

***“I’ve made the first  
step”***

**A report of an  
evaluation of the  
Respect Phonenumber**

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# I INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The Respect Phonenumber for people wanting advice and information about their own or someone else's violence towards their partner(s) or ex-partner(s) was set up in September 2004. Throughout the time of this evaluation, there was a full time coordinator who supervises this line as well as other phone and internet based services for Respect, and a full time worker who takes most of the calls. The line is open for six hours per day on four weekdays per week. Enquirers can also contact the service by email or sms. The line has TypeTalk and Language Line capability enabling it to respond to a diversity of callers. The Respect Phonenumber is a member of the Telephone Helplines Association (THA) and has recently been accredited by them (Quality Standard).

From the monitoring figures for 2007, the line is receiving over 6000 calls per year from around 4,000 callers. Roughly 50% of callers are perpetrators of domestic abuse, 15% victims and 30% friends/family/professionals. The remaining c. 5% of callers called the line by mistake or with a substantial misunderstanding of the purpose of the Respect Phonenumber and are therefore not applicable to this evaluation.

This evaluation aimed to assess the quality and delivery of the service against the written model of work, for people contacting the Respect Phonenumber by telephone only, over a

three month period. Measuring long term outcomes for the callers to the service or for their partners/ex-partners or clients is not possible within the confines of a project focused evaluation such as this. The Respect Phonenumber has a clear set of anticipated possible achievements for a phone call written in the model of work. These are clearly limited: there is no expectation that one call to the line will produce lasting change in individual perpetrators. This evaluation aimed to include interviews from 10% of the callers for the three month period of the evaluation. Follow up calls were designed to elicit further information from those who stated in their initial interview that they intended to take at least one course of action as a result of the call to the line.

## **1.2 Implications of recent research**

There has been some research on helpline services for perpetrators of domestic violence and more long term rigorous research on perpetrator programmes. Both sources offer useful lessons for identifying relevant methods and considerations for this evaluation.

Gondolf (2002) found that men's offer to participate in a programme for domestic abusers strongly affected women's decisions about whether or not to end an abusive relationship. This may however result in unsafe decisions based on unrealistic expectations of change brought about by programme participation. A service for perpetrators such as the Respect Phonenumber therefore has to take into consideration

the effects on partners and ex-partners of encouraging abusive men to contact perpetrator programmes. The Respect Phonenumber is also open to partners and ex-partners of abusers, so that they can develop realistic expectations of the likelihood that their partner will change as a result of participation in a programme. It also has a model of work which prioritises safety of victims and children and has various safeguards in place for staff to follow to promote safety and to be mindful of the effects on partners of interventions with perpetrators. A focus of this evaluation is therefore assessing as far as possible the unique features of this service for victims and to identify how the Phonenumber maintains commitment to safety of victims when talking to callers who are perpetrators of domestic abuse.

A recent evaluation of a pilot of a hotline in the United States identified the value of focusing on limited expectations for such a helpline – namely to encourage abusive men to start to question what they are doing and to seek further more long term help (Roffman et al, 2008). The Respect Phonenumber has clearly described and sensibly limited aims, focused on getting abusers into programmes if possible. This is therefore a key focus of the evaluation: to find out how many interviewees intended to or actually contacted programmes as a result of their call to the Respect Phonenumber.

Practice experience and research on the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes on women's safety has demonstrated that abusive men may lie about their participation and their behaviour. Allied women's safety services are therefore essential for effective programme work with abusive men. The

Respect Phonenumber can by definition have no such parallel safety service to monitor and support the safety of the abused partner or ex-partner. One focus of the evaluation of the delivery of the model of work was therefore exploration of how safety is prioritised as a principle and practice by staff.

Evaluation of victims' contact with perpetrator programmes suggest that there is a significant group of women who do not contact any other service about their own safety and would not receive any help or advice if the programme did not give this (Burton et al, 1998; Debonnaire et al 2005)

Carrying out research activities with perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence at the time when they are seeking help means potentially coming into contact with lives at a time of great crisis, uncertainty and possibly danger. Dobash et al (2002) developed ways of maintaining safe contact with both throughout the course of many months. This evaluation is limited to three months and the participants have to give their active permission before they can be contacted. As evaluator, I followed the model of work and the guidelines in order to retain a cautious approach to making proactive contact and to follow various steps and eventually to stop if I wasn't sure it was safe or appropriate to continue trying to make contact.

## **II EVALUATION PROCESS**

### **2.1 Purposes of the evaluation**

1. To evaluate the quality of the service provided to callers, (including perpetrators and victims of domestic violence and professionals and other individuals) to the Respect Phonenumber against the standards set in the model of work and any other relevant documents.
2. To evaluate the value of the service directly to callers and indirectly to other people such as their partners, clients etc.
3. To provide a report detailing the findings of the above analysis and making recommendations if necessary about future development.

### **2.2 Evaluation methods**

1. Recruitment of interviewees at the end of as many calls to the Respect Phonenumber as possible from 15<sup>th</sup> January to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2008.
2. Telephone interviews with as many people who agreed to be interviewed as possible, up to the limits specified earlier, ideally within 7 days of their call taking place. These interviews were primarily designed to assess the content and quality of the calls and provide some indication of possible outcomes and value. The

interview scripts did not include questions about the use or experience of violence, nor ask the interviewees to identify specifically as a perpetrator or victim. Other questions were designed to make this identification. Clear identification was possible through this means with all but two interviewees who were identified only as suspected perpetrators. The aim was to try to interview a representative sample and one which has sufficient numbers of small categories of callers (e.g. female perpetrators of domestic abuse) to provide some variation. Based on analysis of 2007 figures, the proportions aimed for were perpetrators:victims:others at 50:20:30 in order to reflect the proportions of callers to the line.

