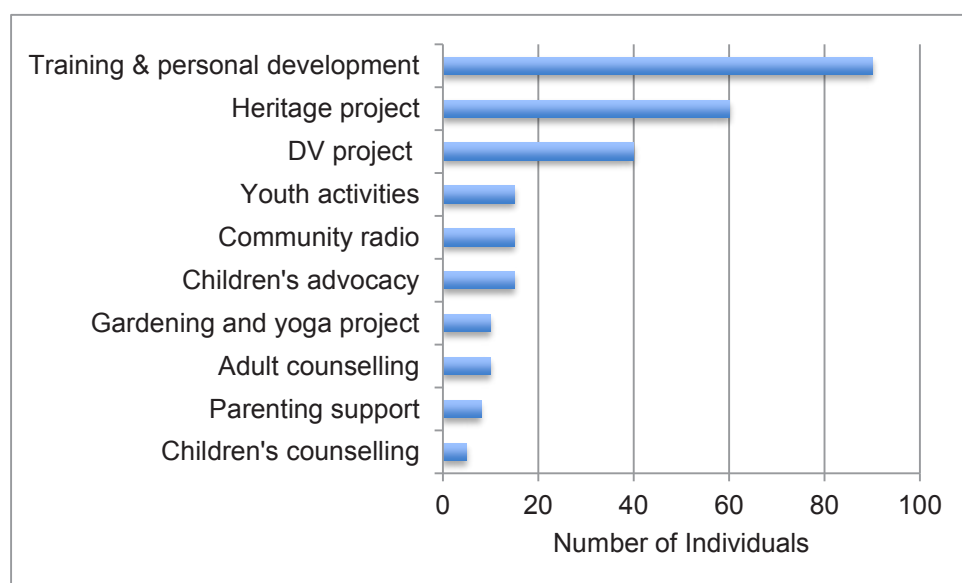
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The Angelou Centre was started in 1993 by a group of BAME women in the West End of Newcastle. The organisation was set up quite simply to build better lives for local BAME women, in an area which had a lack of services for BAME women. Universal services were inaccessible, exclusionary and presented too many barriers; women did not know where to go, language skills were often poor and responses from professionals were often inappropriate. The new organisation wanted to reach out to the numbers of disenfranchised and isolated BAME women in the local community. They started by providing training and education opportunities in an attempt to skill up women who wanted to improve themselves. They also began to speak out about BAME women's rights and challenged mainstream provision to be more accessible and inclusive.

In the early 2000s, the Angelou Centre started providing English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) courses for women who wanted to improve their English skills. ESOL classes became important for local women who needed support but who were not permitted to access community services by their families. The offer of ESOL gave women a safe opportunity to leave the house, particularly as it was delivered from a women only centre. Whilst women were at the classes, they would open up to workers or volunteers about their lives, and for some about the abuse and violence that they suffered. As time went on, more women did this and the Centre helped as best it could.

This then grew as a specialist service, as is explained in the following sections. Today, the centre provides a range of services, which are delivered by a culturally diverse team of 12 paid staff (full time equivalents) and 30 volunteers who speak Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Kurdish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Sylhetti and Urdu. They are funded by organisations such as Esmée Fairbairn, the Big Lottery Fund and the Tudor Trust. In 2014/15, the centre was used by approximately 200 women each week.

Figure 1. Weekly usage of the Angelou Centre, 2015



During their contact with local women, it became clear that BAME victims of abuse were a doubly hidden and excluded group; they were not reporting and not being picked up by universal services and even those who were, did not engage. As such there was a lack of recognition of need and little service development. BAME women often felt they were not believed when they reported abuse and sometimes felt they became suspects, particularly where children were concerned and Children's Social Care was involved. Their assessments were sometimes punitive and often reinforced the abuse that was suffered by the women, for example, with orders to place children with fathers who were the perpetrators of abuse. They also had very little experience of dealing with situations where children might be at risk of being taken out of the UK. The situation was compounded by a misplaced understanding that Violence Against Women and Girls in the BAME community uniquely fell into one of three categories: Honour Based Violence; Female Genital Mutilation; or Forced Marriage. Whilst these issues are prevalent, together they make up less than 20 percent of abuse cases being dealt with by the Angelou Centre. They found that the remaining 80 percent of cases were more complex and could not be compartmentalised into a single issue, although they may be complicated by those issues.

