

Solace Women's Aid is a London-based charity that focuses on all aspects of violence against women and girls. Prompted by their appointment as Lead Partner of a pan-London project, Solace decided to undergo an SROI to examine the project's impacts. We spoke to Gill Herd, Contract and Performance Manager at Solace, to find out more.

What does Solace Women's Aid do?

We are an organisation that focuses on bringing to an end the harm done through domestic and sexual violence to all survivors, in particular women and children. We work across all Boroughs in London, and provide services including advice and advocacy, refuges, and support for children and families.

The focus of our SROI was the Ascent Advice and Counselling (A&C) partnership. This is a pan-London partnership of 14 partners and part of the wider London Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Consortium, made up of 22 specialist organisations. All organisations have extensive experience in providing specialist VAWG services, including counselling and advice services. Solace is the Lead Partner on the Ascent A&C project.

Why is Solace using SROI and how did you go about it?

When we won the Ascent contract we felt that it was a good opportunity for us to use an SROI analysis to look at the impact of the work and the partnership. We were collecting information for funders about the outputs, outcomes etc. but we had not fully analysed it to really get an idea of our impact. SROI gave us an opportunity to take this information one step further, and inform us of the difference we were actually making to our stakeholders.

We began the SROI thinking that the work would mostly be around cost savings to the Government. However, as we progressed and realised that we might need more expert help on the project, we decided to bring in Liz Riley, an SROI consultant. Liz was very good at demystifying SROI, and explaining the practical application of SROIs. She helped us to understand that really, SROI is just a different way of looking at things.

Has SROI been useful? Have you changed anything as a result of SROI?

Yes, SROI has been very useful. The main thing that's changed is the way we're looking at our stakeholders and their feedback. Rather than just levels of satisfaction, we're getting substantial feedback on the value of our services, and the impact they make, which is very important. A service user may be satisfied, but without looking at impact, it's hard to know how we can improve a service. SROI gives us access to this information.

Another useful aspect is the way that SROI has changed the relationship between our partners and us. Now that we have demonstrated the effectiveness of the project, the partnership has become stronger and we have a more collaborative mentality as a group.

Finally, SROI has helped us to effectively spread the message about our work. We do some lobbying work involving the media, funders and commissioners, and the SROI has provided us with evidence that a pan-London and partnership model can work well. For example, there is an on-going struggle in some areas of commissioning with justifying specialist services. Many of our partners work with women in very specific cultural contexts and are led by and for specific communities. The SROI helped us to evidence the value around the use and existence of such specialist organisations. Stakeholders overwhelmingly highlighted the positive value gained from having specialist counselling and advice services from women who really understood the language and cultural context.

Are you embedding or repeating SROI in any of your projects?

Initially not all of the partners that we worked with could clearly see the benefits of using SROI. However, following this analysis, partners have developed skills and knowledge around SROI and are able to see what a valuable tool it can be and we are all keen to continue with the process. Our evaluation protocol is under review, and I will be looking at building SROI into the process somehow.

What would you do differently next time?

I would make sure that we involve stakeholders as a starting point, so that everything we do is focused around them.