3. 10 minute telephone interviews with a smaller number of people who were a subset of the first group of interviewees, approximately one month later. These people will be recruited from the first sample in order to assess in greater detail the outcomes and value of the calls. At the end of each interview, if the interviewee had identified at least one clear course of action they intended to take as a direct result of the call to the Respect Phonenumber, the interviewee was asked if they would be prepared to take part in such a follow up interview a few weeks later.
4. 2 x 45 minute interviews: one with the Respect Phonenumber Coordinator and one with the Respect Phonenumber Worker, to discuss and review how they respond to calls against the model of work. This included looking at the specific challenges of working with this particular client group, such as safety of other

parties, dealing with hostility and a lack of appropriate services to refer callers on to. It also included exploration of how the model of work is monitored and implemented by the coordinator and how the staff taking calls are supervised and supported.

5. Observing the staff taking calls. This was done by sitting in the dedicated helpline room where calls are taken but not listening in to the caller.

The service users making contact by SMS or email were not included in the sample as they are not the subject of this evaluation.

## **2.3 Evaluation tools**

The evaluation tools were drafted and amended following consultation with the staff. The resulting agreed tools were as follows:

1. Permission script for the staff to use to recruit interviewees
2. Form for the staff to use to record contact information and pass it on to the evaluator
3. Questionnaire for initial interviews
4. SPSS data analysis file to analyse the results of the initial interviews
5. Questionnaire for follow up interviews
6. SPSS data analysis file to analyse the results of the follow up interviews

The interview scripts were piloted with experienced actors who have been specifically trained to work on training courses and other services for improving interventions to respond to domestic violence. The phonenumber staff were consulted about the scripts. Feedback from the staff was incorporated into the scripts.

During the course of the evaluation some additional questions were added which were not asked of earlier callers. These came about as a result of feedback gained during the earlier interviews. These questions were about a) victims' experience of other services in comparison to the Respect Phonenumber, to identify any unique features of the service; and b) use of the internet as a source of information about services working with perpetrators of domestic violence.

## **2.4 Ethics, safety and confidentiality**

The evaluation adhered to the Respect Phonenumber model of work: I used this document as a framework throughout the process. I also consulted with phonenumber staff when necessary about general safety and confidentiality concerns.

The staff passed on only the names and telephone numbers of the callers who had agreed to take part in volunteer interviewees and any details about good or bad times to call. They did not provide any further information about the nature of the call or caller before the interview.

I consulted the phonenumber worker about a select number of interviews after these had taken place. This was for the following purposes:

1. To provide more detailed feedback on how the call had been received, on request from the phonenumber worker or if I felt that there was a specific matter which she needed to hear about immediately, for safety or other reasons.
2. To provide some triangulation of the data, by checking with the phonenumber worker what had been her experience of the call, her memory and record of what was discussed and her perception of the outcomes.
3. To identify emerging themes for the evaluation, through more detailed discussion.

## **2.5 Sample analysis**

The staff recruited 81 volunteers for interviews during the three month period, during which time 489 callers were possible interviewees (excluding inappropriate callers). This means that 16.5% of possible callers were recruited.

There were 40 main interviews carried out. This means that 8% of possible interviewees were interviewed by phone during this period.

The 40 interviewees were as follows:

- **29 interviewees were male (72.5%)**, of whom 27 were perpetrators of domestic violence and two were suspected perpetrators.
- **11 interviewees were female (27.5%)**, of whom 5 identified as victims of domestic violence, 2 identified as primary perpetrators 1 as both a perpetrator and victim in what she described as a mutually violent relationship.
- **The remaining 3 female interviewees were professionals** working with either a perpetrator alone or a perpetrator and victim in the same intervention.
- **Interviewees came from 27 different counties** in England and Wales. There were no interviewees from Scotland or Northern Ireland (the Respect Phonenumber is not available in Scotland and Northern Ireland at the time of the evaluation). The service took calls from at least 42 different counties in England and Wales during this period.
- **35 (87.5%) of the interviewees identified as “white”**, “white British” or “white English” or “white Australian”. 2 (5%) identified as “Asian”, 1 (2.5%) as “mixed race”, 1 as “Chinese” and 1 as “Persian”. Compared to the population of the UK as described by the UK Census 2001, this (12.5%) is an over-representation of non-white interviewees – the percentage of non-white UK residents is 7.9% (Office of National Statistics, 2001). The largest single non-white population of UK is Asian (4%), which is reflected here. However, the second

largest is Black or Black British and there were no interviewees who identified in this way.

- **The range of ages was from 20 to 69, the median age was 44**, standard deviation 10.62 with normal distribution such that the majority of the interviewees was between 34 and 54.
- The callers were not asked about their sexuality. From the information they gave during the interviews it was clear that apart from the professionals all those interviewed were perpetrating violence against or experiencing violence from someone of the opposite sex with whom they had or were in an intimate relationship.
- The proportions of interviewees **perpetrators:victims:professionals and others** was therefore approximately **10:2:1**.
- I observed the Respect Phonenumber in operation for approximately four hours in total, on two occasions. This included observing 7 calls and listening to the worker, not the caller.
- I attempted to contact 10 callers who agreed that I could conduct a follow up interview with them. I interviewed three of these, two men (perpetrators) and one woman (victim).

**FINDING:**

The range of callers interviewed is a good representation of the national population with minorities slightly over-represented in the sample.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Respect Phonenumber staff ensure that the monitoring of ethnicity continues and that as many callers are asked as possible.

## 2.6 Limitations of the data set

By the nature of the service being evaluated and the methods of evaluation, certain categories of people are excluded from the list of people included as possible interviewees:

- These who never got through to the Respect Phonenumber if they did not leave a message for the staff to call back.
- Those for whom the call was very short, for example, asking for a simple piece of information such as a phone number – in most cases the member of staff did not feel that it was appropriate or possible to ask these callers although a few callers who had called over something quite simple did take part. These callers are likely to be satisfied with the service they received as

the most common information requested is phone numbers for existing services, according to the staff.

