

SONAS

**An Evaluation of the Sonas Freedom Programme
September- December 2011**

**January 2012
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Introduction

This evaluation examines the efficacy of the Sonas Housing Freedom Programme as a support group for women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. Through a quantitative assessment this evaluation examines the impact and outcomes of the Sonas Freedom Programme for participants in the 2011 programme.

Aim of the Freedom Programme

The Freedom Programme is a support group designed for women who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence. The Freedom Programme is designed as an intervention to empower women to make positive choices about their lives by providing information and support within a group context. It gives women an opportunity and space to develop ways of thinking and behaving to protect themselves and their children from harm.

The aims of the Freedom Programme are:

- To help women understand the beliefs held by abusive men and in so doing, recognise which of these beliefs they have shared
- To illustrate the effects of domestic violence on children
- To assist women to recognise potential future abusers
- To help women gain self-esteem and the confidence to improve the quality of their lives
- To introduce women to their local domestic violence community resources

The Freedom programme comprises 12 90-minute weekly group meetings delivered by two trained staff members. Childcare and refreshments and resources are provided for women.

The Freedom Programme was developed in the UK by Pat Craven who works in the area of domestic abuse.

Sonas Housing and the Freedom Programme

Sonas Housing identified and recognised a gap within its service provision for a support group. Sonas Housing explored many existing support group options and found that the Freedom programme to be the most suitable option to bring into Ireland from the UK. In Summer 2011 two Sonas staff members were trained and accredited in the Freedom Programme to enable the delivery of the new support group in Ireland.

In September 2011 the first Freedom Programme was delivered in Ireland in two Sonas locations: one targeting Viva House Reach-out clients; and the second in one of our supported housing complexes, with invitations extended and transport available for women staying in some of our nearby supported housing units.

Evaluation Methodology

The information was collated using anonymous surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions.

Process

- Surveys were developed by Sonas policy officer in line with previous Freedom Programme evaluations.
- Facilitators distributed the surveys to all participants in the last two sessions of the Freedom programme explaining that they were under no obligation and it was optional to fill them in.
- If they so choose, participants could either fill in on the night or post into policy officer in Sonas HQ. Stamped addressed envelopes were available to participants.
- Surveys were sent into policy officer in Sonas HQ who collated the results.
- Women who attended sessions and may have left mid-way through the programme were invited to fill in an exit questionnaire.

Response rate

The average number of participants was 16 - in the Viva Reach-out programme there was an average of 6 attendees per session. In the supported housing programme there was an average of 10 attendees per session. In total we received 11 surveys. This is over two thirds or 69% of the total average number of participants.

Main findings

The analysis shows very positive results. The main quantitative findings are outlined below.

- 100% of participants said the Freedom Programme had a positive impact on their lives
- 100% of participants rated the Freedom Programme as very helpful

Because of their participation in the Freedom Programme:

- 100% agreed (82% strongly agreed) the programme has resulted in positive change in their lives
- 100% agreed (55% strongly agreed) they are now more hopeful about the future
- 100% agreed (55% strongly agreed) they were more assertive
- 100% agreed (64% strongly agreed) they were more confident
- 91% agreed (64% strongly agreed) they no longer blame themselves for their abuser's behaviour
- 100% agreed (82% strongly agreed) they can now more sense of the abuser's behaviour
- 100% agreed (82% strongly agreed) they now feel less alone in their experience of domestic violence
- 100% agreed (91% strongly agreed) they benefited from meeting other women on the programme

- 91% agreed (73% strongly agreed) they now expect to be respected
- 100% agreed (82% strongly agreed) they were more aware about domestic violence and its effects
- 100% agreed (82% strongly agreed) they can now recognise and identify abusive behaviour
- 91% agreed (27% strongly agreed) they feel they have the ability to respond to abusive behaviour
- 100% (73% strongly agreed) they could now recognise an unhealthy relationship

