

Tower Hamlet's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Service User Consultation

The VAWG strategy aims to meet the needs of people affected by VAWG, and therefore it was important for the voice of services users to be central to the strategy.

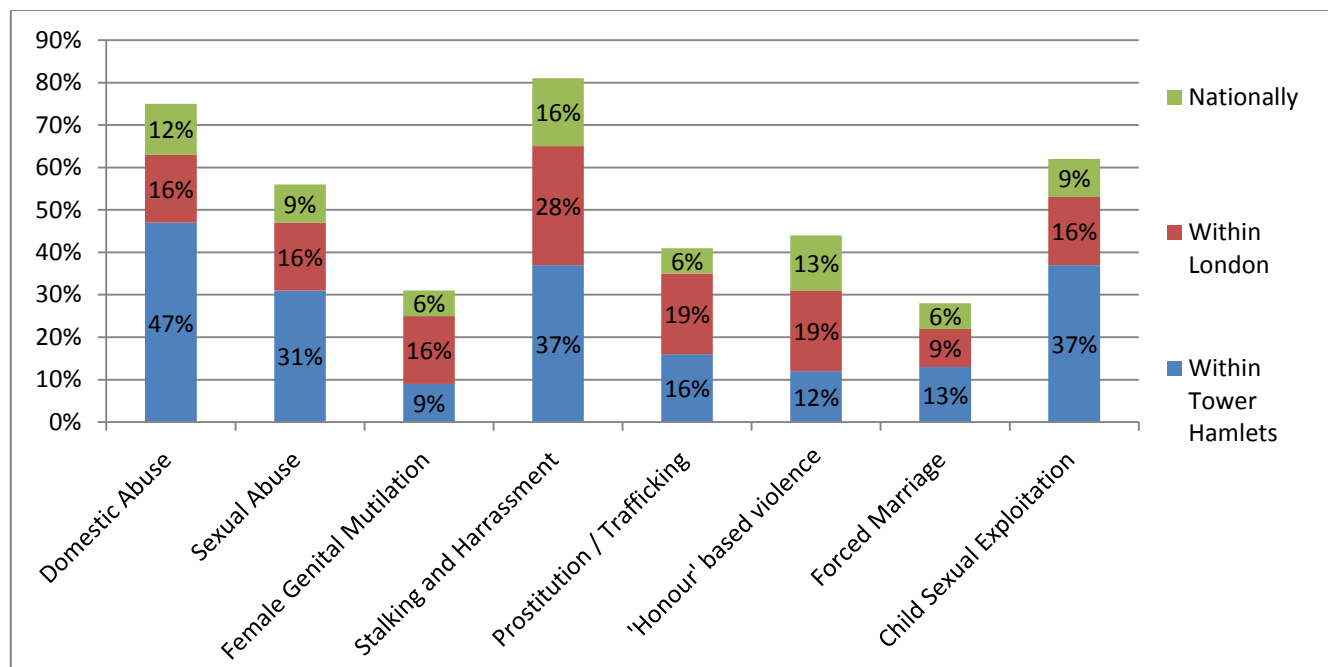
Service user consultation Process

Surveys were sent to a number of service user bodies within Tower Hamlets for example the African Women's Welfare Association, Children's Centres, Substance Misuse Forum, East London Mosque, Hate Incidents Panel, LGBT Community Forum, the VAWG Steering Group, Victim Support and the Youth Council.

33 people completed and returned the survey with an additional 28 service users taking part in face to face consultations.

Consultation Questions and Responses

Q1. Do you know how to access support services for the VAWG strands listed below?

