



Doncare Angels for Women Network ©

Evaluation Report 2007 – 2016

A Doncare initiative...

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Acknowledgements

There are so many people who deserve acknowledgement for their support of the DAWN Program. Doreen Stoves, Chief Executive Officer of Doncare, and successive Boards, have been steadfast and encouraging in their support of this program, and Doncare sets a high priority on providing in the example she sets providing programs that are high standard and responsive to need. The early excitement of the staff, the volunteers and clients has been maintained and a large proportion of the funding required is now securely provided by the City of Manningham.

The Federal Government Office for Women provided the funding and a Steering Committee guided DAWN through its first 12 months. There is a culture that guides and protects both the clients and the program in general, and DAWN has always been governed by a strong clinical focus and clear clinical goals and boundaries.

The Doncare Angels for Women Network (DAWN) has had 6 coordinators over the 9 years of its existence. Kristin Godby helped to develop the DAWN Program, Karen Fallon, Kristin Rogers and Nora Fernandez continued the work and the program's current coordinator position is shared by Janice Hales and Susan Orr. Each of these women has brought enthusiasm, skills, dedication and a high degree of professionalism to the role and Doncare is grateful and proud of their contribution. The Domestic Violence Assessment and Support team (DVAS) as a whole supports the program and provides expertise and support in a myriad of ways. Their professional wisdom and genuine care for women consistently go beyond normal expectations.

Boundless thanks go to the women who have volunteered over the last nine years as our 'Angels'. They are an amazing group of women and over the 9 years there have been 78 volunteer 'Angels'. Some stay for a year and support one client, some have been with us for many years now and have supported many clients. These volunteers are astute, caring and generous, and their capacity to support our clients and each other in wise, wonderful and creative ways is truly inspirational.

This program is nothing without our clients, who often come to us at a time in their lives when they have run out of energy and sometimes hope. Thank you all for your courage and your honesty; your faith in us is humbling. Thank you for your suggestions and your generous feedback and for being willing to be part of this evaluation process. Your valiant struggles and your determination to live well in spite of past indecencies inspire us all; they are the wind beneath the Angel's wings.

An extra thank you to Geoff Newbegin, a long term Doncare counsellor, who worked on placement in the DAWN Program setting up the Excel recording of all the evaluation data and was always so willing to return to offer more help. Thank you to my daughter, Bridget, who helped format this document's graphs and charts.

Carmel O'Brien

September 2016

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*“(My Angel)’s friendship has been
a gentle anchor for my growth
and forward movement in.*

Client: Clare
Post-DAWN Questionnaire



The DAWN Logo

The DAWN logo was designed by the 12 year old son of a survivor. His mother was part of the original Steering Committee during the program's first year. This talented young man told us that he had created his 'Angel' logo to incorporate the image and colours of a day's dawning, along with a river in a green pasture symbolising new life. This logo is much loved by our staff, our volunteers and the women we assist. We wish this gifted and sensitive young man, who would now be turning 21, all the happiness and success that life can afford him.

1. Introduction

The definition of Recovery, from Women's Journey away from Family Violence-Framework and Summary, 2004 is as follows:

"Recovery from family violence is an ongoing journey, a process of survival, of finding 'self' and becoming free from the fear and suffering caused by the trauma of family violence. This journey is one that occurs over time and is as individual and unique as the women who travel it."

Such recovery is a long process for most. There have been many useful reports produced that describe domestic violence, its impact, and the importance of the services available to and accessed by women who are trying to achieve safety and recovery. We are learning all the time how to better support women and children who have been abused in a relationship. This report evaluates a pioneering program in Melbourne's eastern suburbs after its first nine years of service. The report draws on and expands the previous DAWN Reports of 2009 and 2013. Descriptions of the program are drawn from that report, as apart from minor operational improvements the DAWN model is unchanged.

The Doncare Angels for Women Network (DAWN) Program began with a Federal Government grant in July 2007, bringing into being a program that had developed in the mind of the writer of this report for 15 years since her days as a child protection worker. In this role, she often worked with women who had experienced domestic violence. It was very heartening to see how well these women managed their lives and how much the lives of their children improved once they were safe from further harm. A common thread in the lives of these women's lives was the lack of social support. Domestic violence is an alienating experience in so many ways, cutting people off not only from the people who might support them, but also from their faith in themselves. There is only so much a worker can do to reconnect people positively with their community, and usually workers are more likely to connect clients with services. What these women needed was a way to reconnect with other mothers, to make new friends, to take up or renew their interests and to find ways to live fulfilling lives.

The DAWN Program aims to:

- Help the women remain safe
- Provide mentoring support through regular visits and other contact
- Help the women navigate the system, such as linking them to appropriate services and attending appointments or court appearances with them if requested
- Help improve the mental health of the women in the program
- Provide social support for the women
- Assist the women to reconnect to community activities
- Assist those women who have children in their care to provide the best mothering they can.

The primary goals are to maintain safety and facilitate recovery. The desire to create opportunities for women and their children to be supported along this path was the progenitor for DAWN.

This report documents an evaluation of the DAWN Program after the first nine years of client service. It incorporates some details from both previous reports, but supersedes them in terms of data and further feedback from clients and volunteer mentors. Names have been changed, as well as identifying details from client stories.

Much of this report is told in the words of clients and volunteers taken from evaluations forms and interviews. This is because no-one else could say it better.

“I’m still battling with my self-esteem and wonder about my worth as a human being. (Maybe everything he said about me is true).”

Client: Kerry
Pre-DAWN Questionnaire

This quote seems to sum up the devastating and lasting existential effects of living with constant abuse. Domestic violence causes fundamental damage to one’s sense of self, and therefore to the way a person operates in the world. Long after the achievement of relative safety, women often still feel inadequate, worthless and unlovable. After being told so often that they are deficient or incapable in some way (or usually in many ways), they really do wonder about their *worth as a human being*. This process is similar to that suffered by hostage survivors, which in fact they are. Even when gains are made, if something goes wrong, there is still that toxic voice in their heads, his voice, and they wonder *if everything he said about them is true*. Thank you, Kerry, for summing up this so well and so powerfully.

Before ...

*“Barely holding it all together, if I go,
everything goes.”*

Client: Clare
Pre-DAWN Questionnaire

Table 1: Post-DAWN results for client: Clare

DASS21	PRE-DAWN	POST-DAWN
Depression	Moderate	Normal
Anxiety	Moderate	Normal
Stress	Moderate	Normal
IES	64 (indicating PTSD)	36 (with a marked reduction in Intrusion and Avoidance symptoms)
Hopefulness	2/5	4/5

After ...

*“My volunteer has helped me gain
some belief in myself, my potential
and my future.”*

Client: Clare
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

2. The DAWN Program

DAWN provides long-term support to women who have experienced domestic violence to try to speed the process of recovery. Its aim is to improve the safety, confidence, and community connectedness of abused women (and their children), thus improving their mental health and their ability to manage their lives, their children and their capacity to contribute to the community. This is done through a mentoring process, where volunteers are matched with a client and provide in-home social support, assistance with practical issues and companionship. It combats the feelings of shame, anxiety and isolation that are common in women after leaving a relationship with an abusive man, most of whom are forced to relocate and to live in reduced circumstances. The program is designed to increase community engagement by strengthening ties between vulnerable women, trained volunteers, and local support networks.

The DAWN Program sits with a suite of supports that Doncare offers to women who have experienced the impact of domestic violence. Women can also attend psycho-educational support groups, be linked with a Doncare counsellor, and be offered practical and financial assistance through the Information and Crisis Support Program. The Dorothy Rose Fund is a clearing house for donations of money, goods and services, which provide improved quality of life for women who have been abused. There is a choir for survivors called SaSSing and a preventative program for young women called iMatter.

The pilot year of the DAWN Program was funded by the Australian Government Office for Women under the 'Domestic and Intimate partner violence and Sexual Assault Funding'. It commenced in July 2007 and has operated continuously ever since. The program has received funding from various philanthropic trusts to enable its survival:

- Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation (multiple grants)
- The W.C.F. Thomas Trust (ANZ Trustees)
- The Jack Brockhoff Foundation
- The Percy Baxter Charitable Trust (managed by Perpetual Trustees)
- State Trustees Australia Foundation
- Une Parkinson Charitable Trust
- ANZ Staff Foundation.