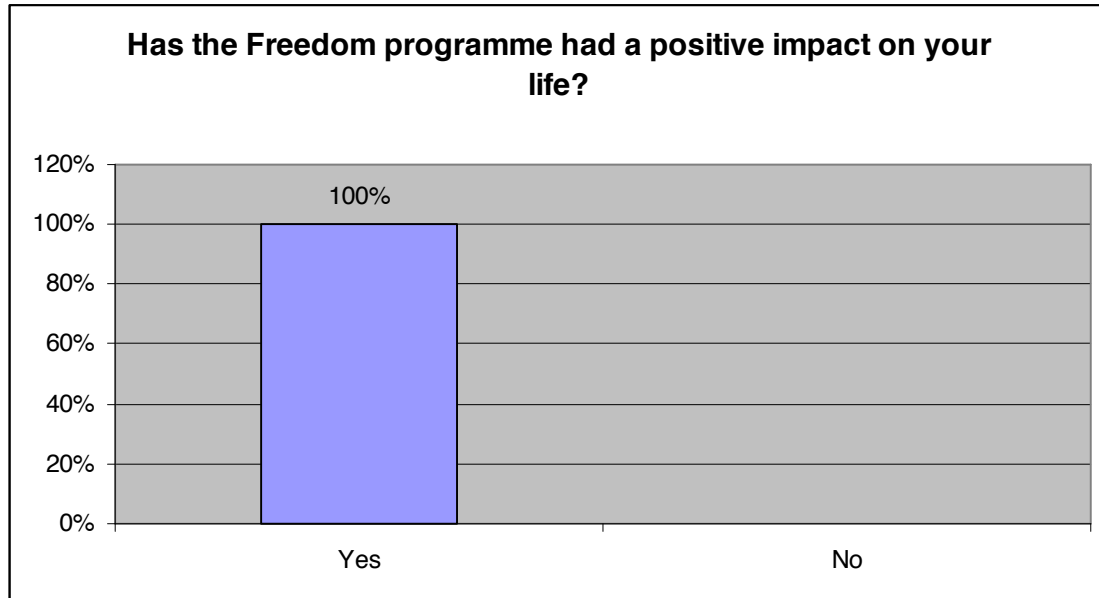
As well as the quantitative findings, women had an opportunity to explain their reasons for selecting their answers. The main themes that emerged from the qualitative questions were:

- Greater strength and confidence - many women said that the programme made them stronger and made them feel more able to stand up for themselves
- More awareness of controlling behaviours towards them and signs of abuse. For example, one woman said that she recognised things that she didn't see as abusive.
- The peer-bonding element of having group support was cited as being very important by many women with one woman an important impact for her was that she now knows she is not alone. Another woman said it was important to her that others understood her feelings around her experiences.
- More hope for the future – many women said they felt more positively about the future as a result of taking part in the programme.
- Boundaries – more awareness that the abuser is responsible for his own behaviour and no one else is.
- Rollout of the programme – many of the participants hoped the programme would be rolled out to help more women as well as educate professionals working in the area.

Detailed analysis

Overall impact of the Freedom Programme

Overall impact was very positive with 100% of those who completed the survey saying the Freedom programme had a positive impact on their life.



What were the impacts of the Freedom Programme?

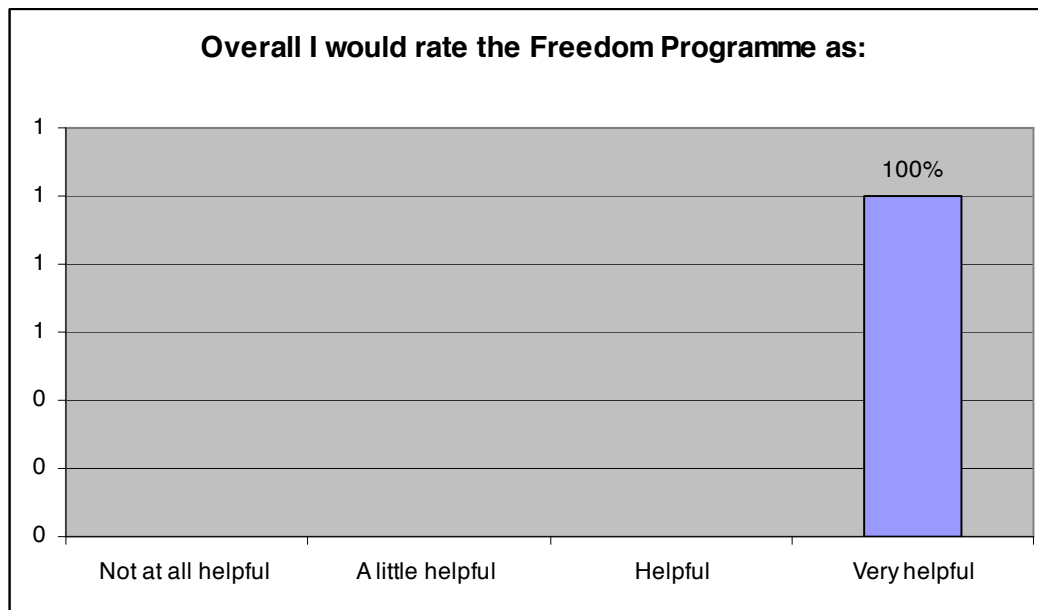
- "I didn't even realise the changes within me at first. It impacted my choices, my company and my reaction to others. I've stopped being over-grateful for kindness which is huge for me."
- "Not to be afraid to get help and stand up for myself. To see the warning signs when he's trying to say he has changed and he'll never treat me or the kids badly again. He just wants us all back under his roof again."
- "It made me feel comfortable and make sense of things, made me feel more powerful. It made me understand what happened in my life."
- "It has made me more aware of signs and made me understand what both my daughter and I have gone through and for me what started with my dad in my own childhood."
- "I can now look positively into the future without necessarily blaming myself or feeling sorry for him."
- "It has made me aware of his behaviour. That he isn't or wasn't depressed. That he is quite clever. That I am not mad. I am strong. It has made me aware of my strengths. That I am aware of warning signs should a new relationship ever occur."
- "I now know I'm not alone and it has made stronger and more positive to make life changes."
- "More aware, less confused, not alone, stronger, understand more, don't blame myself anymore."
- "It made me strong."
- "It has turned my life from a negative to a positive. It is as its name says