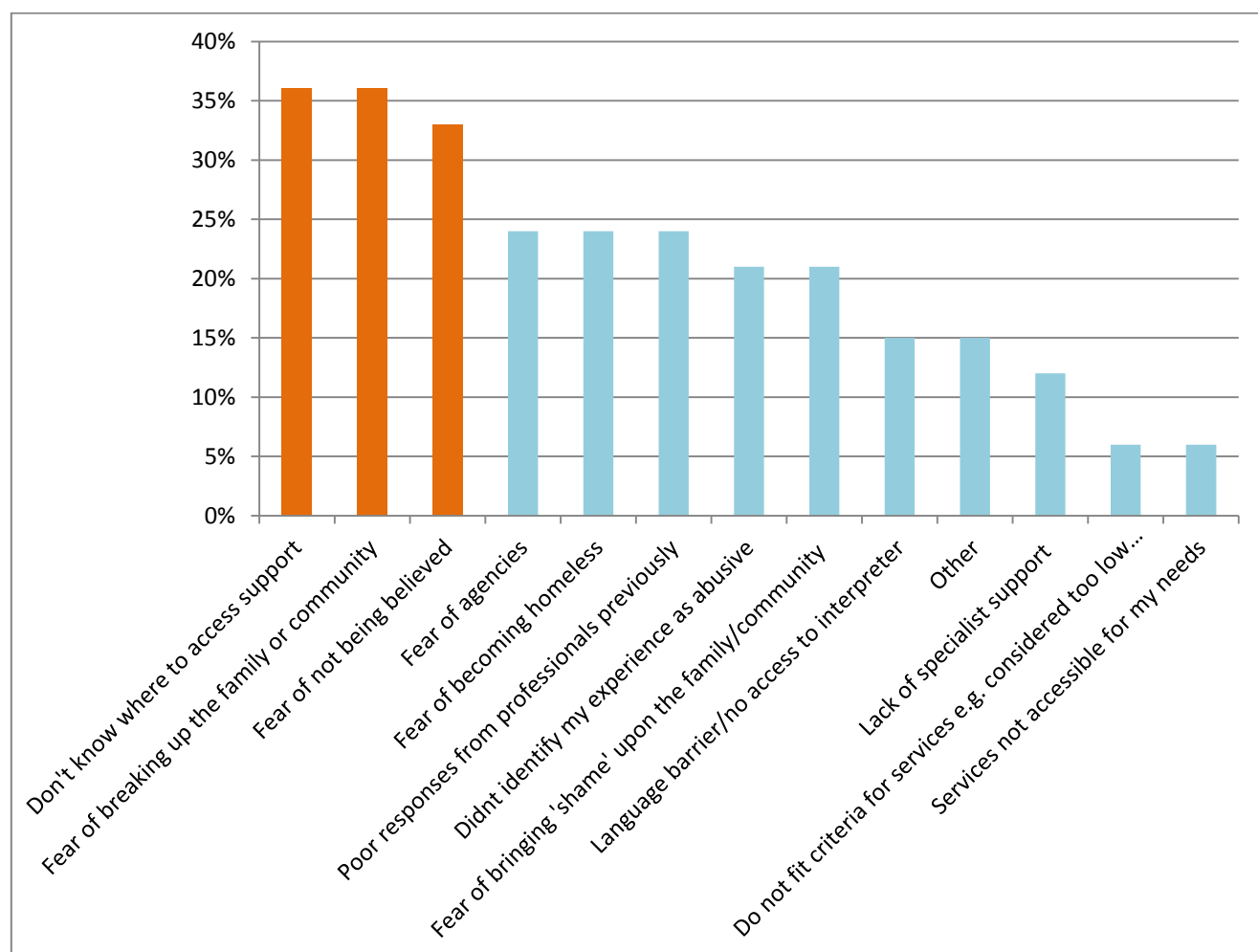


London Borough of Tower Hamlets provides and commissions a range of services to support women and girls affected by VAWG. In addition to the services that Tower Hamlets provides, organisations that work with people affected by VAWG are able to signpost service users to appropriate services, so it is important that people who need interventions are aware of how and where to access support.

Broadly survey respondents demonstrate a good understanding of where to find help in Tower Hamlets, London and nationally. The support service that people were most confident in accessing were domestic abuse. People were least confident about knowing how to access FGM support locally which prevalent data shows that service users are less likely to need.

However less than 50% of service users were aware of the support available which suggests a need to raise awareness of services.

Q2. What were/would be the 4 biggest barriers that stop you from reporting your experiences(s) of VAWG to an agency in Tower Hamlets?



The main barrier to service users receiving interventions was that they did not know where to access support. This reflects low level of awareness of services as outlined in Question 1. The other main barriers were fear of breaking up the family or not being believed.