- Those callers who hung up or ended the call abruptly. This is rare but does happen. These callers may have ended the call because they were unhappy with the service but some will also have been unsafe to continue, for example because they were being overheard by the abuser or someone else.
- Those callers who were distressed or angry at the end of the call – again, this does not happen often but when it does happen, it is often not appropriate to ask their permission to take part in the evaluation. However, some callers who had been angry or distressed or strongly disagreed with the worker did take part in the evaluation – approximately one third (10) of the interviewees expressed some dissatisfaction with the call.
- Those callers who refused to take part in the evaluation for other reasons. We do not know why they refused to take part: it could be as simple as not having the time or wanting to forget about the call.
- Those callers for whom the member of staff taking the call did not feel the request was appropriate for other reasons, such as safety.

The limitations were further compounded by the 50% drop off rate from volunteering for interview to carrying out an interview. Extensive attempts were made to contact all those

who volunteered for interview including the 41 for whom no interview was carried out. 12 gave false phone numbers. 5 phone numbers were answered by people other than the named individual. 5 declined to be interviewed once contact was made. Of the remaining 19, all were called from a variety of landlines and mobiles including some showing the number called from, in order to reduce the chance that the calls were refused because the number was withheld. Some had been very specific about when they wanted to be called, which meant that the opportunities to try them were very limited. All were called at least 4 times and unless indicated otherwise, at a variety of times of day.

This excluded the following:

- People who changed their mind about the interview
- People who had given a false or wrong number
- People who could not be interviewed safely
- People who could not be contacted.

From the statistics kept by the Respect Phonenumber about callers it appears that perpetrators of domestic violence are over-represented in the sample interviewed. Professionals are severely under-represented. They were the most difficult group to contact, even though they were the only group for whom a message could be safely left with another individual. Each professional listed was called at least 6 times – I tried to balance the need for data from them with not wanting to harass busy staff.

It is therefore important to read this report with these limitations in mind:

1. Unsafe, unsatisfied and quick callers are under-represented in the sample;
2. Professionals are under-represented in this sample;
3. Black/Black British callers are under-represented in this sample;
4. Non-white callers are over-represented in this sample;
5. Perpetrators are over-represented in the sample;
6. Victims are under-represented in the sample.  
Interviews with victims tended to be longer than others and the interviewees freely offered more data than other interviewees. This has provided useful data about the specific services for victims.

# III FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION

## 3.1 Source of information about the Respect Phonenumber

### FINDING

The two most common sources of information about the Respect Phonenumber are the internet and Relate.

how did you find out about the Phonenumber?

	Frequency	Percent
Valid web search	14	35.0
partner/ex	1	2.5
saw leaflet	1	2.5
Relate	15	37.5
Women's Aid	1	2.5
Police	1	2.5
Other	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

Of those who found the information via the internet, at least 2 obtained this via the Women's Aid website. Others (at least 6 – some were unclear) used a search engine such as Google. When asked what they had put into the search engine, interviewees were somewhat coy about the words used. Some stated "domestic violence" or "help with relationships". Checking with Google, neither of these would lead directly to a link to a specific page of a website about perpetrators. Putting

in “help with domestic violence” brings up links to websites about help for victims. The most comprehensive site to appear from this search is the BBC website help section, where there is a specific section on domestic violence, including a section on perpetrator programmes containing the Respect Phonenumber. Putting in “help for domestic abusers” or “help for violent men” does not lead to the Respect website but does lead (on the first page of a Google search result) to the Women’s Aid website with links to Respect. It also leads to various others sites of organisations providing very specific services which may not fulfil Respect standards of practice.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Respect Phonenumber staff investigate using appropriate methods for ensuring that a relevant Google search will bring up a link to the Respect website.

### **3.2 Relate and the Respect Phonenumber**

Relate are the agency most likely to refer clients to the Respect Phonenumber. It is good to find evidence that Relate staff know who to refer violent or abusive client to and that this information is being regularly given.

Like many callers, the men below who contacted the Respect Phonenumber after they had been given the information by Relate often had very confused ideas about what would happen:

*"I thought they would give me the service on the phone"*

*"I didn't know what to expect, I was just told to call this number"*

*"I wanted Respect to give me some thing that would allow me to go back to Relate and continue with the couple counselling"*

*"I was told they have programmes all over the country"*

[Interviews with 4 men referred to Respect Phonenumber by Relate]

As stated above, this is not unique to callers who had been given the number by Relate and of course, the interviewees were relaying the impression they had formed from their own interpretation of the information. It is possible that they were all given more accurate information by their Relate counsellor.

Relate as a national agency have done a great deal to develop the national policy and local practice for responding to domestic violence. There is a national procedure for responding to suspicions, allegations or admissions of domestic violence. There are specific domestic violence intervention programmes located in some Relate organisations and plans for more to develop. There is joint work between Relate, Respect, CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) and CAFCASS (Children and Families Court Advice and Support Service) to improve joint working, risk assessment and responses to domestic abusers and victims.

Relate and Respect staff have shared information, ideas and good practice on a range of aspects of both services.

Some Relate clients, having been correctly told by their counsellor that they cannot continue with the couples work without contacting Respect, will also misuse this service, as they would misuse a perpetrator programme, by providing inaccurate or incomplete information to their partner or Relate counsellor or both. The following quote from a Relate counsellor interviewed during this evaluation describes this:

*“my client told me and his wife that the Respect Phoneline had just told him to read some books and that this was enough – obviously I knew that this wasn’t the case as I know the service, but some people might be fooled by this” [interview with Relate counsellor]*

This counsellor was also unhappy about the net effects of the Relate policy not to continue couples work where there was domestic violence if there was no programme to refer men on to:

*“I feel that by raising expectations that there will be a service, knowing that there is none, we are risking doing more harm than good...I work to the Relate procedure and I understand the reasons for it but I do wonder what we are doing when we can’t work with a couple and there is nothing else for them” [interview with Relate counsellor in area where there is no nearby programme]*

It is understandable that counsellors who are trained and committed to helping people in difficulties in their relationships will want to find “something” to help their clients to believe that this will be better than “nothing”. Lessons from research and practice with perpetrators show that “something” can sometimes be more dangerous than “nothing” (Debonnaire, 2005). Counselling with both parties is in this category, hence the reason for the Relate policy on domestic violence and for the section in the Respect Accreditation Standard on couples and other conjoint work (see Respect Standard, 2008, [www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net) ).

