

An introduction to the Change That Lasts Ask Me scheme

What is Change That Lasts?

Change That Lasts is our plan for a future where all survivors get the right response to domestic abuse the very first time. Women's Aid Federation of England developed Change That Lasts with Welsh Women's Aid, and along with Scottish Women's Aid and Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, we will be introducing the Change That Lasts Ask Me scheme to communities all over the UK.

Change That Lasts changes the way we all think about domestic abuse by focusing on what a survivor needs – not just what the risks are. Her needs will include her safety, but so much more – such as support around housing, mental health, parenting, benefits and employment. It will give her the support she needs to recover and move on from what she has been through. Change That Lasts works by training people in communities to know how to start conversations with survivors and put them in contact with the best possible people to help them. Local domestic abuse organisations are at the heart of Change That Lasts, creating a system that works best for survivors.

Why Change That Lasts?

- Every survivor is different. Every person matters, and by listening and understanding their needs, we can direct them to the support that will be most useful to them.
- It brings communities together to end domestic abuse.
- It brings together what help is available nationally and locally, and creates an opportunity for survivors to talk and get the help they need.



women's aid
until women & children are safe

Change That Lasts is delivered through projects targeting distinct areas of society where there are opportunities to support survivors:

- **Change That Lasts Ask Me** is a scheme that works in the community by building a network of Community Ambassadors. They raise awareness of domestic abuse and help to create safe environments for survivors to feel able to disclose abuse. They play a key role in signposting to specialist services – the refuges, helplines and outreach services and challenging the culture which silences women. A Community Ambassador is anyone who talks to people in their local area, and it doesn't matter if this is through their work or not. What is important is that they have conversations that count.
- **Change That Lasts Trusted Professional** is a scheme that works with those who are those already in contact with domestic abuse survivors through their work. From the public and voluntary sector, these professionals are trained to identify domestic abuse and provide a sensitive, appropriate response to survivors. They will also refer on to local domestic abuse services.
- **Change That Lasts Voices** is a scheme that works with specialist domestic abuse services who are already delivering services to survivors in their communities. They are at the heart of the Change that Lasts approach, and deliver the Voices ethos in their local area: Violence Against Women and Girls; Ownership; Inclusion; Collaboration; Empowerment and Self-Help.

Change That Lasts in your local area means that we will be able to help survivors more quickly, and will bring your community together to reduce domestic abuse and save lives.



What is the Change That Lasts Ask Me scheme?

Community is “...networks of people with whom we live, play, work, learn, organise, worship and connect to.” (Creative Interventions, 2012)

Communities are often the first to know about domestic abuse. But lack of understanding and confidence can make people afraid to talk about it, and unsure of how to respond when someone speaks out. Survivors tell us they can feel judged, isolated or silenced by the people around them.

We are changing that through our Change That Lasts Community Ambassadors.

Delivered in partnership with local communities, the Change That Lasts Ask Me scheme is a simple initiative that equips everyday people with an understanding of domestic abuse and ways in which to respond, and inspires them to play more of an active role in ending it.

We offer a free 12 hour training course to community members from all backgrounds and identities to bring our vision to life. As well as learning about domestic abuse and how to create safe spaces where survivors can speak out, Community Ambassadors are trained to listen, believe and guide towards further support those who share their personal experiences of domestic abuse.

Anyone with a connection to the community Ask Me is running in can become an ambassador, whether domestic abuse has affected them personally or if they'd simply like to learn more.

The Ask Me training sessions are welcoming and safe spaces for all members of the community to have a gentle introduction to the issue of domestic abuse, and give them time to find answers to the questions they've always wanted to ask.



After the training, we encourage our Community Ambassadors to to:



This includes sharing what they have learned with those around them in whatever way feels most comfortable to them, and in their own words, to spark conversations about abuse that will help others to better understand the barriers that survivors face in speaking out. We believe this approach creates a culture in which survivors feel more able to talk about abuse without fear, judgement or shame, and creates communities that hear, believe and support them.