In 2009, the City of Manningham provided a grant to Doncare towards program costs, and from July, 2010 this funding became recurrent and the program is now largely funded by the City of Manningham. Initially clients were accepted across seven municipalities, but as much of the funding is local, most places in the program can now only be offered to local women. Doncare recruits women as volunteer mentors to provide weekly domiciliary support to women for a 12 month period. The Program Manager and a suitably experienced coordinator promote and oversee the program, recruit, train and support volunteers, and assess and match clients. A Training Manual and a Policy and Procedures Manuals for the Program have also been developed. These are available on request and details of processes such as assessment, training, and monitoring are not part of this evaluation. A Steering Committee met during the first 12 months to support and inform the program. 'Angels' are recruited through brochures distributed to local services and notices and articles in the local paper.

2.1 Referrals and matches

The total number of referrals to the program over the 5 years was 165, with many more enquiries that did not proceed to referral. About one quarter of referrals are deemed not suitable for the program, or do not go through to matching. This can be due to simple reasons such a client moving out of area soon after referral, but sometimes decisions are made that a woman is perhaps not yet safe enough to be home visited by a volunteer. Other reasons include client having serious or immediate mental health issues, or the referral being more suitable for another program.

The total number of clients successfully matched to volunteer 'Angels' 2007-2016 was 110. In some years, numbers were lower due to doubts about whether funding would continue, and there were some attempts to match that did not work out for various reasons.

Clients not accepted into the program are referred to alternate services. Some clients in the program are also accessing other services, such as counselling. 'Angels' often alert the coordinator to the need for other services, and facilitate linkages, some attending case conferences as a support person for the client.

2.2 The "Angels"

The women who become DAWN 'Angels' come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Over the years it has been found that over half these women have had experience themselves of domestic violence, either directly or through friends or family members. Not all applicants are accepted as volunteers, and the program looks for women who are practical, non-judgemental and have good boundaries. They need to be well recovered themselves if they are to support someone else, and to tolerate the pressures of dealing with the stress being experienced by their client. They include teachers, nurses, administrative workers, welfare workers and artists.

There have been 78 volunteers trained as DAWN 'Angels' over the 9 year period. There are currently 21 'Angels' active in the program, and at least one new group is recruited and trained annually.

Monthly team meetings for the 'Angels' are held and include some topic of professional development as well as time for debriefing. Individual telephone and email support is also available by request.

2.3 The clients

Many clients are referred from other Doncare programs as Doncare is the leading community agency in Manningham and staff members are very familiar with the DAWN Program. Clients are often referred by family support workers, women's refuge workers, counsellors, police members, emergency relief workers and Doncare's Domestic Violence Assessment and Support team (DVAS). Most clients have dependent children, and many still therefore have contact with the man who has abused them. Women need to be safe in order to be matched with a volunteer, but many still have concerns about child contact handovers and continued harassment of some sort.

2.4 The 'Angel' role

The volunteers usually meet with clients weekly, either at the client's home or they go out together, such as to a park or coffee lounge. The role is promoted as 'skilled companionship' and is summarised in Appendix 1. It can include advocacy, personal support and attendance as a support person to meetings and appointments.

In carrying out this role, the 'Angels' use a great deal of creativity and compassion. For example, one 'Angel' was very concerned about her client who had signs of having an eating disorder, and would not eat when stressed. The 'Angel' began taking home-made soup with her to visit this client. This very practical contribution made it more likely that the client would share the food, and most importantly led them both to being able to discuss this issue. Some join a community activity with their clients in order to encourage a return to participation in social activities and to improve mood and anxiety levels. 'Angels' have, over the last few years participated with clients in dancing classes, visiting art galleries, and exercise programs. Some 'Angels' assist those who have young children by going to parks, or helping with household routines and management. One 'Angel', who was supporting her client in her studies to be a qualified beautician, drew the line at being her first model for a 'Brazilian'!

Most of the 'Angels' have helped clients to access services, including financial counselling, women's support groups, and children's services. They advocate for their clients with the Department of Housing, Centrelink, legal services and in locating services for their children. They not only attend court with clients, but have attended parent teacher interviews, case conferences, VCAT Tribunal hearings and medical appointments including chemotherapy and tooth extractions.

Many women who are trying to regain their mental and/or physical health are also living in reduced financial circumstances. They often cannot afford services or goods that most families take for granted. Clients of the program also have access to practical assistance from Doncare via a number of funds to assist with purchases for their children and themselves, and to the Doncare Opportunity Shops for goods. In particular, Doncare has The Dorothy Rose Fund, a way for individuals and organisations to make a positive contribution to the recovery of women and children following domestic violence by donating goods and services. The Dorothy Rose Fund aims to improve the quality of life for women and children in recovery, and by doing so to assist in restoring the self-esteem, mental health and confidence of those affected by family violence. Small grants are made to women for expenses such as computer training, self-esteem courses, driving lessons, necessary medical expenses and essential bills, moving costs and short term respite.

“It was so reassuring to have (my ‘Angel’) to visit. She is like a mother figure. The mother I have always wanted and needed.”

Client: Grace
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

2.5 Joint Client-‘Angel’ activities

In 2010, a new aspect of the DAWN Program was trialled. A local church group offered to hold a ‘pampering day’ for DAWN clients. This idea was workshopped among staff, then volunteers, to think through the issues this might raise. For example, what are the implications of suggesting women be identified as Doncare clients? What are the ethical issues relevant to having clients meet and identify each other? Will accepting such an offer affect the women’s confidentiality or safety? In the end it was decided that if consent was carefully explained and sought, this could be offered to any interested clients, and that clients would be accompanied to the event by their ‘Angels’. It was hoped that such an event would help normalise and encourage greater social inclusion and participation.

The Pampering Day was an unqualified success and has become an annual event in collaboration with this church group and is now organised each year around Mother’s Day. At some of these mornings, photographers have been available to do free family portraits. For many families, the only portraits they have had have included their abuser; and in some cases women have had to leave home and no longer have photos of their family. A portrait of their “revised” family unit can also provide a tangible reminder that they have moved on.

Both clients and ‘Angels’ asked for more such events and some events have been organised that allow ‘Angels’ and their clients to attend together, such as a Christmas lunch. These are always very positive events where there is a lot of laughter and mutual sharing, and although only first names are used, many women exchange further details and many friendships have been made between women in the DAWN Program. This is not only good for recovery and mental health, but it can make it much easier for a woman to finish with her ‘Angel’ when her time in the program comes to an end.

Where appropriate, DAWN clients may be encouraged to participate in the DVAS Women’s Support Groups. This can lead to the formation of new friendships between clients, who have shared experiences and struggles.

Shirley's story

Shirley did not leave her husband, he left her. She had presented at Doncare long before this happened, weeping bitterly and saying "I hate my life. I hate myself. I hate my home." In her counselling sessions she revealed a long history of anxiety and depression, and told tales of her husband's controlling behaviour. He allowed her no say in decisions, even taking her inheritance when her mother passed away and not allowing her access to it. He criticised her cooking, her hair, her mothering and also for shaking when he shouted at her, which to him proved her inherent weakness. He regarded her as completely inadequate, and she seemed to believe him. However, when he left, she was clear that she wanted to live a very different life without him. She confessed that she did not know how. She was so fearful of his presence even after he left that she slept on the living room floor rather than in the marital bed.

Before being matched to her 'Angel', Shirley said "I had a very difficult time with my husband because he was head of everything. I couldn't make even a simple decision." Shirley's 'Angel' found this to be absolutely true. When they went shopping, Shirley could not choose which tea towels to buy! She was 61 years old.

Post DAWN, Shirley's scores on all scales had improved. Responding to patient encouragement, she took to independence with enthusiasm. When asked about a 'turning point' for her, she recalled a particularly important day was when she realised she could choose herself what she would buy her grandson for his birthday.

With her 'Angel', Shirley opened her first bank account, learned to drive, and began to cook and eat what she wished. Six months later she travelled overseas to visit relatives, and a year later she sold her house and bought herself a home in which she felt no fear.

3. The Evaluation methods

The evaluation attempts to measure and describe the impact the program has on the clients' mental health and wellbeing. A number of processes are incorporated into the program's procedures to assist in evaluating the program's effectiveness.