freedom, from pain, guilt, sorrow, hopelessness and self-loathing. I know by the will of God I will have a happy life, full and positive on my own or with the good guy.”

- “It made me understand what happened to me is not my fault.”

Overall rating of the usefulness of the programme by participants

100% of course participants listed the Programme as very useful.

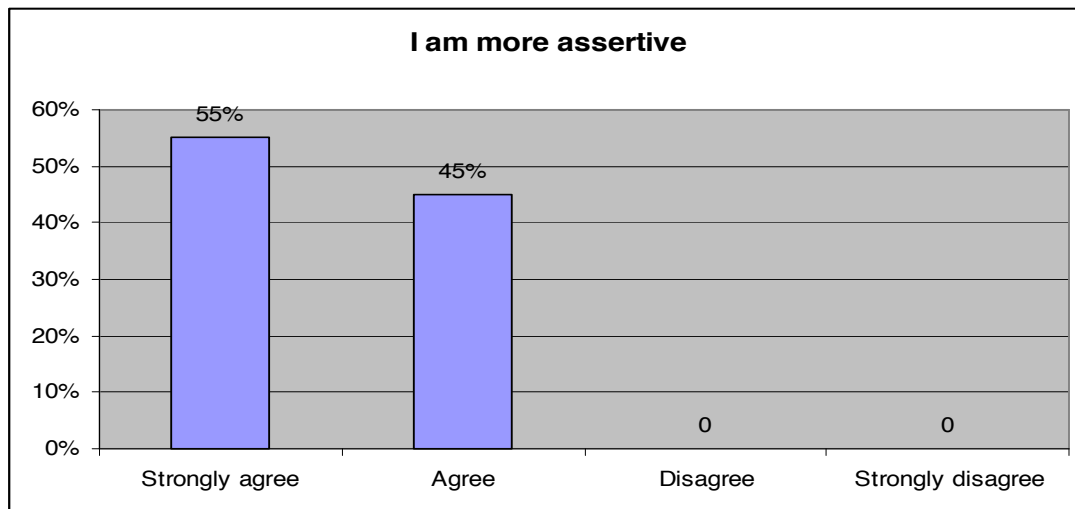
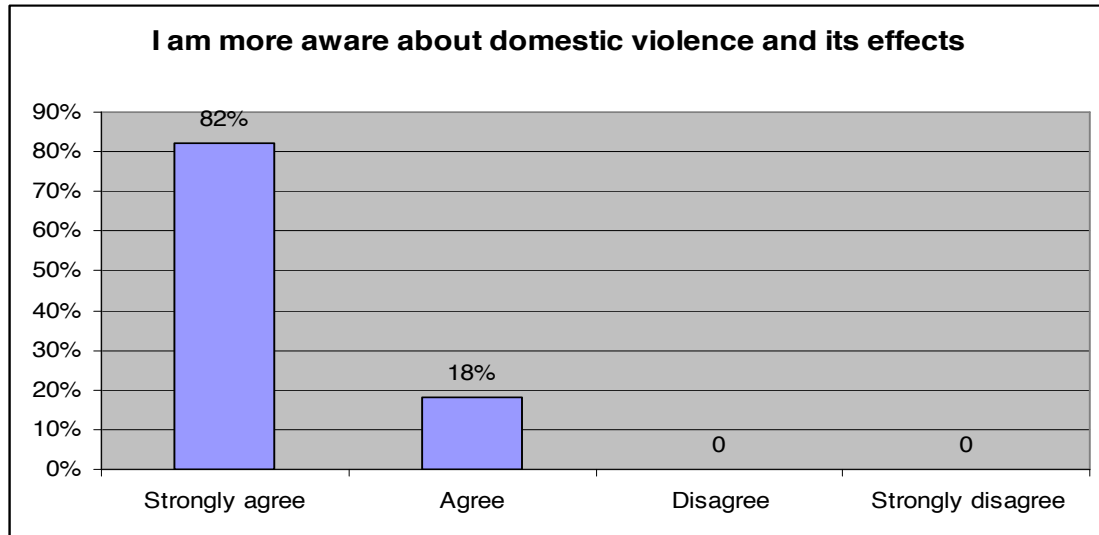