However, the concerns raised by the practitioner above reflect others expressed by the staff and by interviewees wanting the services of a programme: there are insufficient programmes to meet the needs for this service and to meet the demand raised by the Respect Phonenumber. This is further explored later in this report in section 3.10.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the commendable and productive joint working and close liaison between Relate and Respect continues and builds on the links already well established. This should include attempting to improve knowledge of local practitioners about what Respect and particularly the Respect Phonenumber provides, for example, by offering to writing newsletter articles, speak at conferences or training events etc.

### **3.3 Administrative handling of the call**

Almost half of callers interviewed got through to speak to a worker first time.

**how many times did you have to call before you got through**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid first time	17	42.5	42.5	42.5
2 or 3 times	9	22.5	22.5	65.0
They called back	8	20.0	20.0	85.0
not sure	1	2.5	2.5	87.5
more than 3 times	5	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

19 callers left a message. Of these, just under half called during opening hours and just over half outside opening hours. Of these 19 callers, just over half were called back during the same day and a quarter the following day.

**FINDING**

84.2% of callers who left messages were called back well within two working days, which is the aim specified in the model of work.

**3.4 Content of calls**

Content of calls can and does vary enormously according to the needs, situation and inclinations of the caller. I observed the staff respond to calls efficiently and effectively, working rapidly and with skill to establish (as far as I could tell from

listening to the worker only) the reasons for the call and to create sufficient rapport with callers to be able to respond to complex situations and a range of needs. In many cases this was a short process, particularly when the caller simply wanted a phone number for a local programme and did not need any further information or discussion. In many other cases, the rapport required is for sustaining what can be a difficult and challenging conversation for the caller. If perpetrators have called, they may state that they want to change their behaviour, but in practice they often minimise or deny what they have done or blame someone else for it.

Content of calls therefore includes:

- Establishing the purpose of call
- Identifying if the caller is safe to talk and if so, if there are likely to be any interruptions
- Discussing history of violence
- Identifying possible options for further intervention, particularly perpetrator programmes
- Discussing how these options might work
- Carefully challenging minimisation, denial and blame, whilst maintaining engagement if possible and also being mindful of need not to increase aggression in callers
- Discussing what is meant by domestic violence

Data from interviews confirms that this range of content occurred during calls with these callers.

There are specific services provided to victims of domestic violence which appear to be unique to this phonenumber. These are explored in more detail below.

#### **FINDINGS**

Calls vary greatly in length and content.

A range of subjects and discussions can and often do take place during calls, corresponding to the model of work.

Key information about perpetrator programmes is given when appropriate, corresponding to the model of work.

### **3.5 Services for victims and female perpetrators**

Victims benefit indirectly and directly from the Respect Phoneline. Indirectly, they may benefit, whether they are aware of this service or not, if their partner takes up a perpetrator programme or considers other suitable action as a result of the call. Nearly half of those perpetrators who were interviewed intended to or already had contacted a programme by the time they were interviewed.

Some victims benefit directly from this service:

*“It’s a first class service. Clare’s been really brilliant from the start and you can tell her that from me. She helped me to understand what might happen if my partner went on a programme, remembered me months later when I rang back because of problems I was having with him again and recently, now he has left the programme and I have unfortunately had to call her again and she just picked it up from before and helped me to focus on my safety.” [interview with victim who has called more than once over the course of 18 month period]*

The following groups of women are helped by the Phoneline in ways that are difficult or impossible to find elsewhere:

1. Women who identify themselves as perpetrators but are actually victims

2. Women who are both perpetrator and victim
3. Victims who want information about perpetrator programmes
4. Victims who want to discuss the implications of a partner participating in a programme
5. Victims who want to discuss the perpetrator's behaviour and particularly any changes

### **3.5.1 Women identified as perpetrators**

Women who identify as perpetrators are unlikely to receive a service from the specialist domestic violence agencies focusing on women as victims. One of the interviewees said:

*"I don't feel I am a victim, I am just as violent as he is, I got a lot more understanding from the Respect Phoneline than when I rang the national domestic violence helpline, they said they couldn't work with me because I am not a victim"*

[interview with female caller "Sandy" – not her real name - who described herself as in a mutually violent relationship]

Sandy is an excellent example of someone who benefits from this specific service in ways she couldn't from other domestic violence services: she is admitting her own use of violence. Sandy expressed clear views and feels strongly that there is no primary victim or perpetrator in her relationship:

*“I have lots of gloriously un-PC views about domestic violence and feel that there are some people who are so annoying...I think you have to distinguish between a person who is bullying and a couple who have arguments that spill over into violence...I still disagree with the views put across by Respect on this”[Sandy]*

However, Sandy stated clearly that her contact with the service had had a positive effect on her safety. She said that the conversation she had with the phonenumber worker had led to her deciding to separate from her partner and that as a result both she and her partner were safer for the time being though “I’m sure we will get back together in the end”. The fact that she stated she had previously called the national domestic violence helpline suggests that at some level she acknowledges that she is a victim as well as or possibly rather than an equally powerful perpetrator. Sandy stated that she liked to argue and that she had enjoyed debating with the phonenumber worker. I asked the phonenumber worker about this and what she thought Sandy had gained from the call. She felt that Sandy was able to talk honestly about violence in her relationship with this service and that through that discussion, take more informed steps about her safety. She was also concerned that Sandy’s identification as an equal perpetrator could in future lead to her under-estimating the risks to her safety.

Another caller presented herself to me as a perpetrator but from the ways in which she described her experiences it appeared to me that she had used violence against a partner

as a form of resistance (not self defence) against someone who had been abusing her for many years. She said that in her call to the Respect Phoneline, the worker made it clear that she was responsible for violence she used but also helped her to focus on her own needs as the primary victim.