3.1 Evaluation interviews

Clients are asked during the assessment interview what they hope to gain from the program, and also complete questionnaires. These are standard self-report tools that measure symptoms of depression, anxiety, life stress, and trauma. Exit interviews are held where possible and 'Angels' are also asked for verbal and written feedback.

3.2 Assessment tools

Clients are asked to complete two standard inventories at the beginning and the end of their involvement with the program. These inventories are designed to assess levels of anxiety, stress, depression and trauma symptoms.

3.2.1 DASS21

The DASS21 is a standard self-report questionnaire frequently used by doctors and psychologists to quickly assess a person's level of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. It is not a psychological test, but can effectively give a quantitative measure of

Depression (symptoms of depressed mood, discouragement, lack of motivation and despair)

Anxiety (symptoms of psychological arousal, worry and concern); and

Stress (the more cognitive, subjective symptoms of anxiety due to life situations).

The DASS21 is not a categorical measure of clinical diagnosis, but can indicate where a clinical assessment is warranted.

3.2.2 Impact of Events Scale (Horowitz) (IES)

This is a self-report questionnaire which is used to assess the psychological impact that a trauma has had on a person. Developed in the late 1970s, the Impact of Event Scale (IES) has been widely used as a measure of stress reactions after traumatic events, especially to indicate where clinical investigation is recommended for the diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and related conditions. It was chosen because it has been found to be both a reliable and valid indicator of trauma reactions (Sundberg and Horowitz 2002).

3.2.3 DAWN-specific Questionnaire

Before commencing with their volunteer, clients also asked to complete a third questionnaire developed for the program that asked clients to rate themselves on a 5 point scale according to the following continuums:

- Calm ----- Agitated/Angry
- Happy ----- Sad
- Safe ----- Fearful
- Ability to manage their problems (Excellent – Poor)
- Hopefulness (Excellent – Poor)

This questionnaire also asked clients how they would like to be supported by their 'Angel'.

At the end of their time in the program, clients were asked to rate themselves according to the same continuums as the pre-DAWN Questionnaire.

This questionnaire then asked clients to comment on what they have gained from the program, and whether they have any suggestions to improve the program.

Not all clients complete both entry and exit questionnaires, for many reasons. Some leave the program early or suddenly, due to housing or safety issues. Some have so many issues to deal with that it is not appropriate to press them for written feedback. This paper reports on the 47 clients who completed both pre-DAWN measures, and post-DAWN measures.

Kerry's story

Kerry was referred by a Doncare's Women's Group facilitator. She is an intelligent and capable woman who had left one partner only to form a relationship with a new partner who was even more abusive. She had children by both partners. After she left the second partner, her older daughter disclosed that Kerry's second partner had been sexually abusing her. Kerry was depressed, grieving many lost dreams and said in the first interview that sometimes she did not see a future for herself at all, and believed her life was "ruined". Kerry continued to attend the support group and counselling, but also was matched with an 'Angel'. She gradually gained in strength, was able to support her daughter 'without falling apart', and the daughter, who had been so disturbed by her experience that the emergency psychiatric team was called on many occasions, has been able to start healing from the experience, and is again attending school regularly.

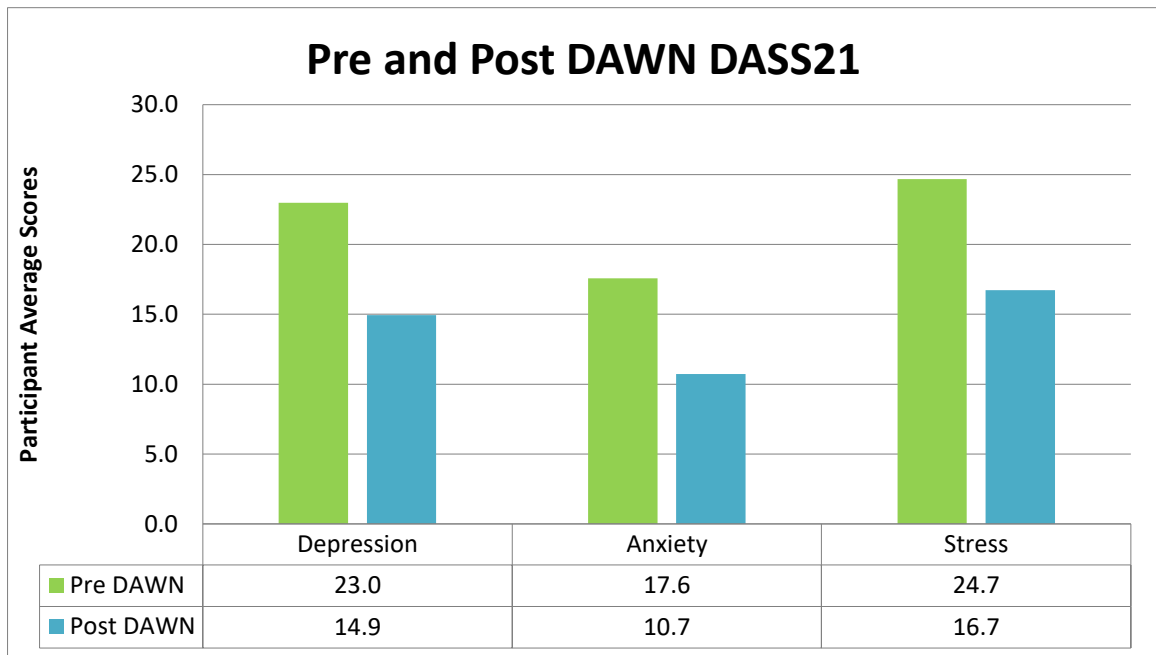
*"I'm safe, my children are safe.
The only thing we have to escape from
these days is the past."*

Client: Kerry
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

4. DASS21: Depression, Anxiety and Stress

The pre-DAWN scores for most clients fall within the Severe or Extremely Severe range on one or more of the three scales (i.e. Depression, Anxiety and Stress). High scores on the DASS21 alert the clinician to a high level of distress in clients and warrant further exploration.

Figure 1: DASS21 RESULTS, PRE AND POST DAWN AVERAGES



Overall, the average scores on all scales had reduced considerably during the DAWN involvement of these clients.

The overall average (the average of the average scores on the other three scales) had reduced from 21.74 (Severe) to 14.13 (Low Moderate).

4.1 DASS21 Sub-scales

The following ratings indicate the severity of symptoms for each sub-scale of the DASS21.