Aside from the initial training, Community Ambassadors also receive:

- A toolkit, including activities and branded goods (pens, lanyards and badges) that they can use to help raise awareness about domestic abuse within their local communities. The resources also remind ambassadors of helpful responses and to look after themselves.
- Supported from a local coordinator with specialist knowledge of domestic abuse. She will listen to and engage with those who have been trained, helping them to form networks that use the power of community action to raise awareness of domestic abuse and challenge the status quo.
- If Community Ambassadors decide that they would like to connect locally, there are opportunities to meet both virtually and in person so that everyone can share their experiences, successes and challenges, and look at local opportunities (for example International Women's Day) to raise awareness. Community Ambassadors in other areas across England and Wales have used these meet ups to continue their learning, support each other or to work together to make their area a better/safer place for survivors.



- Women's Aid Federation of England also facilitates Community Ambassadors being able to come together to form a national movement against domestic abuse through a closed Facebook group and online newsletter. We keep in touch with Community Ambassadors with short surveys to find out how they are getting on. As well as showing the impact the project has on survivors and Community Ambassadors, it also helps us to ensure we are doing all we can to support them.

Community Ambassadors **do not...**

- **... need to spend a certain amount of hours per week in the role.** Community Ambassadors are not volunteers. The role is as big or little as the person wants to make it. Some may go on to be very proactive in raising awareness whilst others may choose not to but will have a better understanding of the issues that they can share as the opportunities arise.
- **... need to raise awareness/break the silence ALL the time.** Community Ambassadors should consider when they need to self-care, or whether in some spaces/with certain people they don't feel comfortable/safe speaking about domestic abuse.
- **... give specific advice or provide ongoing support.** They do not replace domestic abuse services.
- **... make judgements about what's best for another person,**
- **... give out their personal phone number/email address to their community or be seen as the point of contact about all domestic abuse issues.**
- **... attempt to sort out the survivors problems.** This includes any kind of bystander intervention e.g. getting involved in a physical incident/filming it, etc.
- **... make referrals on the survivors behalf.** At most, they can signpost, and support the survivor to call (e.g. let her use their phone, sit with her while she does).
- **... mediate or act as a counsellor.**
- **... offer their home as a safe place to stay** (for anyone that they might not have done so prior to the training).
- **... tell others that they are a Community Ambassador unless they want to.**
- **... do anything they don't feel comfortable with.**



Community Ambassadors **do...**

- ... **listen and give a good response.**
- ... **challenge myths, stereotypes and wrong information about domestic abuse.**
- ... **give information/be a source of knowledge.** Simply putting a leaflet on a counter or in a toilet may make a huge difference for a survivor because she is in a safe space where she can access that information. Community Ambassadors can also let survivors know about local services, or guide others to information online.
- ... **go further!** After the training, Community Ambassadors may decide that they would like to do more to support their local service or become more involved in ending violence against women. Local coordinators can provide information about further opportunities around volunteering, fundraising, awareness-raising, or campaigning.



Frequently asked questions

Who is the Change That Lasts Ask Me scheme open to?

The scheme is open to anyone of any gender, background or identity with a connection to their local community (e.g. living, working, volunteering).

What is the minimum age to become a Community Ambassador?

18 years old.

How long is the training?

The training course is twelve hours in total. Areas can choose how they break up these twelve hours to ensure the training is flexible and meets the needs of their community.

How is the scheme different to other similar schemes?

Prior to developing Change That Lasts, the Women's Aid Federation of England team scoped out a number of schemes across the world that also ran VAWG training or produced awareness raising resources for communities. These were (amongst others)

- J9
- Cut It Out
- Ask For Angela
- The Black Dot Campaign
- Wythenshawe Safe Spots

The main differences with our project are that many of the above schemes either provide resources about domestic abuse for communities to display, or deliver a short training mainly around spotting the signs of abuse and on local domestic abuse services. The Community Ambassador scheme is a twelve hour training course that focuses on individuals being able not only to give the right response if a survivor shares their experiences, but also has the potential for longer term social change as



community ambassadors are trained and supported to break the silence and change attitudes in their community about domestic abuse.

We also sought inspiration from the Time to Change campaign around mental health awareness, community organising principles, and from the Creative Interventions toolkit, to frame our project.

Can professionals attend the Community Ambassador training?

Yes, but this isn't a training course for professionals. The course is aimed at the community, ideally for those who do not have access to domestic abuse training in their current role, and pitched at an introductory level. Professionals are welcome to attend because they are also members of their community, and we often talk about people wearing different "hats" in their lives.