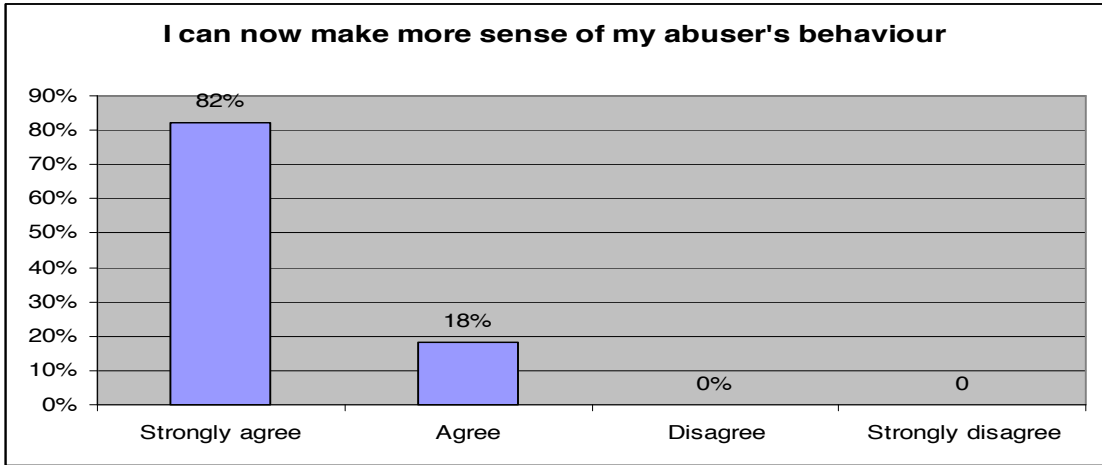
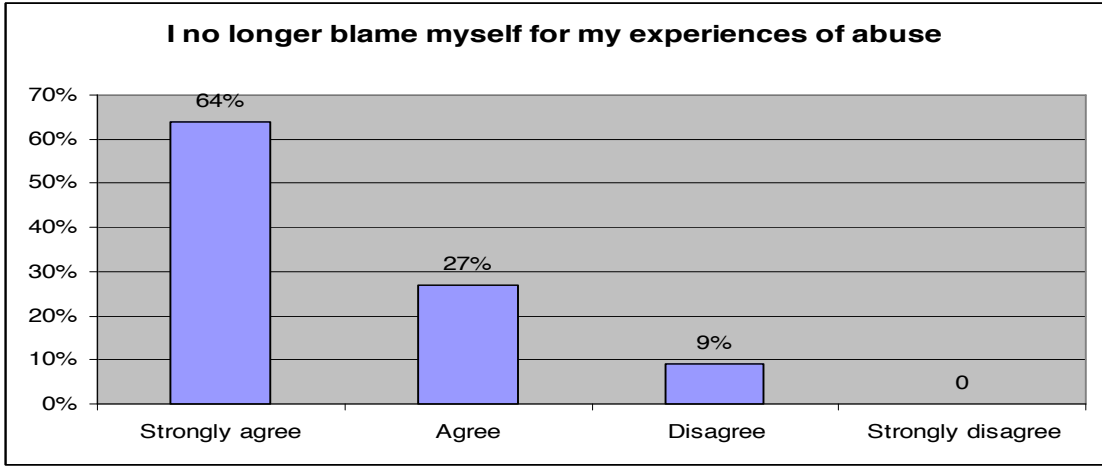
Why?