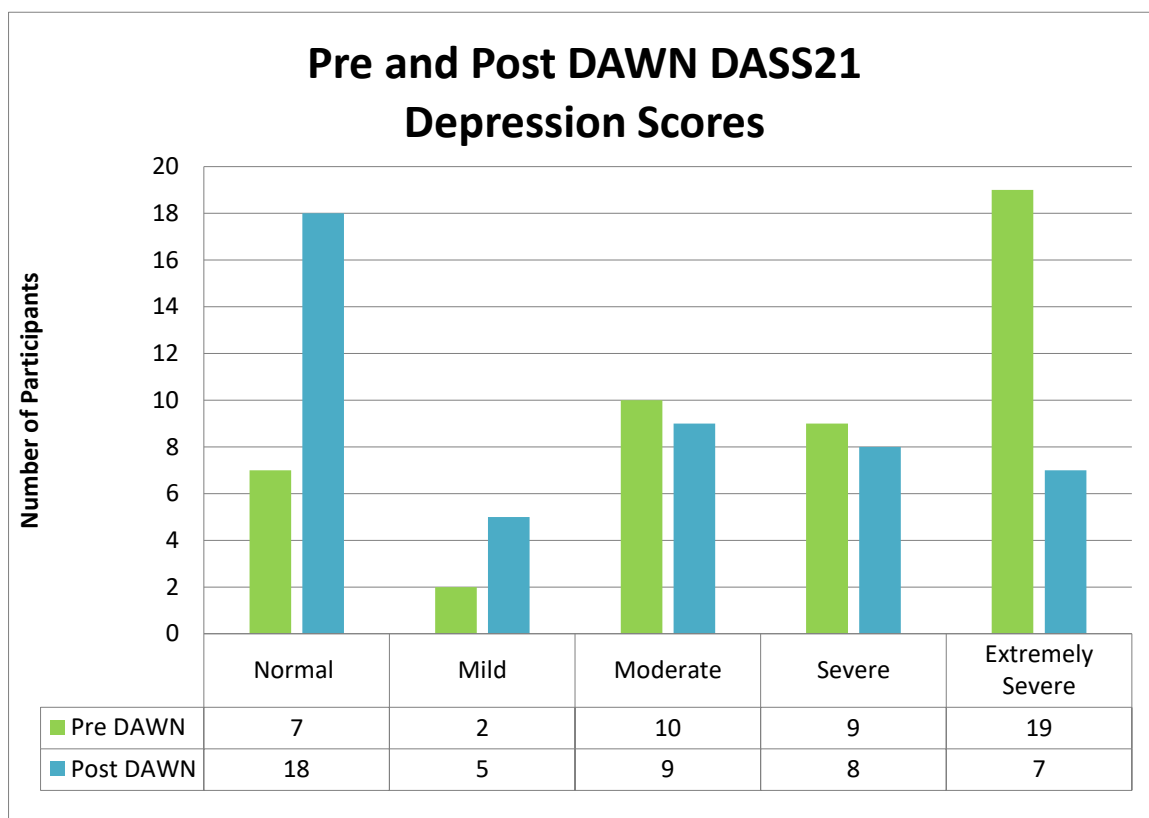
Table 2: DASS21 SEVERITY RATINGS

SEVERITY	DEPRESSION	ANXIETY	STRESS
Normal	0-9	0-7	0-14
Mild	10-13	8-9	15-18
Moderate	14-20	10-14	19-25
Severe	21-27	15-19	26-33
Extremely Severe	28+	20+	34+

4.2 Depression

The average score on this scale pre-DAWN, was 23 (a Severe rating). The average score on this scale post-DAWN, was 15 (in the Moderate range). This indicates a significant reduction in depression scores post-DAWN.

Figure 2: DASS21 Pre and Post DAWN Depression Ratings (Numbers of clients per severity rating)



Pre-DAWN, only 9 out of 47 women scored in the normal or mild range on this scale (19%); and 10 (21%) scored in the moderate range. Nine women (19%) had depression scores that indicated severe levels and 19 (38%) had levels indicating extremely severe depression.

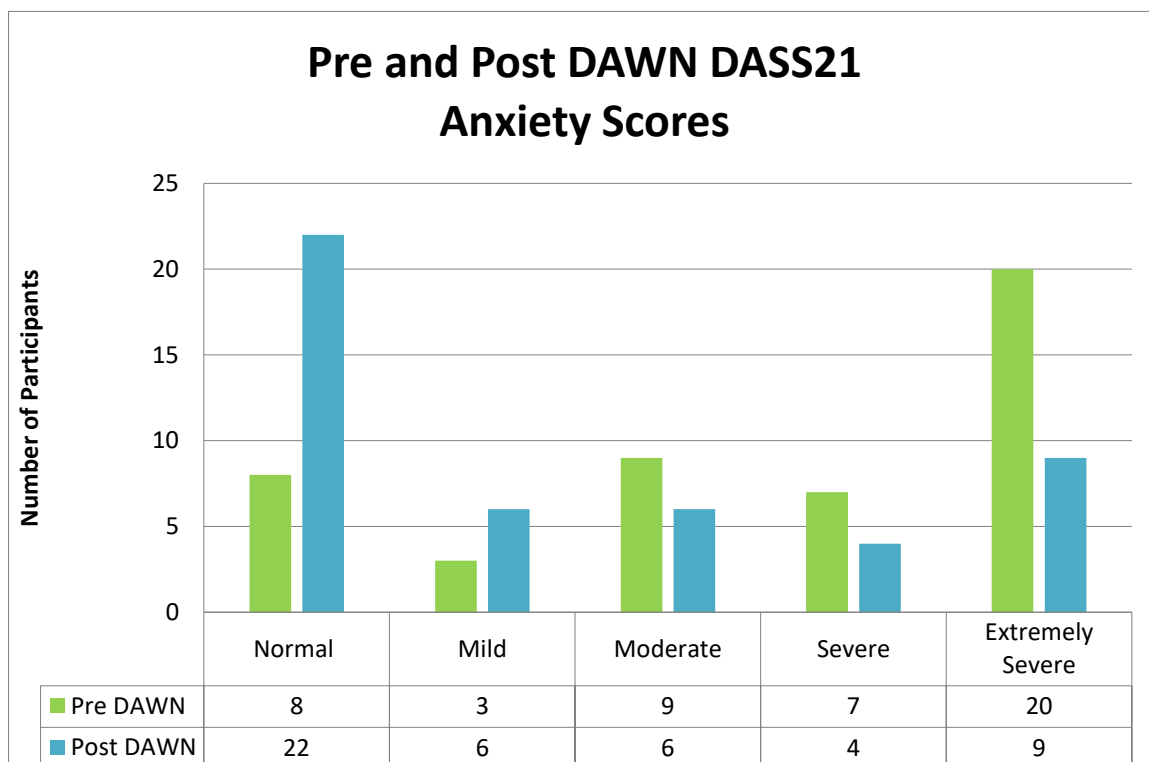
Post-DAWN, 23 (49%) of the 47 women scored in the normal or mild range on this scale; and 9 (19%) scored in the moderate range. Seven women (15%) remained in the Extremely Severe range. The reduction in the numbers of women experiencing severe or extremely severe depression had dropped from 60% to 32%.

Not all women scored less at the end of their DAWN experience, but all those whose depression scores worsened had life stresses that were clearly contributing to their depression. Seven women had depression scores post-DAWN that put them in a higher rating category of depression.

4.3 Anxiety

The average score on this scale pre-DAWN, was 17.57 (Severe), with 20 (43%) of clients in the Extremely severe Range. Only 11 (23%) a quarter of clients reported scores in the normal to mild range in their pre-DAWN assessment, and altogether 27 (57%) reported severe or extremely severe anxiety ratings.

Figure 3: DASS21 Pre and Post DAWN Anxiety Scores (Number of clients per severity rating)



The average score on this scale post-DAWN, was 10.72 (in the low moderate range), with 9 clients (19%) still reporting extremely severe anxiety scores and 28 (60%) of clients now in the Normal to Mild range.

This indicates a significant reduction in anxiety scores post-DAWN.

The number of women reporting severe or extremely severe anxiety decreased for both categories.

Five women had anxiety scores post-DAWN that put them in a higher rating category for anxiety than their pre-DAWN score.

Only one woman's score had risen from a lower category to severe. This woman was in the midst of a protracted property battle in the Family Court.

“Someone is hanging in there with you so you keep hanging in there.”