We have found that contacting people who identify they are in a professional role ahead of the course to check out their intentions for the course can help avoid any confusion on the day. This creates an opportunity to explain that the training is an informal course targeted at community members, to review the expectations of the role and the scheme and signpost to any other appropriate local training (e.g. Trusted Professional, Champions schemes). It also provides an opportunity to explore any potential conflicts of interest between their professional role and role as a community member. For example in the instance that they are a police officer or social worker.

How do we make sure community ambassadors give the right messages, keep safe boundaries and don't become burned out?

We have incorporated a number of safeguards throughout the project to ensure that our Community Ambassadors are appropriate for the role, give the right response to the survivors they come across, and feel safe and supported in their role. This includes during the recruitment stage, whilst on the training, and in their post-training activities. We also have procedures for what to do when there are concerns that a person isn't



suitable for the role, and self-care for ambassadors is threaded through everything we do.

I'm concerned that advertising and promoting the scheme will further isolate survivors if perpetrators become alerted to who ambassadors are in their community

The identities of Community Ambassadors are not promoted or shared publicly unless we have their permission to do so. In which case, this would be a photo on social media. Community Ambassadors can choose to share with their networks that they are part of the scheme. We encourage ambassadors to raise awareness by wearing branded goods (pens, lanyards, badges) only if they feel safe to do so, and we explore this in further detail in the training.

Alternatively some Community Ambassadors choose to remain anonymous and can in this instance apply their learning and skills in conversations where domestic abuse is raised.

Because there is an option for scheme participants to remain anonymous, this creates opportunities for survivors to join the scheme even if they are still in an abusive relationship and living with their abuser(s), and can also continue to engage with their community without the abuser further isolating them.

What happens if we have a perpetrator on the course?

Our initial pilots trained 176 number of ambassadors. We have developed procedures as part of the suitability of an Community Ambassador that also considers what to do if you suspect or have concerns that somebody on the course is a perpetrator of abuse.

Can people with personal experience of domestic abuse join the scheme?

Any survivor at any point on their journey is welcomed to become a Community Ambassador. We believe the survivor is the expert in their own life and their involvement in the project is led by them; only they know when they are ready to take



part and there is no time limit on exiting a service or a relationship. We had an average of four disclosures per training course in our initial pilots and feedback from survivors on the course indicates that being part of the training was a real turning point in their lives and part of their recovery process.

Survivors should also be trusted to tell us when they are not ready. We have designed the scheme to be delivered in a trauma-informed way so survivors are supported to feel in control of their journey and to opt out at any point if they wish.

Will Community Ambassadors tell other survivors if they have personal experience of abuse?

We decided to place no hard and fast rule on whether ambassadors with personal experience of abuse decide to share this with their communities. Instead, we encourage Community Ambassadors to consider their own emotional safety needs before sharing with other survivors that they meet, and encourage them to think about what their intentions are for sharing and how they would feel if they didn't receive a positive response. We trust Community Ambassadors will make this decision for themselves for the right reasons.

What safeguarding expectations are there from Community Ambassadors to help keep survivors and children safe?

Community Ambassadors are not volunteers or professionals. Most are general members of the public, and therefore have the same safeguarding duty as the rest of the public and do not need DBS style checks. On the training, we introduce trainees to guidance included on the NSPCC's website for what to do if they have concerns about a child's safety, and signpost them to their local safeguarding team and emergency contact numbers.

We also introduce ambassadors to the safety needs of survivors, which includes preserving their confidentiality and not sharing with anyone else without their consent



to do so. To ensure ambassadors understand the importance of confidentiality in terms of safety, as well as risk, we have taken the following steps:

- Discussion and powerful training exercise around confidentiality.
- Discussion around when to break confidentiality and when to speak to local safeguarding team if concerned.
- Reassurance that they can contact the project coordinator or the National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge) if unsure about what to do or want to talk through their concerns.
- Training slides and resources on safeguarding directed at the general public audience and numbers to call.

We're concerned about an increase in referrals as a result of Community Ambassadors being active in the area

Monitoring data from our initial pilots show that there has been no measurable increase in referrals to the local domestic abuse services. We do however note that if, as part of their post-training activities, ambassadors are given posters to distribute there may be an increase in referrals due to the increased amount of publicity in the area. We would advise discussion with your local partners about activities of ambassadors post training and how they can best be utilised, and whether distributing publicity would be helpful or unhelpful locally.