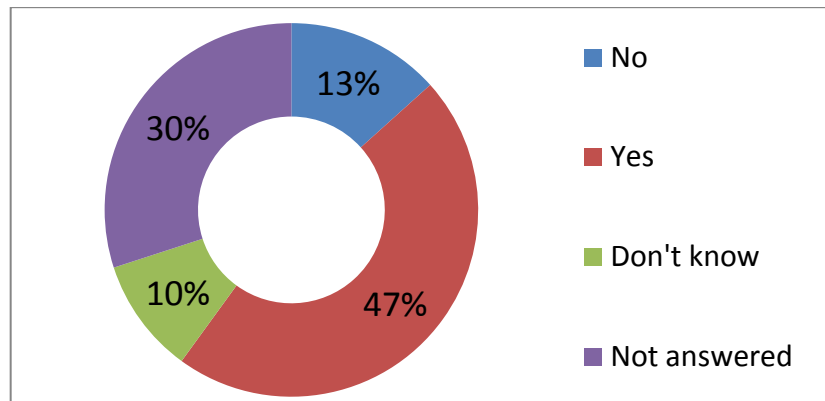
Almost 25% of services users say that they have had poor responses from professionals which suggests that there is still a need to train people on how to work with people affected by VAWG.

Few service users reported that services are inaccessible or that they do not meet the criteria which suggests that services tend to be flexible and responsive to victims' needs.

Please suggest how you think we could remove these barriers:

Information about services
Share my information
 Stop using victim blaming language
 Legal advice
Equality
BELIEVE VICTIMS
 Reduce shame
 More funding for services
 Women's groups
 Reduce stigma
Translators
Campaigns
WEEKLY DROP INS
 Do not put pressure on victim
Educate community
 Reduce isolation
 Competent professionals
 Services for young adults

Q3. When you worked with agencies in Tower Hamlets and told them about your experience(s) of VAWG, did you feel that you were being worked with according to your individual needs?



The most frequent response to the question 'do you feel that you were being worked with according to your individual needs?' was yes. However less than half the number of respondents said that they felt that their needs are being met. A large percentage of people did not answer the question which might also indicate a less than positive experience.

What could have been done better?

professionals take responsibility

always keep me updated

be knowledgeable around VAWG

advertise domestic abuse support services

work with other professionals better

listen

don't treat me like a statistic

be personable

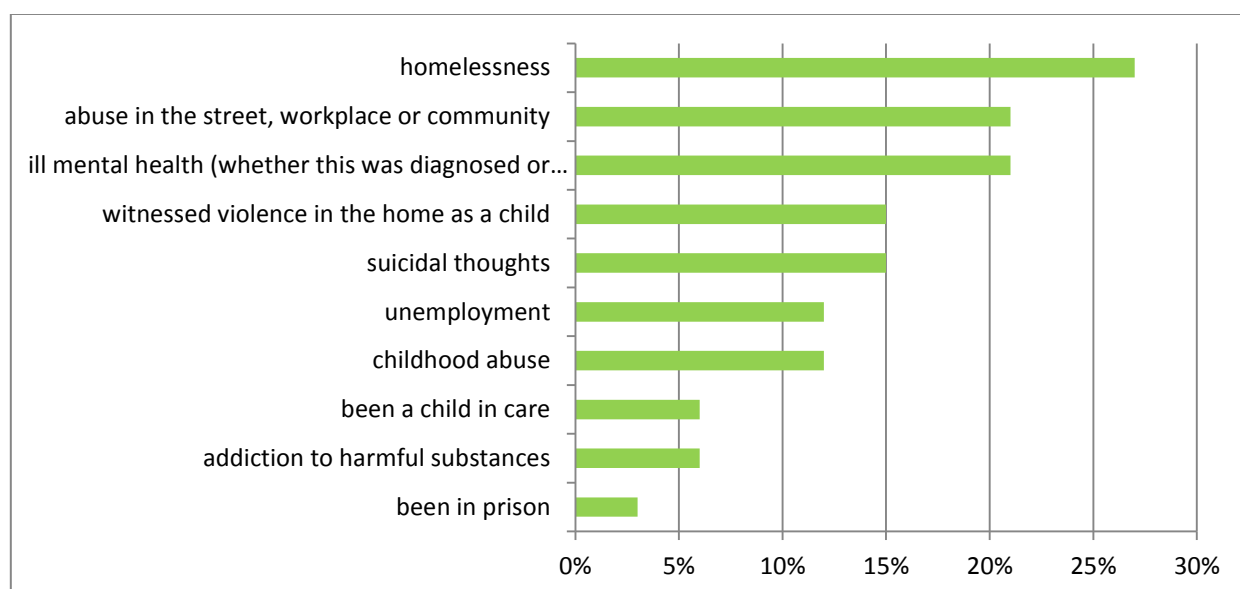
Q4. What have been the most helpful aspects or offers from statutory* and/or voluntary agencies in Tower Hamlets?