Client: Patricia
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

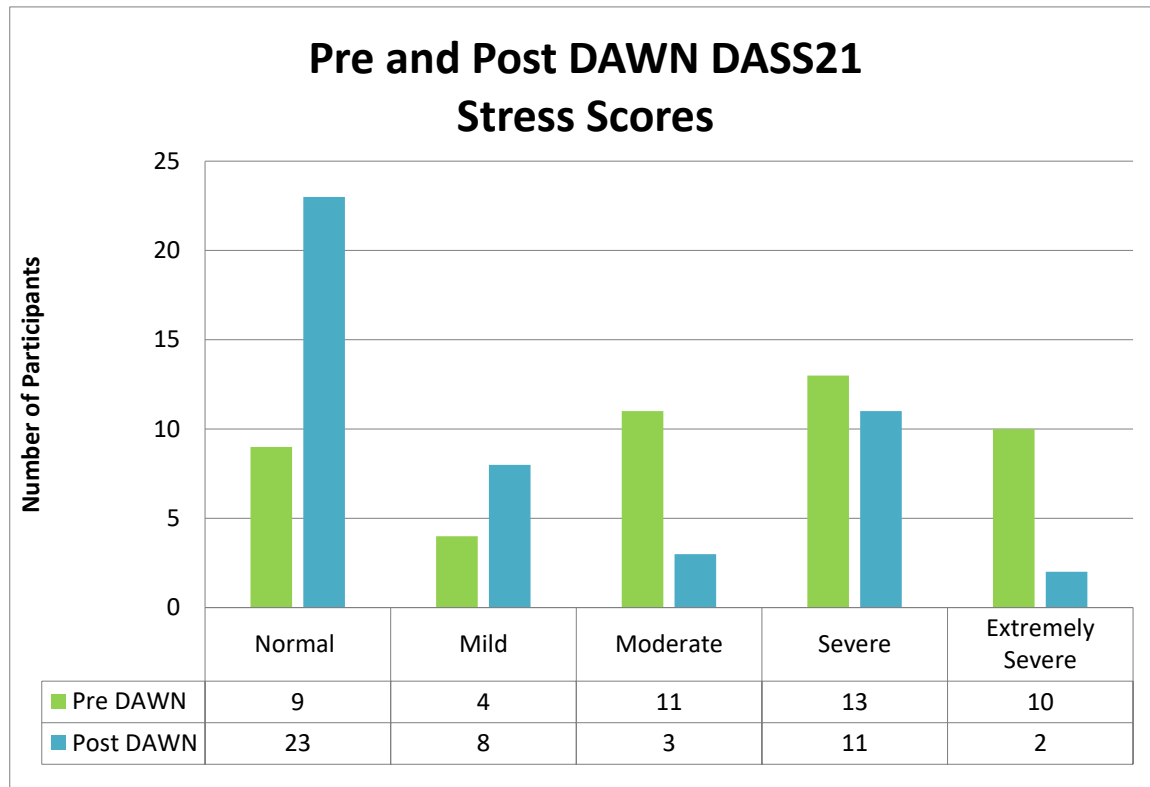
4.4 Stress

The average score on this scale pre-DAWN, was 24.68 (High Moderate range).

The average score on this scale post-DAWN, was 16.72 (Mild range).

This indicates a significant reduction in stress scores post-DAWN.

Figure 4: DASS21 Pre and Post DAWN Stress Scores (Number of clients per severity rating)



Pre-DAWN, 13 out of 47 (28%) women scored in the normal or mild range on this scale; while post-DAWN this had increased to 31 out of 47 women (66%).

Pre-DAWN 10 women (21%) had stress scores that indicated extremely severe stress. Post-DAWN there were 2 (4%) women who scored in the Extremely Severe range. The percentage of women scoring the Severe or Extremely Severe Range on the Stress Scale reduced overall from 23 (49%) to 13 (28%) from pre to post-DAWN. Some of the women had scores that had reduced from extremely severe scores to severe scores, indicating an improvement for them even though their scores were still a concern.

Six out of 47 women had stress scores post-DAWN that put them in a higher rating category for anxiety than their pre-DAWN score, reflecting stressful life events that they were still experiencing including one woman about to be evicted and another involved in Family Court processes.

“I know now anything I really put my mind to, I can do.”

Client: Stella
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

Before ...

*“I don't really see any future for myself.
I'm just going through the motions of
staying alive, largely”*

Client: Louise
Pre-DAWN Questionnaire

After ...

Post-DAWN, Louise's scores changed:

Table 3: *Post-DAWN results for Client: Louise*

DASS21	PRE-DAWN	POST-DAWN
Depression	Severe	Severe
Anxiety	Severe	Mild
Stress	Severe	Normal
IES	46 (indicating PTSD)	15 (with a marked reduction in all categories of symptoms)
Hopefulness	0/5	3/5

Post-DAWN experience:

*“The support that (my ‘Angel’) gives me,
encouragement, practical, fun, caring, is a
light in my dark tunnel that is getting
bigger and stronger daily.”*

Client: Louise
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

5. IMPACT OF EVENTS SCALE

The Impact of Events Scale measures subjective distress caused by traumatic events. It also has three sub-scales to measure three clusters of common trauma symptoms. These are:

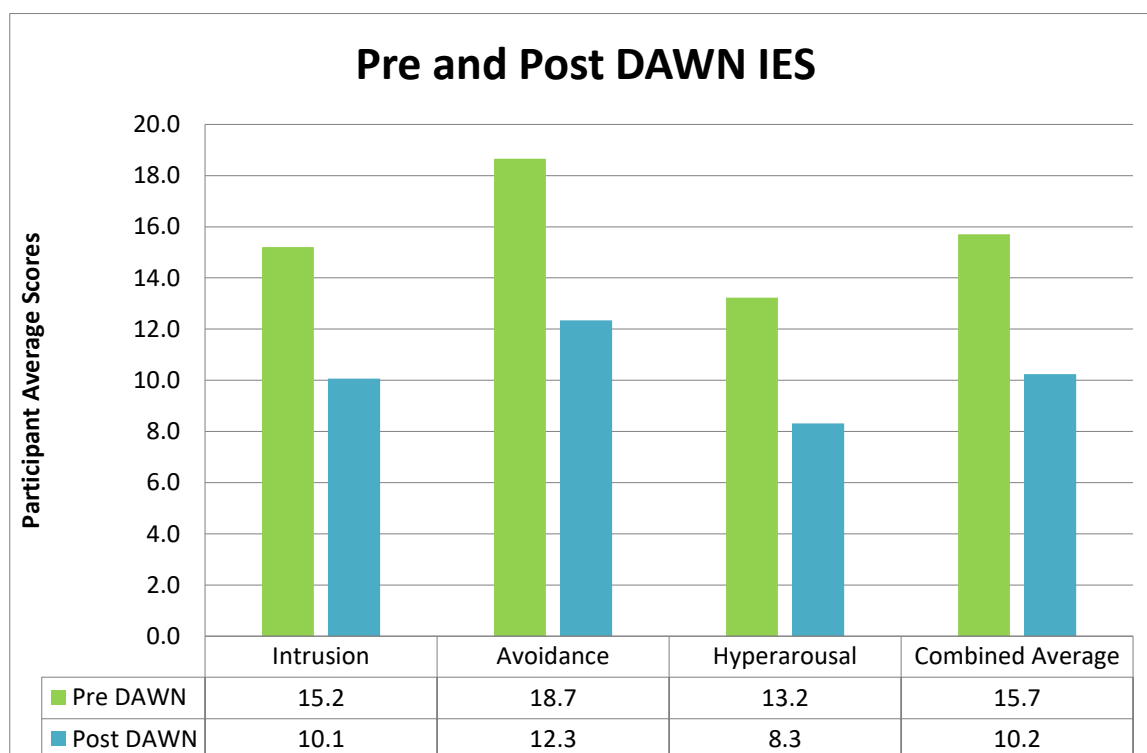
- Intrusion: e.g. nightmares and intrusive thoughts and feelings;
- Avoidance: e.g. emotional numbing, avoiding thoughts or feelings about the event; and
- Hyperarousal: e.g. anger, irritability, jumpiness, startle responses.

A total score above 33 indicates a likelihood of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

5.1 Total IES Scores

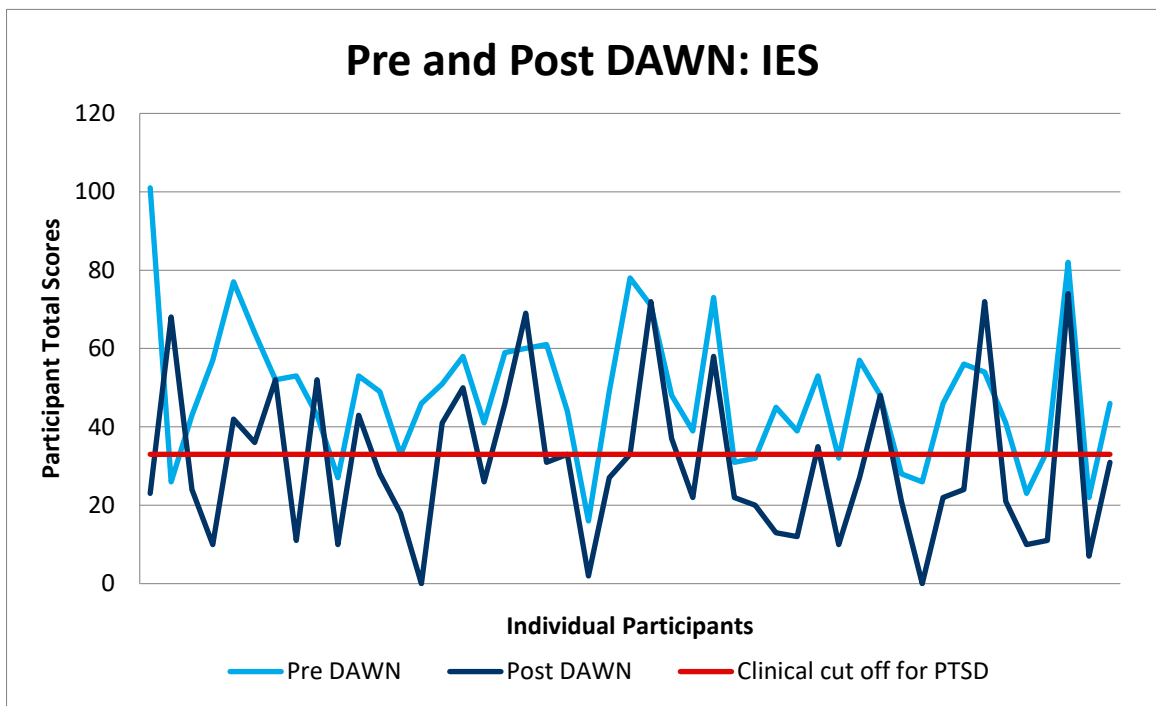
The data from the nine year evaluation reflects the finding of the earlier DAWN evaluations.