*“As we are not overtly a Violence Against Women and Girls organisation, we use our economic/social inclusion and personal development activities to engage a wide range of women from diverse communities. Many of these self-refer for domestic abuse once they observe other women being supported in the Centre”.*

Centre Manager

## The shared experiences of BAME women

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Women from BAME families often share common patriarchal traditions and family values. They may have very strong and enduring ties to their countries of origin which can involve rigid social control and subordination of women's rights. Women may have lived their whole lives in a form of purdah, confined to the four walls of the family home. 'Black magic', religious imperatives and emotional blackmail are used to enforce conformity and may be very deeply ingrained. Like survivors generally they may have very low self-worth, and be self-blaming and have limited knowledge of any structures of support or help. In addition to this they may be completely unaware of UK laws and sources of support to help them escape violence and abuse. The survival strategies that they develop may result in behaviour that is not readily recognised or understood by professionals from the UK. Many survivors are drawn back to the family, even where it is highly abusive, if they have no clear alternative options. The risks of this are clear, for example, South Asian women have consistently been found to be three times more likely to attempt to or successfully commit suicide than women in the general population and have disproportionate rates of self-harm and poor mental health<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, Southall Black Sisters was set up in response to 18 suicides that were suspected to be related to domestic abuse.

Source: Angelou Centre

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<sup>1</sup> McKenzie, K., Bhui, K., Nanchahal, K. and Blizard, B. (2008) Suicide rates in people of South Asian origin in England and Wales: 1993–2003. *Br J Psychiatry*, **193**: 406-9.

<sup>2</sup> Biddle, P., Moss, O., Alali, Y., and Cole, B. (2014) Evaluation of the Angelou Centre's Therapeutic Care and Support Project for Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women Victims of Honour-Based Violence, Domestic Slavery and Forced Marriages (Domestic violence), Northumbria University



## The approach

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In response to an increasing need, the Centre set up a Network For Survivors Group in 2009 with a small piece of funding from the Local Criminal Justice Board. They called this the Survivors, Engagement, Empowerment and Development project. They started it with a group of 25 women and their children who provided peer support at a weekly meeting, supported by a worker from the Angelou Centre. At this group it became clear that survivors had a common set of needs, which included counselling, one-to-one advocacy and risk planning. It also became clear that BAME women wanted to be supported by other BAME women and soon people of a range of ethnicities were coming to the Centre from all over the North East (although the highest numbers were South Asian and were from Newcastle).

It was found that BAME victims needed a different way of working than other non-BAME women; they needed family work, consisting of support for them and children; and they needed the crèche or childcare facilities, something which was already provided by the Centre. There was also a host of legal matters which needed resolving, particularly for asylum seekers and those who had come to the UK on a Spouse's Visa and this became more difficult after Government cuts to the legal aid budget. The Angelou Centre started providing legal assistance, such as advice on the Domestic Violence Right to Remain Concession and Emergency Weekly Funds for women with no recourse to public funds.

*“Women like us have been kept like prisoners, our husbands and families have done everything, controlled every part of our life so when our lives turn upside down then we don't know where to begin. The Angelou Centre has helped with everything.”*

*(Pakistani survivor)*

Following on from this work in 2012, they started a Therapeutic Care and Support Project which was funded by the Ministry of Justice’s Victim and Witness Fund<sup>3</sup>. To assist them in the development of this work, they received support and learned from another BAME women’s organisation from London, the Southall Black Sisters<sup>4</sup>, who had been supporting BAME victims of abuse for 30 years. They had developed a successful service model, recognised as best practice by the Department of Health, which combines specialist counselling with information, advice, advocacy and support work. The Southall Black Sisters model was already similar to that used by the Angelou Centre and included the delivery of specialist social welfare and educational interventions used in conjunction with therapy, designed to help women to develop a social network<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The ‘Victim and Witness Fund’ was a £9.8 million fund designed to support community, voluntary and social enterprise sector organisations and initiatives, that target and support witnesses and victims who are most vulnerable and in need of support.