**statutory agencies are services provided by the Government e.g. NHS, Social Care, Police*



The most beneficial aspect of services was their ability to signpost to specialist VAWG support. GPs were named as specifically helpful with this.

Q5. Have you ever experienced any of the following?



The service users consultation found that victims of VAWG had experienced a multiplicity of issues, including homelessness, mental issues health and addiction.

A number of victims had experienced significant trauma in their lives including childhood abuse and witnessing violence at home.

Experiencing abuse in the street, workplace or community was very high on the list of adverse experiences. This suggests that we need to continue to educate the community and workplaces on what behaviour is unacceptable and this needs to be actively challenged so that people feel safe living and working in Tower Hamlets.

Q6. How can we make victims of VAWG feel safer in Tower Hamlets?

- More police
- Tackle street harassment
- Discrete help in ESOL classes
- Language support
- Bengali speaking Police Officers
- Housing assistance for low risk victims
- 24 hour services
- Take it out of the victims hands when charging
- Take time
- Promote support services

This reflects a range of responses, but is not presented in order of preference. Key services are the Police and language support. Professionals taking time to build relationships and trust with service users was key feedback throughout the service user consultations.

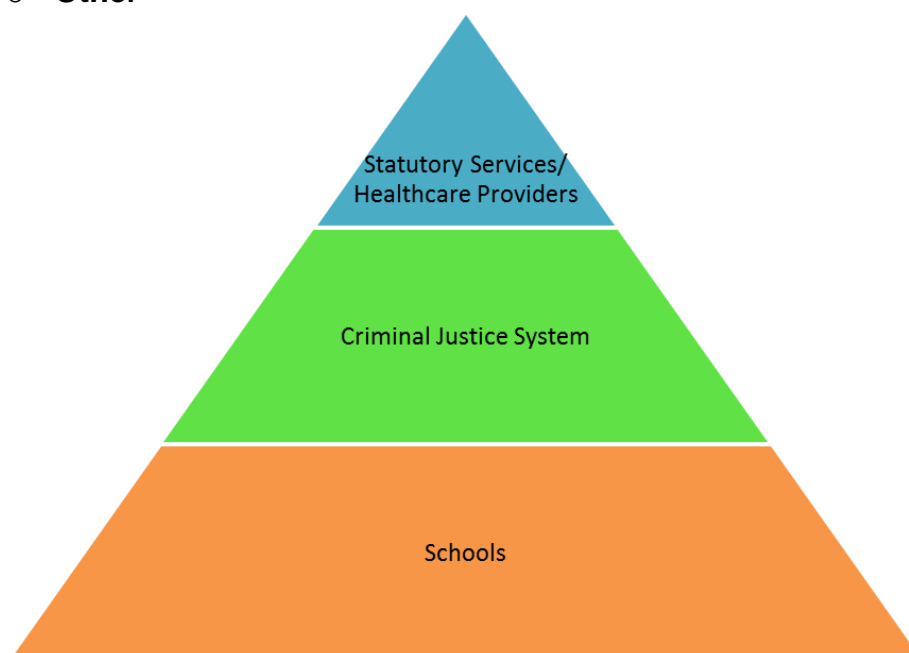
Q7. How would you improve statutory and/or voluntary services in Tower Hamlets for victims of VAWG?

Providing more time was the key improvement suggested by services users. Professionals should be spending more time with the victim and their family to fully understand their circumstances and less time should be spent waiting to access services.

Q8, Locally, who do you think have the strongest influence in raising awareness and challenging attitudes around VAWG?