All the women who identified as perpetrators in the evaluation did so freely and gave unasked for information about what they had done, with very little blame. This was in direct contrast to the male perpetrators. Interviews with the staff and observation of calls provided further evidence of this difference. This sample is too small to generalise from but strongly supports findings by other research (see for example Wagstaff 2002).

### **3.5.2 Victims**

Victims who want information about perpetrator programmes are a key group of callers. The National Domestic Violence Helpline run jointly by Women's Aid and Refuge provides an excellent range of services for victims of domestic violence, helping them to discuss what has happened, to obtain information and support and where necessary a referral to a specialist service. However, this and similar victim focused services are not designed to provide information about the perpetrator or about services working with perpetrators.

*“Women's Aid have been very helpful to me but they can't discuss what's going on in the programme he's on and I have really needed*

*Clare [Respect Phonenumber Worker] to explain to me why certain things are happening since he went on the programme” [interview with female victim]*

These women are vulnerable to their abusive partners giving them misinformation about programme participation. Once they are involved with a programme, information is available to partners and ex-partners from the women’s safety services associated with programmes, but before the abuser is in contact with the programme there are few if any agencies from whom victims can obtain information about programmes or with whom they can discuss their partner or ex-partner’s possible participation. There is also evidence from other evaluations of perpetrator programmes (Debbonaire, 2005) that a significant group of women living with abusers do not contact any women’s service and that without contact with a perpetrator based service these women would have no access to help or information at all. The callers in this small sample generally confirmed this: 3 women had already been in touch with specialist women’s services for responding to domestic violence before calling the Respect Phonenumber but the remaining 8 did not appear to have had any contact with other women’s services before contacting the service.

The skills and experience of the staff mean that they are able to respond appropriately to calls from male and female perpetrators and to be clear that abuse is never acceptable, whilst demonstrating understanding of how primary victims can feel driven to retaliate. They also have a good understanding, confirmed from observation and interviews with staff, of the

difference between mutual abuse and primary aggression with self defence. This means that the service is probably unique for female perpetrators.

## **FINDINGS**

The Respect Phonenumber provides services and information for women including female victims of domestic violence that they cannot easily obtain anywhere else.

This includes responses that recognise differences and similarities between female and male perpetrators and maintaining the clear message that everyone is responsible for the violence they use.

### **3.6 Quality of calls**

#### **3.6.1 Manner of call handling**

I observed the professional way in which the Phonenumber staff take calls. Calls are taken clearly and politely. Challenging takes place with respect and care, whilst not colluding.

Most of the callers I interviewed seem to take a similar view:

*“She had a very professional manner”* [interview with male perpetrator]

*“Very patient, even though I disagreed with her”*  
[interview with female perpetrator]

*“[I got] reassurance that people can change”*  
[interview with male perpetrator]

*“She was calm, well-informed, reflective and willing to explore my frustrations”* [interview with female perpetrator]

I observed the Phonenumber Worker dealing with difficult callers calmly whilst remaining focused on the tasks she was trying to accomplish.

Some interviewees had different views which reflect differences of opinion and challenges they also mentioned in interviews.

*“She didn’t want to hear my side of the story, I felt that it was biased against me”* [interview with male perpetrator]

The nature of the work means that some callers will feel this way simply because the staff did their job properly. It would be of great concern if this were done in a disrespectful dangerous or unprofessional way. I observed staff handling calls in a very professional and respectful manner, with great focus on safety even under great duress. Some interviewees who were challenged still stated that they were satisfied with the way the call was handled (see below).

## **FINDING**

Phoneline staff are clear, polite and respectful as per the model of work.

### **3.6.2 Understanding**

The Phoneline workers demonstrated a very high degree of understanding of the nature, dynamics and effects of domestic violence on perpetrators and victims. This understanding translated into insightful working with callers:

*“she said I understand how hurt and angry you felt - that makes such a difference for someone to say they understand”* [interview with victim]

*“It was good to be really honest with her, she's easy to talk to...clear constructive sensible advice... she showed understanding without colluding or condoning what I'd done. She really picks up on things others may not hear, really listens; I couldn't fault her, I've spoken to many people and she's very good - confrontational in an appropriate way”* [interview with male perpetrator]

## **FINDING**

Phoneline staff use high levels of understanding of the nature and effects of domestic violence in order to respond appropriately to callers.

### **3.6.3 Reflection and careful challenging**

I observed the Phoneline staff reflecting what was being said to them in clear ways and then carefully challenging or asking the caller to consider the impact of the behaviour in ways that kept callers engaged even though it was difficult. Some of the interviewees stated that they found this valuable:

*“The most helpful thing was me reflecting on my actions. I assumed it was normal to do things like hit a door. I found it hard to hear that this is violent and aggressive”. [interview with male perpetrator]*

*“She is very good... it was difficult...she is so sensible, pointed things out to me that were abusive” [interview with male perpetrator]*

*“I learned about how I’ve abused her [partner] and things I’ve done that are abusive like belittle her in front of friends” [interview with male perpetrator]*

*“She helped me see I’ve made the first step in acknowledging I’ve been violent and taking*

*responsibility for my behaviour” [interview with male perpetrator]*

*“The most useful thing was that I wasn't just listened to but really challenged with difficult questions which made me really think”*

*[interview with male perpetrator]*

This careful challenging is an opportunity for abusers to reflect on their behaviour as the first step in acknowledging that they have responsibility and need to change. It is heartening to hear comments like these from men who stated that they had been challenged but appreciated it and saw the need. Of course many perpetrators of domestic violence may not openly appreciate the challenges and may interpret them as hostile. Some interviewees expressed this:

*“I felt a certain hostility - no, too strong, perhaps I wasn't communicating properly so she may have misinterpreted but I felt it was emphasised too strongly that I shouldn't have thrown the cup. I felt I was being blamed more than I deserved, she didn't understand the build up” [interview with male perpetrator]*

*“She said I'd used violence and was minimising it and I don't agree. I think the violence aspect is overstated - it was quite minor and its the relationship that's the problem. she disagreed and clearly saw violence as problem” [interview with male perpetrator]*