<sup>4</sup> [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Biddle, P., Moss, O., Alali, Y., and Cole, B. (2014) Evaluation of the Angelou Centre’s Therapeutic Care and Support Project for Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women Victims of Honour-Based Violence, Domestic Slavery and Forced Marriages (Domestic violence), Northumbria University

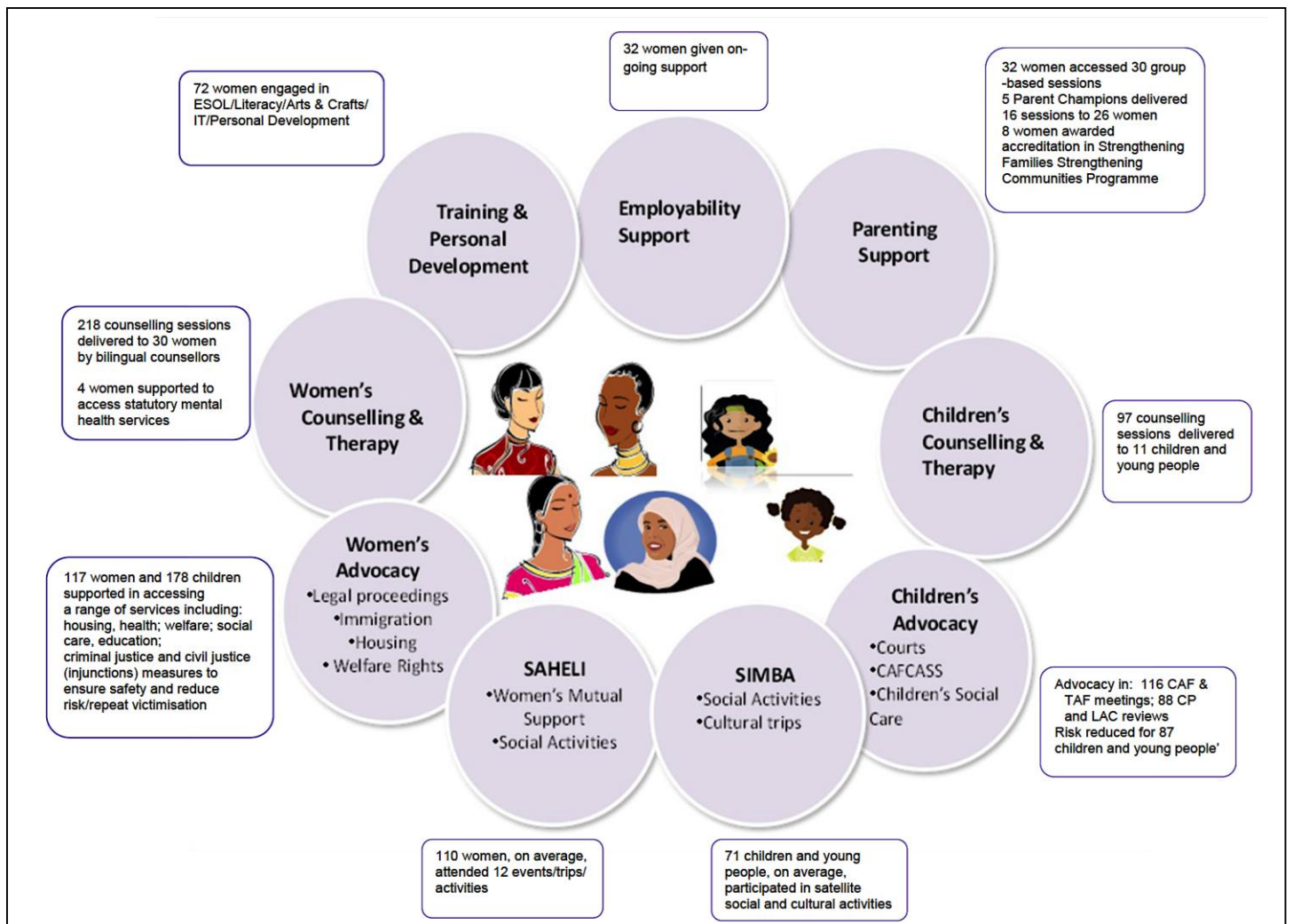
The Angelou Centre now provides BAME women with a holistic model of support, which includes:

1. **Crisis interventions/emergency support:** support into a refuge or alternative accommodation; reporting to the police; emergency funding; help with child protection issues.
2. **Advocacy:** accompanying or representing women at child protection conferences; housing; legal support; and at other local services.
3. **Practical skills:** helping women live on their own; budgeting; housing benefits; setting up a house.
4. **Therapeutic support:** helping women and children in their recovery through peer support; counselling and psychotherapy.
5. **Moving on:** skills development; training and education; and the development of a social network.

In reality, support is rarely so compartmentalised and there is some crossover, for example, they run parenting courses and economic inclusion training, which improves practical skills as well as helping them move on. Support is often provided over a sustained period of time which has been found to prevent repeat victimisation. The following diagram presents the output figures for the Angelou Centre between March 2014 and April 2015.



Figure 2: An holistic approach to supporting survivors of domestic abuse, with usage figures for 2014/15



## The impact of the work

The Therapeutic Care and Support Project has recently undergone a thorough evaluation carried out by Northumbria University<sup>6</sup>. The evaluation, carried out over three years, found a highly successful project which made a real difference to women's lives. It confirmed that the provision of the variety of activities and support was key to addressing their isolation, threatened homelessness, financial

<sup>6</sup> Biddle, P., Moss, O., Alali, Y., and Cole, B. (2014) Evaluation of the Angelou Centre's Therapeutic Care and Support Project for Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women Victims of Honour-Based Violence, Domestic Slavery and Forced Marriages (Domestic violence), Northumbria University.

problems, mental health and legal/immigration issues. In particular, women valued the opportunities to develop their social network and to be able to volunteer and help other women.

Specifically mentioned were the quality of the workers and volunteers, their deep knowledge of the cultural contexts of their issues and their warmth and caring nature. Women said they felt safe, empowered, relatively financially secure and much more able to face the future independently without fear of re-victimisation<sup>7</sup>.

The evaluation found that the project had a series of other positive outcomes including: improved mental health and wellbeing; reduced physical, verbal and sexual abuse; reduced isolation; assisted financial independence and security; enhanced parenting skills; increased access to specialist legal/immigration services; secured suitable housing; and increased access to training and volunteering opportunities.

*"I received most of the help I needed from the Angelou Centre. If I had not received this help I would have been stuck in the same place, I would not have my children living with me and they would have been living with an abusive family. I got everything I needed from the Support Workers at the Centre. If I had not come to the centre where would I have gone?"*

(Punjabi survivor)

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<sup>7</sup> Alali, Y., Biddle, P. and Cole, B. 2013. Evaluation of the Angelou Centre's Therapeutic Care and Support Project For Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women Survivors of Honour-Based Violence, Domestic Slavery and Forced Marriages, Northumbria University.



## Conclusion

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The Angelou Centre engages successfully with BAME women who have been victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence; those who would otherwise have been unlikely to access any other community based services. This is because the service is not identified with a single issue but provides many 'easy' routes to support, such as confidence building or employment support. The Centre provides women with an option or choice which offers them a credible route out of their situation of familial abuse. This is a great achievement bearing in mind the level of isolation experienced by most women they work with. Agencies like the Angelou Centre are vital to both bringing services to BAME women and countering the culturally reinforced instances of Violence Against Women and Girls. However, without sufficient resourcing from those statutory agencies like the Ministry of Justice who have policy aims tackling issues of Honour Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation or Forced Marriage, they may lack the necessary operational costs to continue their work.

## Contact details

If you would like to know more about the work of the Angelou Centre or to receive a copy of the recent evaluation, contact:

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