

**Example of a grant awarded from Funds set up with Essex Community Foundation (ECF) and that received matched funding from the Proceeds of Crime Scheme also managed by ECF:**

**Safe Steps**, based in Southend, supports women and families who have experienced domestic abuse, providing a safe place and the services needed to begin their recovery journey. Though it is not always visible, domestic violence is a problem that can have far-reaching consequences.

**Average statistics show that of the domestic homicides that occurred (year ending 2022), 33% of female victims were killed by a current or ex-partner (ONS).**

Thanks to funding from the **Ball Family Fund** and the **River City Fund** managed by ECF, Safe Steps were able to continue a project supporting families in Southend who have experienced domestic abuse, with services that are client-led and trauma-informed. In a single year they were able to respond to over 5,000 calls from people in crisis, as well as welcome 30 families into their refuge. The group are also reaching out to schools in Southend to provide 'Healthy Relationship' workshops to nearly 1,400 young people.

A second grant from the River City Fund allowed the group to set up a consultation room where families can seek refuge. The refuge has been well used as a place for one-to-one support for both women and children and as a place to discuss other needs such as finding school places and making housing applications. It is a safe space that helps vulnerable visitors in both the short and long-term.

Violence against women tends to worsen during a pregnancy, affecting about 6% of pregnant women, and 40% of homelessness in the UK is, in some form, a result of domestic abuse. Safe Steps are working hard to provide specialist services to those who have experienced domestic violence. This can be in the form of emergency accommodation for people in danger, advocacy and counselling for long-term recovery, or prevention and awareness training for the wider community. The group has a vision for a brighter future in which not only are individuals living free from abuse, but their community and support networks are safer than ever before.

**Story from a survivor:**

Mia had been in a relationship with her abuser for 20 years, experiencing emotional and psychological abuse throughout. She explained that she felt she had lost herself and had limited family and friends around her to provide support. She therefore didn't know how to live without her abuser.

Mia engaged in one-to-one support with her Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and began to identify her abuser's controlling behaviours. She subsequently ended their relationship, and support was provided regarding the stalking she experienced for months following the separation.

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Mia continued to engage with her IDVA and realised that she was struggling to identify boundaries with her now ex and had very low self-esteem. Mia received counselling from Safe Steps and engaged well in each session. At the beginning, she struggled with sharing her own experiences, however, as weeks went by her confidence increased. She said, *“Where I used to avoid eye contact, I held my head high”*.

Following her group therapy sessions, Mia said, *“The support I received has made me feel like I'm not alone and I can reach out for help if I need it. Also, that what I experienced is real and not in my imagination. I spent many years without any support. If I had sought help earlier, I could have recovered quicker and been able to put in boundaries sooner.”*

As a result of the support she received from Safe Steps, Mia was able to start a new job and was successful in getting a promotion at work.

**As well as 1:1 sessions, Safe Steps organises a wide range of activities for women and children affected by domestic violence, including play groups, craft sessions, self-esteem groups, days out, recovery programmes and counselling.**