*“She seemed to be saying it was about control...I don't think this applies to me. Society is too quick to blame an individual instead of saying ‘I just lost control and made a mistake’. I didn't hit her, I just pushed her but I had my hands at her throat. Its not just men - women do it too. She was too quick to say it was abuse and about control. I felt she saw me just as a statistic. I feel certain I won't do it again but she wouldn't hear that...I got off the call feeling worse thinking maybe I would do it again but I asked my girlfriend and she said I wasn't a control freak” [interview with male perpetrator]*

These callers represent a range of other responses to being challenged. Some of these comments actively reflect continued minimisation and denial of violence used. Clearly there is a limit to how much change and challenge can be expected during a phone call. Other comments and evidence suggest nevertheless that with some callers, such change does take place. There is a potential danger in failing to give clear messages about responsibility for violence as abusers could then tell their partners that the Phonenumber service agreed with them that they weren't totally to blame. However, there is also a potential danger in giving these messages so strongly that they result in increased aggression of the caller, which could then be taken out on the victim.

I discussed some of these with the Phonenumber worker to explore more how she judges the balance between challenging and maintaining engagement.

*“it’s always important to keep asking does the service do more harm than good and to keep thinking about what we do to keep people safe – sometimes I am not sure about the consequences and I have to discuss this in supervision... I do think it is vital to maintain a clear line, that abusers are 100% responsible...without this they can’t change anyway, as they will be waiting for someone else to change before they stop being abusive...” [interview with Respect Phonenumber Worker]*

I observed the Phonenumber staff using a range of interviewing skills to keep callers focused and engaged, even when challenging. These skills are well developed by professionals who have, as the Phonenumber staff have, worked with perpetrators on programmes. The situation of phone calls means that there is sometimes a more intense or concentrated use of these skills, particularly as there are no visual clues, no means of keeping the caller on the line and no means of checking on their partner afterwards.

*“we have to keep focused on getting them to take responsibility so that they can engage with programmes and sometimes this means reflecting and challenging in ways they won’t like...of course we don’t want to send a man away more aggressive towards his partner because of something we have said, that’s a risk we run but by being focused about getting*

*them engaged I think we help to maintain safety” [interview with Respect Phonenumber Coordinator]*

The limited model of work provides a strong set of boundaries for the work: it is not possible to carry out a complete change in behaviour and understanding over the course of one phone call and the focus is on programme engagement and taking responsibility for changing. With these aims the scope for challenging callers is cautiously limited, which helps to keep callers engaged without making them more aggressive because of what they are hearing. However, some abusers will not be ready to hear these things or will interpret reflection as argument or challenging as hostility. It should not surprise us that many perpetrators of domestic violence are unhappy when their view of their entitlements in relationships is challenged; over the course of participation in a group work programme this can be explored and constructively worked with over weeks and months, not so on a phone call. The Phonenumber staff and model of work benefit from the regular consideration they give to how to maintain the balance in the course of a short phone call.

#### **FINDINGS**

The limited model of work helps to focus the nature and purposes of reflection and challenge which should help to limit the likelihood that the challenging will result in further aggression.

The skills and reflexivity of the staff are used to review informally and formally how this works and how to maintain the focus on safety.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The discussions in line management and clinical supervision about how to maintain safety should continue.

The skills and experience of the staff should be recognised as the Respect Phonenumber service develops.

#### **3.6.4 Stimulating action**

At least four interviewees made contact with a programme as a direct result of the call to the phonenumber who hadn't intended to do so before calling.

*"I got everything I'd hoped for. She was compassionate and helped me to be able to see my problems and showed me a way I could do something about them, what more could you want. She was exactly the sort of person you'd want at the other end of the phone for this sort of thing. It's never easy having to face up to your problems but she helped lift me up and take action"* [interview with male perpetrator]

*"I felt elated, motivated and focussed at the end of the call, completely different to how I had felt at the start. It was a cathartic and empowering*

*experience to let go of baggage. I've got to the point with Clare's help to focus on what I've done and what the causes really are and that I can take responsibility for changing my behaviour". [interview with male perpetrator]*

Both of these callers had been prompted by the call to contact a programme and had done so by the time I spoke to them. Two others had done so by the time of their follow up interview. None of these four callers had intended to take part in a programme beforehand. It is important to be cautious about the implications of these findings but they suggest that in some cases it is possible for the phonenumber staff to stimulate an interest in taking a particular form of action which the caller had not considered beforehand and to help them to see the benefits for themselves as well as for others. This is a primary purpose of the phonenumber so it is satisfying to be able to identify several interviewees who appear to have reached this stage during the course of the call to the phonenumber. Further information about this outcome is explored in a later section of this report.

#### **FINDING**

Some perpetrators of domestic violence are stimulated to take action they had not considered before, particularly participation in a programme, as a direct result of the call to the Respect Phonenumber.

### **3.7 Satisfaction with call**

Interviewees were asked to rate how well they felt they were listened to, on a scale of 1 (not listened to well at all) to 5 (listened to really well). 77.5% rated the phonenumber worker's listening as 4 or 5.

**how well were you listened to?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
	3	6	15.0	15.0	20.0
	4	7	17.5	17.5	37.5
	5	24	60.0	60.0	97.5
	0	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

The two who marked the listening as 2 were interviewees who strongly did not agree with the phonenumber worker holding them 100% responsible for the violence and described this as not being listened to properly about their side of things.

Interviewees were then asked to rate how satisfied they were with the call overall, on a scale of 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). 75% scored overall satisfaction at 4 or 5.

**how satisfied were you?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	2	3	7.5	7.5	10.0
	3	6	15.0	15.0	25.0
	4	10	25.0	25.0	50.0
	5	20	50.0	50.0	100.0

Total	40	100.0	100.0
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The main complaint was lack of a local programme:

**how satisfied were you? \* what else would you have liked?  
Crosstabulation**

Count

		what else would you have liked?				Total
		VPP closer to home	something to do together	Other	Nothing	
how satisfied were you?	1	0	0	1	0	1
	2	2	0	1	0	3
	3	1	1	3	0	5
	4	3	0	4	2	9
	5	3	0	5	10	18
Total		9	1	14	12	36

The range of responses under “other” included:

- Someone to “listen to my side/both sides” or similar (4)
- Longer opening hours or quicker response (2)
- Details of success rates of programmes

Seven interviewees used this opportunity to give more detailed positive feedback about the service.