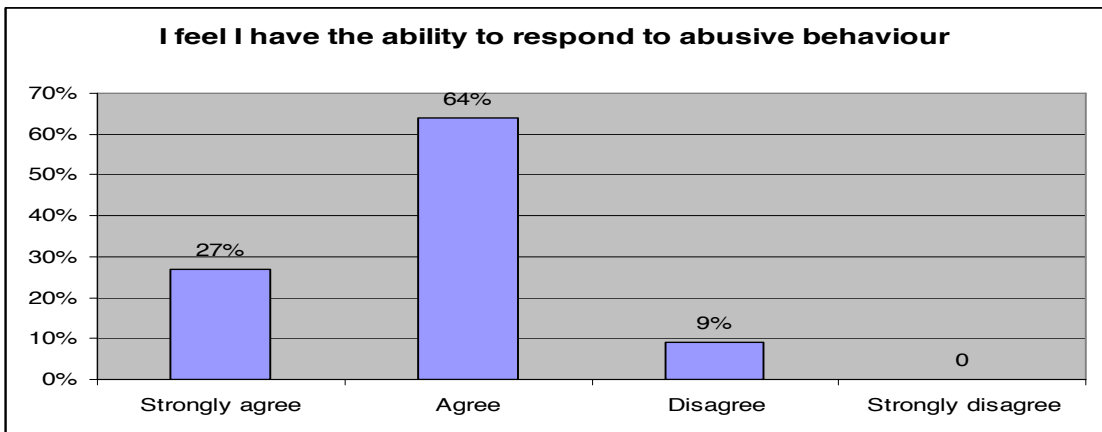
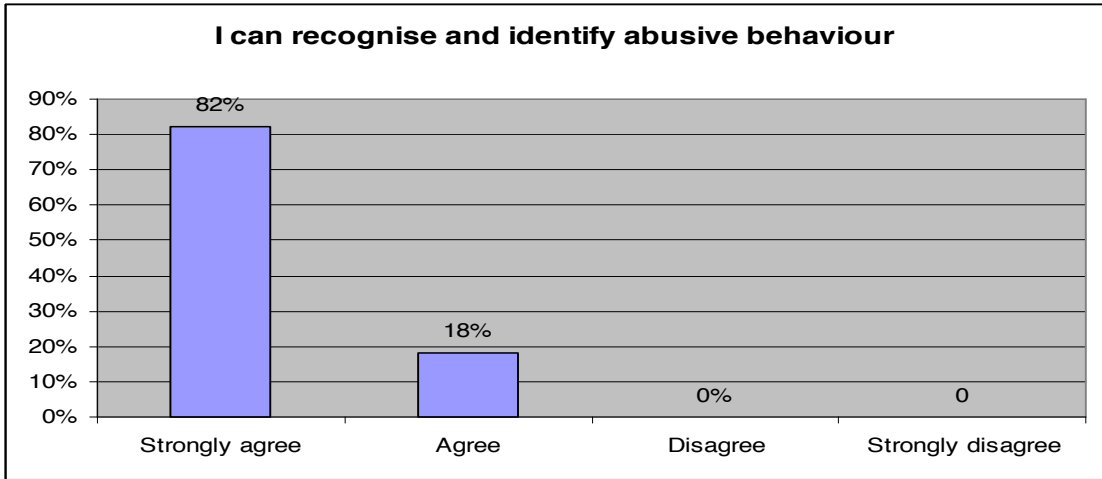
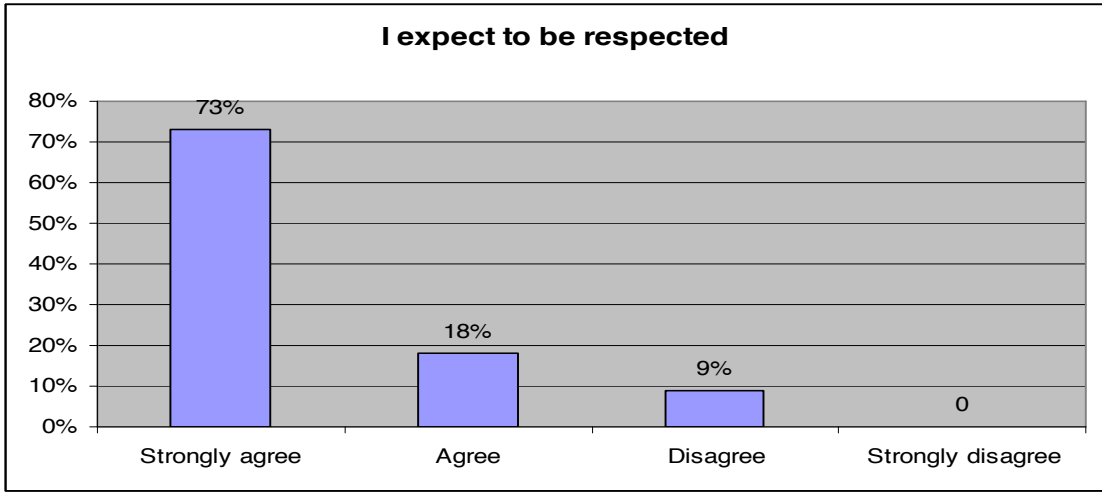
- “It opened up eyes to the dominator and allowed me to make friends with others in similar situations.”
- “To me, this is a powerful programme because of the impact it has had on me and my hope for my daughter's future.”
- “To be able to identify his behaviour as emotional abuse and the tactics he used to achieve what he wanted.”
- “It's really helpful because I now know and understand the abuse.”
- “It made me break the loneliness and made me more aware of the tactics involved by the abuser.”
- “Because it made me understand life.”
- “It gave me the gift of awareness and hope for a better future.”
- “It helps me understand what I went through and to make sense of what happened. It will help in the future not to get into an abusive relationship.”
- “Not to try to make sense/excuses for his bad behaviour anymore. Or not to blame myself any more.”