Figure 5: DASS21 Pre and Post DAWN Impact of Events Scale Scores (Average scores)



Most significant is that when assessed most clients (37, or 79%) had scores above the point that indicates a likelihood of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder warranting further investigation. Post-DAWN, this number had dropped to 16 (34%). The average pre-DAWN Score was 48.23, and the average post-DAWN score was 30.72, below the clinical cut-off point although still significant. All Doncare's Domestic Violence, Assessment and Support team (DVAS) workers have come to expect high degrees of post traumatic stress in clients and many are referred to counselling and other services as part of the assessment process. The post-DAWN scores indicated improvements in 37 out of 47 women, which is very heartening.

Figure 6: IES Totals Pre-DAWN and Post-DAWN



Four women reported an increase in trauma symptoms and for another three women their overall score did not change. Most other women reported significant improvement in their post trauma symptoms following their experience with the DAWN Program.

*“To have that big sister influence ...
I wouldn't be where I am without
this program.”*

Client: Grace
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

5.2 Intrusion

The average score on this scale pre-DAWN, was 15.2.

The average score on this scale post-DAWN, was 10.1.

Forty-three women (92%) reported a decrease in these symptoms at the end of the DAWN intervention.

5.3 Avoidance

The average score on this scale pre-DAWN, was 18.7.

The average score on this scale post-DAWN, was 12.3.

Forty-three women (92%) reported a decrease in these symptoms at the end of the DAWN intervention.

5.4 Hyperarousal

The average score on this scale pre-DAWN, was 13.2.

The average score on this scale post-DAWN, was 8.3

Forty-two women (89%) reported a decrease in these symptoms at the end of the DAWN intervention.

*“I feel perfectly comfortable with her –
there is no-one else in my life where
I feel like this.”*

Client: Sarah
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

Rose's story

Rose was a very creative artist, who had abandoned her creativity as a result of the abuse she experienced from her husband, who effectively sabotaged her creative outlets. Her 'Angel' reignited Rose's creative spark by asking for her assistance with a craft project. Working on this project together led Rose back into creativity and she began again to create her own work.

Angela's story

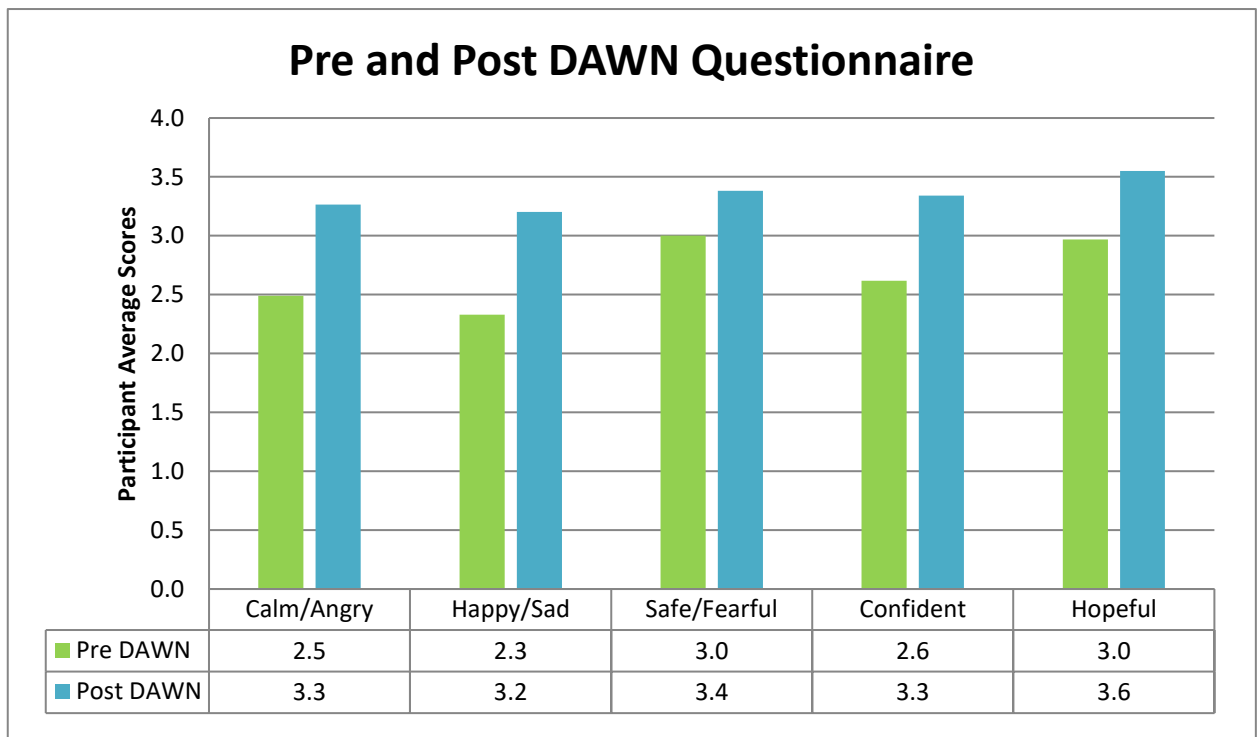
Angela is a successful businesswoman with a high-powered career. She had separated from her husband following violence from him, including physical abuse. He was also verbally abusive and highly erratic in his behaviour. She continued to have to deal with this in relation to child contact arrangements. Angela has support from her family, good friendships and professional networks. Yet for her, having an 'Angel' allowed her to talk about her concerns with someone who was removed from these networks, and allowed her the freedom to receive support.

DAWN-specific Questionnaire

The DAWN-specific pre-evaluation and post-evaluation questionnaire asked women to rate themselves on the following continuums along a scale of 0 to 5.

- Calm ----- Agitated/Angry
- Happy ----- Sad
- Safe ----- Fearful
- Confidence in their ability to manage their problems (Poor – Excellent)
- Hopefulness ----- (Poor – Excellent)

Figure 7: DAWN-Specific Questionnaire: Averages



Percentage Increase:

- How calm are you? 31% increase
- How happy are you? 37% increase
- How safe do you feel? 13% increase
- How well are you managing your problems? (Confidence) 27% increase
- How hopeful are you? 20% increase

Some women reported lower scores on their post-DAWN questionnaire, but most reported improved functioning and mood.

- 85% reported being as calm or more calm that at assessment pre-DAWN.
- 81% reported as happy or happier,
- 74% reported feeling safer,
- 83% reported feeling more confident, and
- 79% reported feeling more hopeful.

Women generally reported feeling calmer, happier, that they are managing better and are more hopeful. The most marked increase was in mood (happiness) and calmness.

It is interesting that nearly one quarter of women in the program reported feeling less safe post-DAWN, and this was usually due to continued harassment from their former partner, and in one case was due to a recent assault by the woman's former partner. Although a thorough assessment of physical safety is part of the assessment, many clients are mothers of dependent children and still have some degree of contact with their former partners in relation to child contact arrangements.