### **3.8 Suggestions for development**

#### **3.8.1 Gender of Respect Phonenumber Worker**

*“I got everything I wanted except to talk to a man - would have been good to have that option”* [interview with male perpetrator]

Very few (only two) interviewees mentioned this as a suggestion and neither was critical of the fact that they had talked to a woman when they called. At the time of writing and of this evaluation the majority of calls to the Respect Phonenumber were taken by the female full time worker. The male Respect Phonenumber Coordinator took some calls at various times such as when the full time worker was on leave or training.

Talking to a woman does not appear to have prevented the callers from talking, even those who mentioned it. From observation and interviews with staff, this does not seem to be a significant concern for people ringing the phonenumber.

### **3.8.2 Opening hours**

*“I think the opening hours should be longer”*  
[interview with male perpetrator]

Several interviewees suggested that opening hours could be longer. For many callers, the opening hours meant that they had to call at work. When the option was provided during this evaluation of being interviewed in the evening, around half preferred this and about half the interviews took place during an evening on request of the interviewee. One interviewee made the point that they couldn't leave a message for the phonenumber as they didn't want to be called back at work. This is effectively reducing access to the phonenumber for anyone who can't be called back at work for whatever reason.

## FINDINGS

Most callers were satisfied with the service they received and felt listened to well

A very small minority of male callers said that they would have liked the option of talking to a man but this did not appear to have stopped them from talking

## RECOMMENDATION

The Respect Phonenumber staff should consider longer opening hours as this would help callers who can't call or be called during office hours.

### 3.9 Outcomes of the calls

Most of the callers interviewed took some action as a result of the call to the Respect Phonenumber.

#### any action as result of call?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	25	62.5	67.6	67.6
	no	10	25.0	27.0	94.6
	not sure	2	5.0	5.4	100.0
	Total	37	92.5	100.0	
Missing	System	3	7.5		
Total		40	100.0		

The most common course of action following the call is to contact or commit to contacting a domestic violence intervention programme.

**what action have you taken?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	contacted programme	14	31.8	56.0	56.0
	thought about partner/ex referred client	1	2.3	4.0	60.0
	Other	1	2.3	4.0	64.0
	Total	9	20.5	36.0	100.0
	Total	25	56.8	100.0	
Missing	System	19	43.2		
Total		44	100.0		

The source of information about the phonenumber affects the outcome. The most likely group of men to state that they were definitely going to contact or already had contacted a programme were those who had been referred by Relate (7 out of 14 who indicated this). This group of callers has by definition already taken some steps to deal with difficulties in their relationships and therefore perhaps more likely to take up the programmes. However, some were significantly still not willing to acknowledge that they needed to deal with their own abusive behaviour.

## **FINDING**

The most common outcome for the call is that a perpetrator has contacted a programme, which took place in nearly half of the calls with perpetrators evaluated

### **3.10 Lack of a local programme**

This is a significant limitation placed on the service. The outcome of many calls is immediately limited by the location of the caller.

*“if a man rings from Norfolk or Lincolnshire or most places in Wales, my heart sinks immediately” [Respect Phonenumber Worker]*

Due to the total lack of programmes outside the probation service in large areas of the East of England and the majority of Wales, callers who wish to change their abusive behaviour or who want their partners to contact a programme can have very little positive encouragement to take this next step.

*“I am very frustrated that there is no local programme, I have had 4 clients in the last two months who needed this and I don't like having to tell them or their partners there is nothing I can do” [interview with Relate counsellor, Norfolk]*

14 out of the 31 perpetrators who were interviewed were given information about programmes. Of the remaining 17

interviewees, 10 had specifically called wanting information about programmes and all of these interviewees lived in places where there is no programme other than probation programmes for court mandated men. 4 live close enough to other programmes to consider travelling there but did not feel that this was possible.

#### **FINDINGS**

The most significant limitation placed on the service is the lack of local programmes to refer callers on to.

At least one third of the callers for whom a programme could be relevant did not live near a local programme.

National coverage of perpetrator programmes would improve the services the Respect Phonenumber provides. It would also increase the likelihood that other agencies would be able to adhere to safe practices about other interventions, such as joint work.

### **3.11 Adherence to model of work**

The model of work for the service is clearly limited and recognises that “the Phonenumber is extremely unlikely to bring about lasting change in perpetrators that use it” (Respect Phonenumber model of work). The model states that *“what we feel the Phonenumber can potentially achieve is:*

1. *Give perpetrators clear, unequivocal messages about domestic violence*
2. *Sign-post them to perpetrator programmes in their local areas, where these exist*
3. *Carefully challenge partner blame, minimisation and justifications for violence and abuse*
4. *Motivate perpetrators – both to get help and to stop their violence and abuse*
5. *Help calm perpetrators down, if they ring up angry and upset*
6. *Talk through short-term solutions, such as signals and time-outs*
7. *Sign-post (ex) partners to appropriate local and national services –some of whom will not have got any support for themselves*
8. *Encourage (ex) partners, friends, relatives and professionals who ring about a perpetrator to have realistic expectations about his likelihood of changing*

[Respect Phonenumber model of work]

There was evidence from the interviews that these potential achievements were met in the following numbers:

<b>Responses to perpetrators (31)</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage of relevant callers</b>
Give perpetrators clear messages	Not clear	
Sign post perpetrators	17	55%
Carefully challenge	At least 17	At least 55%
Motivate perpetrators to change	At least 14	At least 45%
Help calm perpetrators down	At least 18	At least 58%
Talk through short term solutions	Not clear	

Time out is a technique notoriously misused and manipulated by many men on perpetrator programmes. With weekly monitoring and contact with the partner or ex-partner, the risks can be managed and in any case the programme will aim to move many perpetrators beyond this limited interruption technique. It can be a helpful short term technique to explain to perpetrators. However, the evidence from this evaluation seems to suggest that it is not frequently explained to men calling the phoneline and that this is for reasons to do with safety and the potential for the technique to be misused.