Options given were:

- **Male members of the community**
- **Female members of the community**
- **Statutory services (e.g. Police, Children's Social Services, etc.)**
- **Local media**
- **Family and friends**
- **Religious / Faith leaders**
- **Schools**
- **Healthcare providers (e.g. Doctors, Midwives, A&E staff etc.)**
- **Criminal Justice System (e.g. Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Judges)**
- **Specialist VAWG organisations**
- **Other**

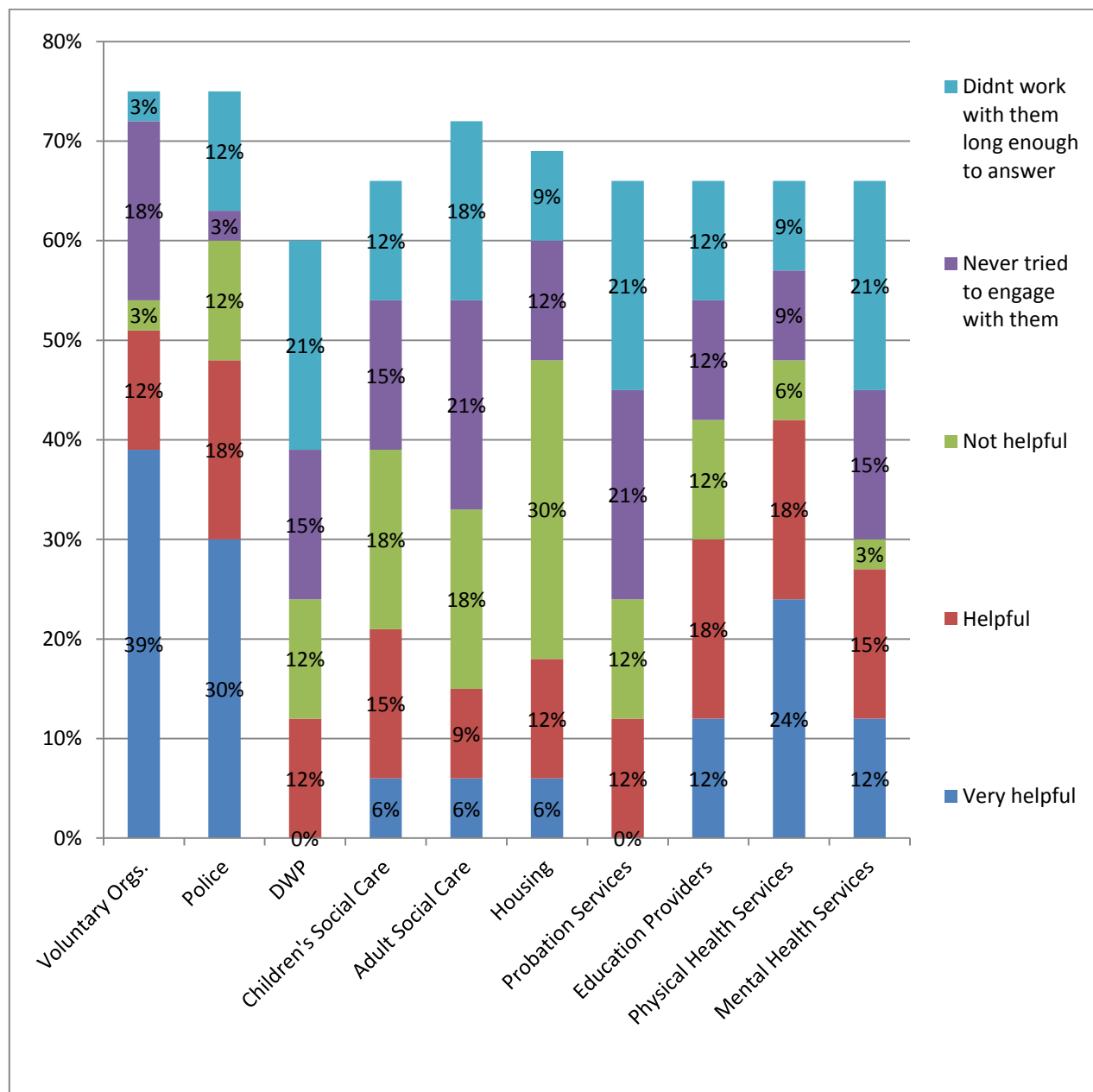


Service users believe that statutory agencies and other professionals have the most influence in raising awareness about VAWG, though this is not reflected in the professionals consultations which suggests a disconnect between professionals.

The responses suggest that awareness campaigns should focus on schools and that statutory services and health services should be competent to address VAWG related issues.