This questionnaire allowed for comments about their self-ratings, and many women reported that their feelings were affected by ongoing harassment, child contact, court appearances, poverty or housing stress. This particularly affected their feelings of safety. One woman said on closing: "I still have an ongoing court case. My ex was convicted of an assault and the police backed him up." This woman reported that her ex-partner is frequently breaching a five year Intervention Order, and that warrants are currently out for his arrest. Another woman said her anxiety now was harassment from her neighbours, as she is a practising Muslim and has suffered cultural abuse in her new neighbourhood.

*"The support helped me hold myself
and my children up without
falling apart."*

Client: Vivien
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

Margaret's story

Another woman had very high scores for anxiety, depression, stress and trauma symptoms at the start and higher scores at the end. She was in her 70's and not in good health and this was deteriorating. She reported having experienced over 50 years of domestic violence and felt that her family had turned against her when she finally left her husband. Despite all this, when asked what she had gained from the program, she said "I gained hope and strength to keep me going. It helped to open my mind, to see things differently. This was very important to me. I would like to say thank you to Doncare from the bottom of my heart."

A major issue for Margaret was that she was in the process of selling her long term family home and was extremely worried about where she would live after this was achieved.

Jessica's story

The worker who referred Jessica regarded her as one of her most difficult clients. Jessica had both a childhood and adulthood full of abuse, and was seriously and chronically depressed. She sometimes stayed in bed for days, relying on her older children to look after the younger ones. Jessica had a long history of difficulties with workers, and they were often the target of her anger. Because she was abrasive, conversations frequently escalated to the point where Jessica would either hang up or refuse to call workers who left messages. She was in hiding from her ex-partner, who had been extremely violent.

After a few months, her 'Angel' described her as identifying "intense feelings of long-standing wounding, betrayal and

disappointment”, and being in a continual state of crisis. The ‘angel’ assigned to Jessica was a practical, positive woman and a good problem solver, with plenty of patience and humour. The effect on Jessica was nothing short of amazing. After a couple of months, Jessica told the DAWN coordinator “I have done more in the last 4 weeks than I have in the last 4 years!” This relationship was extended for a further nine months, in order for progress to be maintained and to ensure that Jessica can really manage on her own, as well as use her improved ability to engage with services to seek help in the future. Jessica introduced her volunteer at a case conference as her ‘Angel’, and added “and I am her cherub!”

6. Qualitative Feedback

This section shares evaluation comments, grouped into the themes that emerged in the pre and post-DAWN questionnaires and interviews with clients. The more general questionnaire had open questions that gave clients an opportunity to describe their experience both before and after DAWN, and to make suggestions about the program.

The comments are enlightening, and at times quite moving. Remember that all of these women, at the start of their DAWN experience, had symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. The comments speak for themselves, and many are reproduced verbatim. Comments that best reflect each theme are provided.

6.1 Comments from clients: Pre-DAWN

Describing their situation

Mental health

“I don’t like to talk about my experiences with people who haven’t any idea of the grief, shame, guilt, anger and sorrow domestic violence incites; but sometimes I really do need to talk about it and wish there was someone to talk to.”

“It is difficult for me to discuss some of my fears and worries with my friends because I think they would not understand how much this still impacts on me every day”.

“I’m still battling with my self-esteem and wonder about my worth as a human being. (Maybe everything he said about me is true).”

Safety

“I worry about what my ex-husband will do.”

“I am worried about our future with him being involved in our lives” (through contact with the children).

“I’m safe, my children are safe. The only thing we have to escape from these days is the past.”

“I wouldn’t have thought of safety so much without, i.e. safety plan.”

“I try to keep positive. Try to think this will all be over soon.”

“I’m still feeling fearful of what he might do, still fearful of people.” (At the assessment stage, this client would dry retch when accessing counselling or group support.)

Social inclusion

“I tend to deliberately isolate myself and have to push myself to get out of the house.”

“I don’t have a lot to offer people, one of the reasons I stay away.”

“I don’t want to upset my family with all this stuff.”

“The thing I feared most before leaving was loneliness and isolation.”

Coping

“I feel I have a lot on my shoulders at the moment.”

“It is very overwhelming at times and this leads to a lack of motivation and a lonely, isolated feeling.”

“I am worried about the effect this is having on my health. Even though I try to keep everything on track it’s not as easy as it looks to some. I constantly feel like it’s only just holding together.”

“Try to pretend I feel okay for the kid’s sake.”

“Overwhelmed, no motivation, but trying really hard to hang in there.”

“Grieving about my hopes and dreams for the future.”

“No foreseeable happy or positive future. All I see are struggles and that’s pretty bleak.”

“My emotions are too up and down.”

“I manage well and everyone sees me as very strong, but sometimes I feel like giving up.” (This woman had two episodes during her time in the program where she was actively suicidal).

“Barely holding it all together, if I go, everything goes.”

“I don’t really see any future for myself. I’m just going through the motions of staying alive.”

Parenting

“I feel like I am constantly snapping at my daughter.”

“I have realised that I have been sabotaged for years. Will I ever have my family again?”

What did women want?

“I hope that the support from DAWN will help me better cope with the things I am dealing with.”

“It would be helpful to have access to an empathic, supportive person to help me stay focussed on the positive aspects of life.”

“Someone to talk to, a walking friend.”

“Just to have an adult conversation would be nice.”

“Assistance with re-engaging with life and all it has to offer.”

“I’m looking for advice with raising my children.”

“I guess I yearn for empathy, non-judgement and a little nurturing.”

“Great to have someone to regularly talk to that’s not a counsellor or support worker.”

“Moral support.”

“Strength, resilience and hope.”

“I would like to finally lead a normal life.”

“A friendship to bounce ideas off and gain insight.”

“(Good to) learn from other’s poverty experiences.”

“I would like to meet other people and make friends.”

“I hope to improve my health and ability to manage and prevent anxiety.”

“I hope my ‘Angel’ will be company as it is difficult connecting with others when everyone is busy with work/family. Learning boundaries can be isolating.”

“This is a big aim but reaching out and sharing I feel will enable me to shift shame and uncertainty to acceptance and wisdom.”

“To know I am not alone.”

*“I have so needed and so loved
having an ‘Angel’.”*

Client: Kerry
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

6.2 Comments from Clients: Post-DAWN

What have you gained from the Program?

General

“There are no words enough to say THANK YOU that justify how good is the exceptional work that you do.”

“I have so needed and so loved having an ‘Angel’.”

“To have that big sister influence ... I wouldn’t be where I am without this program.”

“My support person has put a smile back on my face.”

“I have gained so much, my confidence, my health, my family is happy at last. (This woman’s score on the DASS21 dropped from 92 to 34 over the course of the program).”

“I have an ‘Angel’ who helped me to know my worth.”

“It’s like having an extra person who cares.”

“I have been able to reconnect with myself.”

“Having (my ‘Angel’) in my life has been fantastic. She would listen and never be judgemental, she helped me talk through my problems.”

Mental health

“You can cry with her.”

“I feel safer and more confident now.”

“I can open up with her in a different way than with friends and family.”

“To know that someone will come and see me every week and I would be able to talk about all the things that worry me and she would listen without judging me.”

“I now understand so much more as I’ve been reminded of my good qualities and realising I have so much more.”

“I have clear control of my mind, changing my choices and actions.”

“Just the idea that someone who knows what they are getting into is willing to spend time with me. It set me up to think I had no reason to be ashamed.”

“I could be myself with her and start to put these things behind me.”

Safety

"I feel safe from my partner but unsafe in the (legal) system."

"I feel safe and able to move forward."

"Without Doncare I would not be here."

"I would not have survived without Doncare. I don't know where I would be now."

"(I am safe) in my home and life as I don't let him 'control me' anymore."

"I still have to deal with a nasty divorce from my husband."

"After (the divorce) is finished I will be back to a happy person again, but I worry about my kid's safety."

"The current Intervention Order expires soon. I fear for my son's safety at school."

Social inclusion

"Camaraderie."

"A nurturing female presence."

"I gained a friend."

"I feel like I've known her forever."

"None of my friends could really have that true level of understanding."

"Needed a person to talk to 'who had been there'."

"Gave me hope for the future because my 'Angel' had survived that period of her life."

"A chance at adult company."

"She has renewed my faith in people and given me hope for the future."