<b>Responses to victims and others (9)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of relevant callers</b>
Sign post ex/partners	Not clear – some didn't need this	
Encourage others to have realistic expectations	9	100%

Interviews with staff and observation of the calls strongly suggests that the staff are adhering to the model of work and using great skill and understanding to do this.

### **FINDINGS**

The Respect Phonenumber appears to be operating according to the model of work

The skills, experience and knowledge needed to operate according to that model of work are considerable and very specific to the service

There is no other equivalent service for perpetrators, victims or others

The model of work is supported by the very clear line that perpetrators are 100% responsible for their own abusive behaviour and that they alone have responsibility to change. Without this clear approach, it would be difficult or impossible

to engage perpetrators in taking steps to change their behaviour.

The model of work and the good reasons for this approach sometimes mean that the callers do not feel satisfied in the traditional model of helpline callers as they may have to be carefully challenged in order for the purpose of the Respect Phoneline to be safely fulfilled.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Respect Phoneline should continue to be clear to funders, referring agencies and others that this service is primarily a route to getting violent men onto programmes for long term change and that the phoneline service is not a replacement for such programmes, nor can it exist without them. As national coverage of programmes increases, so will the demand for and value of the Respect Phoneline service increase.

### **3.12 Skills and experience of staff**

Staff were observed using specific knowledge and experience which is essential to meeting the model of work:

1. Experience of or strong understanding of how perpetrator programmes work (necessary for answering questions from all categories of callers)

2. Knowledge of basic legal responses to perpetrators and victims (although victims can and should obtain further detailed legal advice if they want to take legal action)
3. Skills of interviewing perpetrators, in particular motivational interviewing; this requires substantial experience of working with perpetrators, skilled line management and clinical supervision, understanding of the range of ways perpetrators may manipulate the discussion and how to manage this without collusion or creating additional risks for victims.

Motivational interviewing with perpetrators of domestic violence is a very specific skill which requires relevant experience and/or training and good specialist supervision. In order to be effective the staff have to be clear that abusers are 100% responsible for the abusive behaviour they use and that they alone can change this. This can and does however mean that some callers feel that they aren't getting what they **wanted** – this does not mean that they aren't getting what they (and their partners/ex-partners) actually **needed**.

### **3.13 Challenges of engaging without colluding or compromising safety: the parallels with programmes**

The challenges of running a service for and about perpetrators are similar to those faced by perpetrator programme staff.

Callers who are using abuse may lie, minimise and deny abusive behaviour they have used, they may blame their partners or appear to take little responsibility, making them difficult to engage. They may see little benefit in changing or be uncomfortable with admitting to violence, which may limit the effectiveness of any engagement. They may become aggressive during a call and take this out on their partner. There is also the added complication of the lack of a parallel women's service from whom the staff can gain feedback on the safety of the women whose partners receive the service, as would be compulsory in a Respect accredited perpetrator programme.

In a few cases both parties call the Respect Phonenumber, sometimes with each others' knowledge and sometimes without. In these cases the staff have to exercise great caution to ensure neither party becomes aware of the other's call. A perpetrator programme would have a women's service to promote separation. However, perpetrator programme workers still have to use the same skills when working with a perpetrator about whom they have received information from the women's safety service worker.

Perpetrator programmes and the Respect Phonenumber have already benefited from committed individuals considering carefully what the safety risks might be and how to remove or manage these and promote victim safety as an overarching aim.

Clinical and line management supervision are both essential features of the employment conditions for staff on this line. These were not the subject of this evaluation. Evidence from

this evaluation, however, strongly suggests that these are both effectively provided and used.

#### **FINDING**

Many or most of the challenges of maintaining safety and confidentiality for victims in this service mirror those at work in perpetrator programmes.

The skills, knowledge and supervision required for working on the Respect Phonenumber are very similar to those needed for work on perpetrator programmes and Respect is maintaining this standard for the phonenumber.

As practice and research in perpetrator programme work develop, the lessons should be analysed for their implications for the Respect Phonenumber.

## IV Conclusions

The Respect Phonenumber has a realistic model of work which sensibly limits the expectations of the service to those which are achievable in some cases, particularly focusing on encouraging perpetrators to participate in programmes and victims and others to have realistic expectations of programmes.

The Respect Phonenumber is adhering to this model of work.

Callers contact the Phonenumber from various routes, the most common of which was referral by Relate.

The majority of callers who participated in the evaluation were very satisfied with the service they received.

The most common outcome of the calls was a perpetrator of domestic violence agreeing to contact a programme. The most likely callers to take up this suggestion are those referred by Relate.

The lack of national coverage of local perpetrator programmes limits this potential outcome. There is a close relationship between the development of the Respect Phonenumber and the development of local programmes as one affects the other. The Respect Phonenumber should be seen as an essential partner of not a replacement for perpetrator programmes.

There is a clear need for more comprehensive coverage of programmes across the UK, in order to meet the demand from

this service and future increased demand as the service develops and has more publicity.

Observation of the Phonenumber calls indicates that those callers who did not take part in the evaluation were receiving services according to the model of work and with high priority paid to promoting and safeguarding the safety of victims.

This service benefits from being specialist and focused on domestic violence. It requires a particular and very specific set of skills from the staff taking calls and responding to emails etc. These skills are found in staff who have worked in perpetrator programmes. Key skills are the ability to engage and maintain engagement with someone who has used violence, challenge them about this violence and motivate them to take further action. These require substantial experience, skills and knowledge to start with and training, clear effective line management and clinical supervision thereafter.

I commend the staff and associates of the Respect Phonenumber for their skills, knowledge and commitment to the work and thank them for their full co-operation with and participation in this evaluation.

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