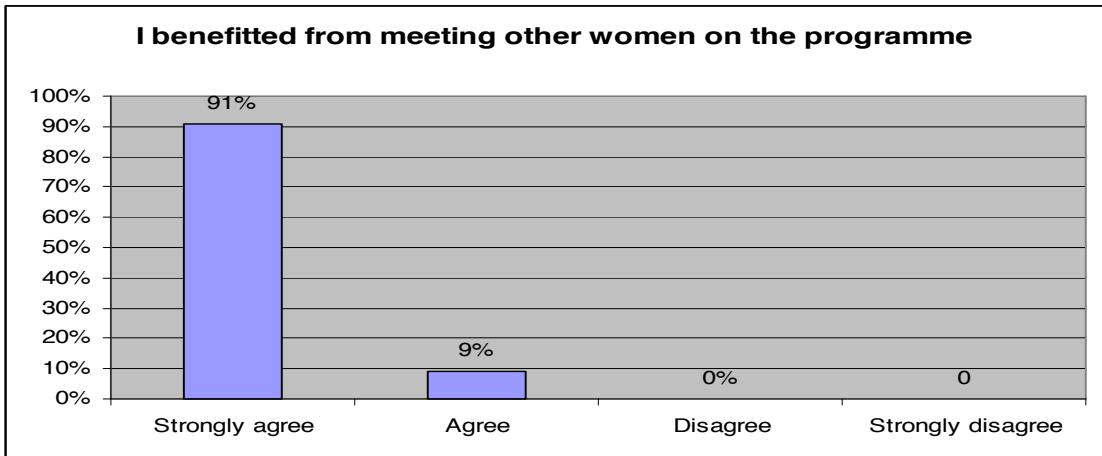
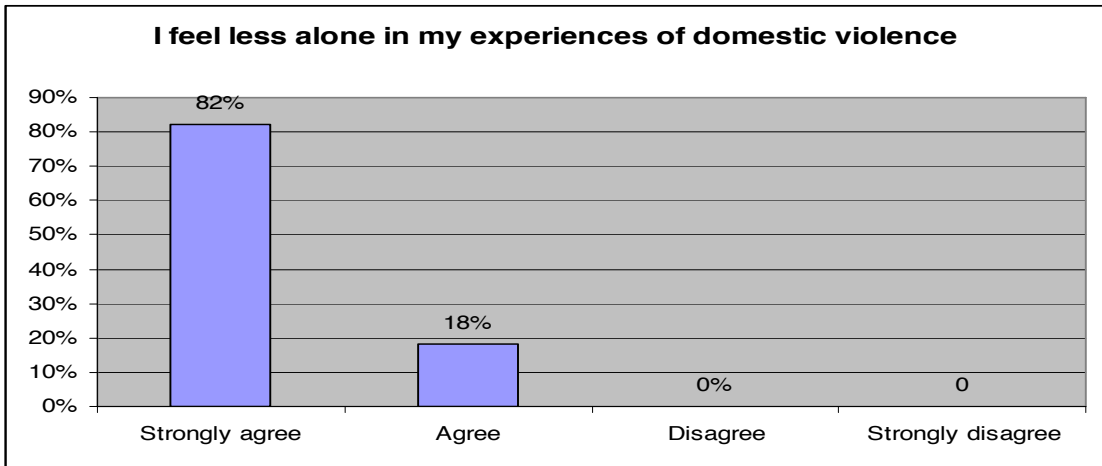
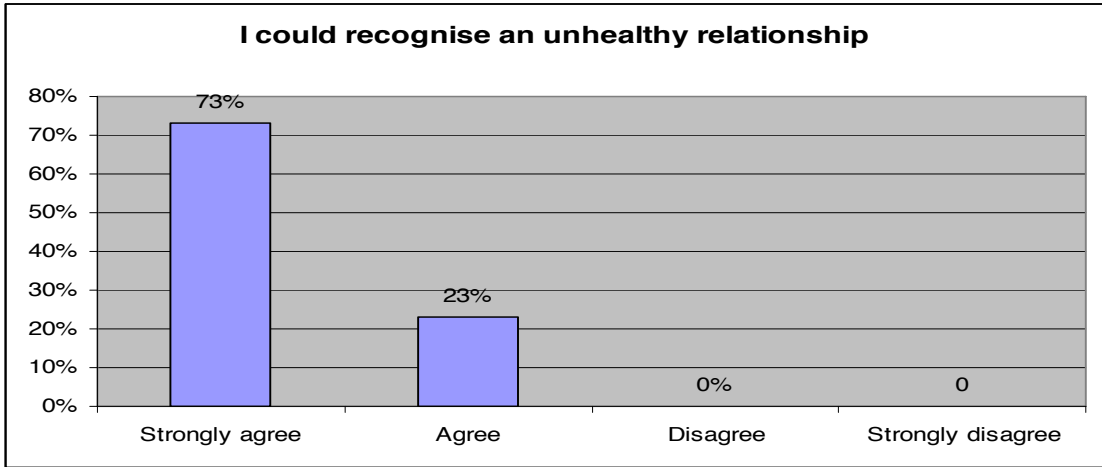
Outcomes of the Freedom Programme