The 'Criminal Justice System response' needs a bit more analysis as it covers a number of different agencies. However this also reflects a need for the courts, Police etc. to be seen to be taking VAWG seriously.

Q9. How helpful were the following agencies in supporting you?



Service users thought that voluntary sector organisations and the Police were the services that they found most helpful.

There is a low level of satisfaction with key statutory agencies such as Housing, Children's Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions and Adult Social Care. Some of this might reflect national policy, but it could reflect the need to improve the skills of local agencies in supporting people affected by VAWG.

Q10. Do you think there are any gaps in the VAWG strategy or any unmet needs for VAWG victims that we need to address in the new strategy?

Making perpetrators accountable was the biggest gap mentioned by service users. Service users have felt that they are the ones who have been punished by the system and the perpetrator bears no consequences for their actions. Having one referral pathway and access to interpreters to reduce barriers that victims face when trying to access support was a need that should be met and long term work and education with the community, including schools, to raise awareness on VAWG.

Appendix A

Key quotes from service user consultations:

1. Women only spaces are valuable:

"women have different lives"

"girls build confidence in each other"

"if my manager was male then I think I may have found it more difficult to disclose"

"girls feel more vulnerable if talking [about VAWG] in front of boys"

2. We need to educate the community around VAWG:

"societal change needs to happen"

"people don't talk about it enough – it's taboo"

"parents don't know about social media and the potential risks around VAWG their children face"

"abuse is not a cultural issue"

3. We need more public facing campaigns:

"we need campaigns on everything – Facebook, the tube, schools"

"campaigns shouldn't just be at one time of year"

"make communities stronger and more comfortable, more open for people to speak of their feelings"

4. Victims need time with professionals to build a trusting relationship:

"you can't start from a blank piece of paper"

"advocates are important. I find it really difficult to talk"

"I feel guilty for talking to my keyworker because they don't have time"

"some people cannot fight for themselves"

5. Young people need more support:

“the system lets kids down...they’re not bad kids”

“...intervention is needed but [victims of VAWG] often don’t meet CAMHS threshold”

“Children need to be taught about respect and relationships from year 6”

6. More action needs to be taken against perpetrators:

“where is my equality? Why do I have to leave London? I’ve not done anything wrong”

“people need to be held accountable for their actions”

Appendix B – Networks and partners who consultation was shared with

Adult Social Care Teams	London Buddhist Centre
African Women's Welfare Association	MARAC representatives
Art Pavillion	Maryam Centre
Ascent	Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel
Bangladeshi Youth Movement	Memory Clinic Team
Bengali Men's Group	Mental Health Partnership Board
Bengali Women's Group	Migrant project network
Beyond the Streets	Nia
Bromley by Bow centre	Permanence and Fostering Team
Children social care teams	Praxis
Children's Centres	Prevent Team
Children's Mental Health Team	Pritchard's Road Day Centre
Compass	Protect and Respect
Child Sexual Exploitation team	Public Health
Substance Misuse Forum	Queen Mary University
DeafHope	Real
Designated Safeguarding Leads Forum (for schools)	Refuges
East End Citizen's Advice Bureau	Reset Recovery
East London Mosque	Richmix
East London Out Project	Riverside Hostel
External Providers Advisory Group	Royal London Hospital
English for Speakers of Other Language learners	Safe East
Faith Regen Foundation	Sanation Association London
Galop	Saudha
Global Voices Theatre	Specialist Domestic Abuse Court Steering Group
GP surgeries	Sex and Relationships Forum representatives
Gurdwara Sikh Sangat	Stepney Jewish Community Centre
Hate Incidents Panel	LBTH Headteacher's bulletin
Health and Social Care Provider Forum	Tower Hamlets Prostitution Panel
Health and Wellbeing Forum	Tower Hamlets Voluntary Centre
Homeless Partnership Board	Tower Hamlets Community Church
Hostels Single Homeless Forum	Tower Hamlets Community Housing
Ideas stores	Tower hamlets Together
IRIS	Toynbee Hall
LBTH Children with Disabilities Team	VAWG Newsletter subscribers
LBTH Council via in-house screens, intranet and Yammer	VAWG and Domestic Abuse Steering Group
Learning disabilities services	VAWG training attendees
LGBT Domestic Abuse Partnership	Victim Support
LGBT Community Forum	Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation Subgroup

