

# VIOLENCE REDUCTION

## Good Practice Case Studies

LB Waltham Forest  
Safe & Together

*The Safe & Together (S&T) model is designed to improve the way that safeguarding and surrounding systems respond to children affected by domestic abuse. Working with partners to put an S&T model into practice across children's services has enabled Waltham Forest to pursue a Violence Reduction approach to addressing domestic abuse that can improve outcomes for families and communities.*



### The Challenge

Data which examines the lives of young people who are identified as victims, suspects or perpetrators of knife crime indicate that domestic abuse is one of the most common factors present in the homes that these young people grew up in. [A report](#) into common risk factors for young people known to the criminal justice system in Waltham Forest showed that 52 per cent of the young people within the Youth Offending Service report experiences of domestic abuse. National and international research reflects our local evidence in revealing that experiences of domestic abuse in the family home can create vulnerabilities to exploitation and violence.

The 2017 report on the Joint-Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs) of children and domestic abuse also recommends paying more attention to the emotional, psychological and practical needs of children, moving away from a 'failure to protect' discourse with victims (as a result of which children and their non-abusive parent can become alienated from the services which aim to support them) and having greater focus on the attitudes and behaviour of perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Such findings highlighted the need for a Violence Reduction approach in the borough to include a more effective and robust approach towards addressing domestic abuse.

### Partners involved

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Respect

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### Proposed solution

In September 2019, the London Borough of Waltham Forest entered into a partnership with London Borough of Hackney and [Respect](#), a domestic abuse organisation dedicated to supporting perpetrators of domestic abuse in changing their behaviour, to implement the Safe & Together (S&T) model into practice across children's services enabling practitioners to use the model to enhance good practice and improve outcomes for families where domestic abuse is a concern.

### Approach

The S&T model is an approach designed to improve the way that safeguarding and surrounding systems respond to children affected by domestic abuse. It provides a framework for partnering with domestic abuse survivors and intervening with domestic abuse perpetrators to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children. Safe and Together has had international success<sup>1</sup> in changing children's services' responses to domestic abuse, increasing the number of children who remain safely with their non-abusive parent and decreasing re-referral rates.

Over 20 years, S&T has amassed a strong evidence-base in improving outcomes for children<sup>2</sup> in the US, Australia and Scotland. The underlying principles of S&T are that professionals engaging with families affected by domestic abuse should:

- Aim to keep the child safe and together with the non-abusing parent, promoting children's safety, stability and trauma-recovery
- Endeavour to develop strengths-based partnerships with non-abusing parents, promoting child-centred risk assessment through mutual information sharing
- Aim to intervene with the perpetrator to reduce risk and harm to the child

Learning from S&T colleagues in Edinburgh and Australia demonstrates a need for strong partnership between Children's Services (CS) and domestic abuse sectors and specialist on-site support to embed the model. Safe and Together increases the focus on perpetrators and the evidence base supporting perpetrator interventions is growing (see Mirabal Research 2015) specifically alongside parenting interventions (Caring Dads: Safer Children: Evaluation Report 2016).

The Safe and Together model is an approach designed to improve the way that safeguarding and surrounding systems respond to children affected by domestic abuse

<sup>1</sup> <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/evidence-resources/effectiveness-of-the-model/>



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While training is a crucial element of the project, the outcomes of the project are far reaching and transformative across children's services. Domestic Homicide Reviews and Serious Case Reviews involving domestic abuse repeatedly point to communication and collaboration failures in the multi-agency system. The S&T model is strongly focused on improving multi-agency working so that victims and their children receive more consistent support

A 2012 evaluation undertaken in Florida six months after implementation of S&T showed increased identification of DA (up almost 60 per cent); a decrease in children becoming looked after (down by more than 50 per cent); and a decrease in percentage of repeat referrals (down 48 per cent). An evaluation undertaken in Edinburgh in 2017 showed significant changes in the approaches and competence of staff trained in S&T.

### Desired outcomes

Positive outcomes for children are achieved through refocusing children's services' response to domestic abuse to effectively link child and survivor recovery interventions with perpetrator change and parenting services, and strengthening partnership working and cross-system collaboration. The expected outcomes for children through embedding the Safe and Together model of practice, include:

- a) Reduction in children subject to Child Protection Plans and/or looked after because of domestic abuse.
- b) Reduction in the number of children being repeatedly exposed to domestic abuse (shown through repeat referral data).
- c) Better engagement with perpetrators of domestic abuse to change behaviour change and improve parenting/fathering.
- d) Children's voices and experience of domestic abuse and identified needs feature strongly in case planning and consideration of recovery interventions.
- e) Increased social and youth work domestic abuse competency.

The model has become the preferred system by the Scottish Government with an ongoing integration in Scotland between Safe and Together Children's Social Work and Criminal Justice Social Work. Greater Manchester have also invested in Safe and Together, training practitioners across the area. Domestic Abuse Commissioner Nicole Jacobs is an advocate and spoke at the Waltham Forest Safe and Together launch in September 2019.

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### Current picture

Support and guidance was offered to practitioners across the borough in the form of training sessions and case consultations. To date, the project has achieved:

- General advice: this has been offered on 94 occasions
- Consultations: 188 case consultations have been held with practitioners across children's services and some of our VAWG partners
- Training:
  - 57 practitioners have completed the full 4-day Safe & Together Core training
  - Over 200 practitioners across children's services, health, police, housing, schools and the VAWG partnership have attended a 1-hour briefing on the Safe & Together Model.
- Covid-19 response: a webinar was developed to support practitioners around how to work safely with families where domestic abuse has been identified. The webinars were attended by 142 practitioners across children's services.
- Nine staff members across the Partnership have completed the S&T 'Train the Trainer' certification enabling them to arrange delivery of the core training internally. This approach allowed us to save costs and has equipped us to offer training to other local authorities and organisations.

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### Learning

- One of the main concepts of the S&T work is to frame the model as a supportive one and ensure that practitioners do not feel that they are being blamed for their practice prior to the introduction of the S&T Model. This message has been beneficial in ensuring practitioners felt supported and not scrutinised by this work.
- The importance of pairing the offer of training to practitioners, along with case consultations in order to support in embedding the S&T Model, has become apparent throughout our work. While the training provided practitioners with the framework they needed to practice in an informed way, the consultations provide them with further guidance around how to use the S&T model's principles, components and tools to support them in their practice with specific families.
- The S&T Implementation Lead is developing a small team of Safe and Together Champions who are will begin to supplement the IL's role in providing case consultations. This will support increasing capacity for case consultations as meeting this demand has been a big challenge. This approach will ensure that practitioners across Waltham Forest will be able to access guidance on their cases in a timely manner from several individuals without the need to rely on one specialist only.
- Covid-19 has had a major impact on our ability to continue to deliver training sessions planned through 2020. As a result, we adapted our approach and explore several options for virtual training delivery into 2021
- The steering group initially established for the development of this project allowed us to continuously develop the project to meet demand and to respond to the challenge of Covid-19 more effectively.

### Next steps:

- A full evaluation conducted by Stirling University around the implementation of the Safe & Together model
- Audits will be conducted to measure the impact of the implementation of the Safe & Together model in Waltham Forest over the last year
- Training will continue to be offered to practitioners working across the borough
- Training opportunities will also be offered to other local authorities and organisations
- Learning to be disseminated through an event in spring 2021

### Contact



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Reduction

*This is one of a series of case studies submitted by London boroughs and collated by London Councils to share experience and learning across the capital. Publication date: May 2021*