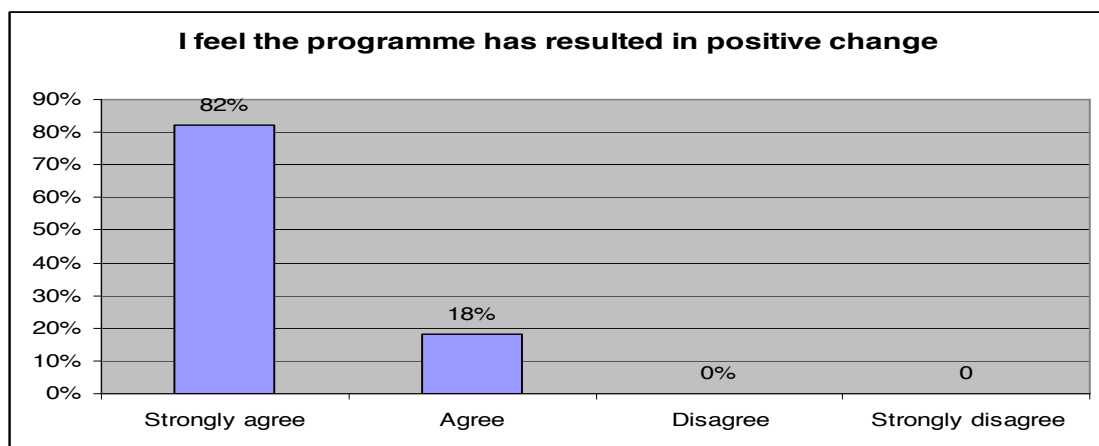
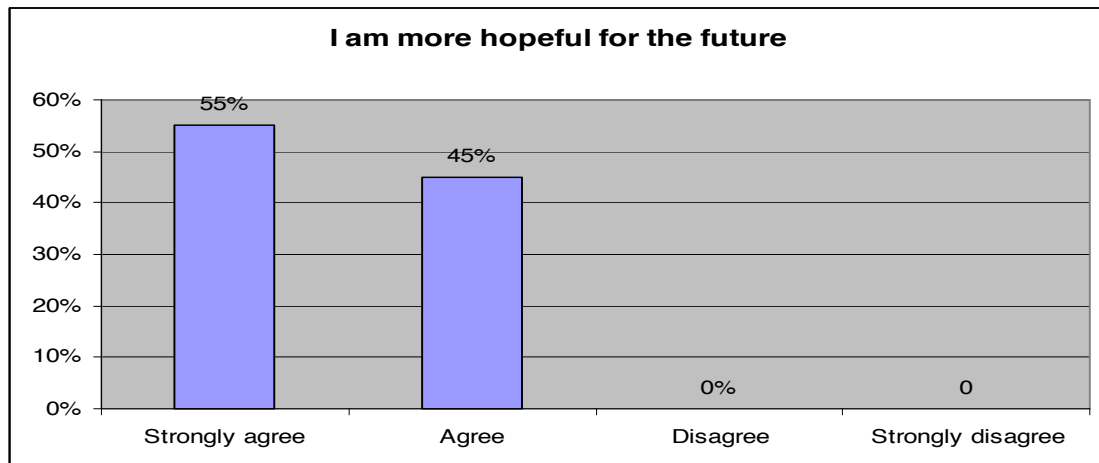
The women who participated in the Freedom Programme were asked to rate how they agreed with the following statements after taking part in the Freedom Programme. The results were overwhelmingly positive.











Which session did you find most useful?

Participants were asked which of the 12 sessions they found most useful and why

- “All of them. My husband displayed behaviour from all of our sessions. The sexual controller made me aware that his advances were wrong and inappropriate and his tactics were controlling. And I wasn't the blame and I had every right to say no to him when I did.”
- “Jaliler, Sexual Controller, Bad Father - I recognised things I didn't see as abusive. I felt others understood my loneliness, my worthlessness, my shame.”
- “All of them. Every week something would have happened in my personal life and each week of the course I would have come home so much stronger and not alone.”
- “The quiz sessions - I was able to participate and to learn from other peoples' experiences.”
- “The Liar - Because it made me see that when Mr Dominator is abusive he is in total control and it is all a tactic and that he, only he, is responsible for his actions.”

- “The persuader”
- “Sexual controller - my partner has been withholding sex for months and I was thinking it was me. Now I know it's his behaviour.”
- “Effects on children - I am directly involved in this experience with my six year old at present. The school are trying to label her with a disorder but I think it's what we went through.”
- “I found all of them useful because they helped me understand it's not only me, there are many other women.”
- “The king of the castle and the jailor - My ex was a jailor and I was not aware because he didn't beat me physically.”

Which session did you find least useful?

Participants were asked which of the 12 sessions they found least useful and why

- “The sexual controller - maybe because the other types of abuse were much worse.”
- “None. I found elements of my partner is all of the sections.”
- “They were all helpful - could see I was the same as the other women.”
- “Jailor - I had little experience of these signs of behaviour compared with others.”
- “They were all useful.”

Other suggestions/feedback

Participants were asked for any other comments or feedback.

- “Make it open to non-Sonas residents. Advertise it on the Sonas website. Ensure that participation is not required and they can come to trial it out.”
- “I am really grateful to have had the experience of the programme and that it has strengthened me mentally.”
- “Just to say thank you so much!”
- “I would just like to thank everyone involved and would love more women to have the opportunity to do this course to make them aware of all the abuse and not feel alone. Thanks so much.”
- “I loved the programme and applaud Pat Craven for doing all this work to enable us to understand abuse and for the professionals to help to understand. I think that it would be helpful if this course was made available to students, 16 years+ and to social workers, refuge workers and anyone else who deals with family and kids. Hopefully one day if things improve with the recession, to get government funding to get the programme available to people who need it. Also it would help if a section of the Garda Siochana had a domestic violence unit who could be trained in the Freedom programme. This programme needs to be made understandable to foreign women and women of different faiths. If organisations such as Sonas could work with community and culture centres so women can understand and access services for victims of domestic abuse.”
- “Maybe a course of small sessions and an agreed period with the same

- group to liaise with and offer support.”
- “This course is the most uplifting and amazing course I have ever done. If you ever need me to help you or be there for other women don't hesitate to call me anything. If I could help anyone be as strong as you made me, I would love to in some way. I would.”

Exit surveys for women who left programme early

Two women who left the programme mid-way through filled out exit questionnaires.

- One woman said she left because she was not ready to deal with the issue saying: I found it upsetting and it brought back memories to me that I had in the past
- One woman left because she was not comfortable and felt embarrassed to talk.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the Sonas Freedom Programme was extremely positive. The Programme had a deep resonance with participants and had very positive impacts on their lives. The participants enjoyed both the sessions and also the time spent with other women in similar situations. The group nature of the programme was key to its success.

The suggestions were very useful with a great focus on extending the programme and ensuring its availability to more women who are in situations of domestic abuse as well as professional practitioners working in the area of domestic abuse.