"I feel perfectly comfortable with her – there is no-one else in my life where I feel like this."

"I was so reassuring to have (my 'Angel') to visit. She is like a mother figure. The mother I have always wanted and needed."

"She's been my rock; has really been there for me, to listen when I really needed it the most."

"A greater sense of belonging, acceptance and understanding."

"This makes me feel more normal."

"I am more confident and don't hide away so much. It was helpful getting me out in the world again."

Coping

"Having an 'Angel' has helped me feel like I'm closer to calling myself a survivor of domestic violence instead of a victim."

"It will be good to know I can manage on my own."

"I know now anything I really put my mind to, I can do."

"Having an 'Angel' gives you hope more than counselling."

"It has changed my world. I am more confident and able to deal with things."

"Someone is hanging in there with you so you keep hanging in there."

"My health has improved, I am less tired. This program gives me strength to survive." (This woman's score on the DASS21 dropped from 84 to 38 over the course of the program).

"(My 'Angel') has worked wonders towards hopefulness and regaining some of my personal power."

*“Thank you for allowing me an ‘Angel’.
It was very helpful in getting me out
in the world again.”*

Client: Jenny
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

*“Without Doncare I would
not be here.”*

Client: Rose
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

Bronwyn's story

Bronwyn was removed from her birth mother due to neglect and child abuse and placed in foster care. Growing up in the foster family was not much of an improvement and she experienced verbal, emotional and physical abuse for years. In her late 20's, Bronwyn had a brief relationship and found out later that she was pregnant. Bronwyn gave birth to a son and raised him on her own as there was no contact with her abusive partner. She struggled to parent her son, feeling overstretched by the daily demands of making ends meet, parenting and dealing with her own childhood trauma. Bronwyn was diagnosed with depression and was prescribed medication. She frequently despaired about ever having a stable life, and felt very vulnerable and unable to trust others enough to make friends. As a result, Bronwyn became isolated unhappy and unmotivated, not wanting to leave the house. She reported having difficulty with her son and was referred to DAWN for an 'Angel'.

Bronwyn and her 'Angel' began to go out weekly for coffee and outings. The 'Angel' supported her, gave her encouragement, listened when she wanted to talk and challenged her to look at other interpretations of things that were happening. Over time, Bronwyn began to have a more positive outlook, was less inclined to be overwhelmed or oversensitive and her relationship with her son improved. Bronwyn and her 'Angel' explored the walking tracks of the suburb. With the support of the Dorothy Rose Fund, she attended belly dancing classes with her 'Angel' and gradually engaged in other social activities. Bronwyn's 'Angel' was impressed with her commitment, capacity to forgive others and determination to improve herself. Doncare's receptionist commented that Bronwyn looked like a 'whole different woman' from the Bronwyn who used to attend the service.

Parenting

“(My ‘Angel’) has helped me feel safe within myself which has made me a better Mum.”

“The adult conversation is of great benefit allowing me to regroup and refocus as a Mum.”

“She is very engaged regarding matters affecting her son.”

“My children’s behaviour has improved.”

“It has given me someone to talk to about adult issues and that has consequently enabled me to be more available emotionally and head space wise for my daughter.

What was helpful?”

“Not having to accept an ‘Angel’ if I felt incompatible.”

“Personal attention and follow-up care.”

“Being talked into getting out of the house.”

“Has told me about other services.”

“The flexibility of it is very important – it is not needed for everyone to have weekly contact.”

“A really good initiative. There’s nothing there for people long-term.”

“Really good having court support.”

“The kids really like her.”

“It’s good to have the commitment of a weekly visit, giving me something to look forward to.”

“The support person was a constant so that I did not have to keep repeating my background history.”

“My ‘Angel’ is definitely the most important part of this program. She is irreplaceable.”

“I’m really glad I got someone who understands, who has been through this. She can relate to me. She makes me feel good and is very reassuring.”

“You can cry with her.”

“My ‘Angel’ coming to befriend me, and suggesting good strategies to carry on with my life.”

“Someone to come to court with me.”

“(My ‘Angel’) is very understanding, caring and empathic and non-judgemental.”

“The fact that we are both survivors of family violence helped tremendously.”

“I gained confidence from my ‘Angel’ and was inspired by her.”

“Having someone to talk to and would listen without judging me for the problems and mistakes in my life.”

Comments from those still in difficulty

“As my situation is unresolved it is difficult to feel calm about the future.”

“I am still worried about what lies ahead.”

“I miss my ‘Angel’ – the title is 100% accurate.”

“Since finishing with my ‘Angel’ I’ve felt a little lost, though I am stronger than I was.”

“It is hard to plan for the future at the moment.”

“I am sad about being in the middle between my new fiancé and my boys.”

“I’m worried about money and paying for my children to visit me.”

Suggestions for the program

“Personally I feel ‘Angels’ should have been a victim of family/domestic violence to fully understand client’s situation.” (About half of DAWN ‘Angels’ are survivors themselves).

"I found it hard to ask my 'Angel' for help and had to be encouraged to do so. It's important for 'Angels' to know it's really hard to call when you need them. They need to call you."

"More 'Angels'. I had to wait for a while to be matched and I know this program would have been so great for me earlier."

"People come into calmness in their own time. If you take away their support too soon they could lose their footing and fall again." (Client suggested longer matching periods. These are reviewed and sometimes extended where needed.)

"Maybe extend the time together."

"More joint activities with other women and their 'Angels'."

"I would love the opportunity to meet other women in the program more."

"None. You are all amazing. Thank you."

"You were all so lovely, insightful and thoughtful. A top pick."

*"I feel safe and able to
move forward."*

Client: Marina
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

6.2.1 Before and after comparisons

The differences that occur in many women's lives during their DAWN experience can be spine tingling. There are existential improvements in functioning, and in women's core beliefs about themselves. These seem to free women up to make decisions they could not have imagined making only a year or two earlier. One woman bought a small farm in another state, something she had always wanted to do. Some take on employment and study opportunities they never imagined themselves being able to achieve. Many attend course including skills development or parenting classes, and change patterns that have seemed intractable. There is something if not magical, at least wonderful about the impact for these clients of having this very special relationship in their lives, and it often comes when they have lost hope in relationships altogether.

Some before and after examples are as follows:

Betsy, before the program said "I have never felt safe." In her post-DAWN questionnaire she wrote "I am learning to believe in myself and my thoughts."

Ruby, before the program wrote: "It all seems too big and I lack confidence in the police and legal system to bring the promised freedom." Her later observation was "The support that (my 'Angel') gives me, encouragement, practical, caring, is a light in my dark tunnel that is getting bigger and stronger daily."

Before being matched to her 'Angel', Shirley said that "I had a very difficult time with my husband because he was head of everything. I couldn't make even a simple decision." Post-DAWN, her scores on all scales had improved and she had carved out a new life for herself in almost every way.

One client made her own before and after comparison: "I am so happy about DAWN. At (the) beginning I was very sad and upset. It helped me slowly, slowly move on with my life. My 'Angel' was very nice and helped me a lot and took me out. I am so happy about DAWN. What they have done for me means I can now stand on my feet now. Thank you."

*"I have an 'Angel' who helped me
to know my worth."*

Client: Sally
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

*"My 'Angel' is a Godsend...
With her, there are no 'have tos'
and no pressure."*

Client: Kim
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

Jai's story

Jai had left a 20 year relationship 3 years before she was referred to the DAWN Program. She had experienced verbal, financial and emotional abuse from her ex-husband who had an alcohol problem. Life with Ahsan had never been easy: the family had moved 20 times in 20 years, been bankrupt a few times, and then Ahsan had begun to pursue other women. Ahsan's increasing neglect of her was the final straw and Jai left the relationship.

Jai was depressed, physically exhausted and caring for 3 children aged under 15. She struggled with mood swings, and often presented as disorganised, confused and indecisive. She told her 'Angel' she felt unattractive and unfit. She frequently became distressed when people she knew said hurtful things.

Through regular weekly meetings over many cups of coffee, the 'Angel' became a strong and positive support to Jai, acknowledging her skills, strengths and successes, helping her plan her week and reflecting with her on achievements of the previous one. Over the year, Jai was able to keep a job, began to look for long term accommodation, discussed options with her 'Angel' who affirmed her capacity to make decisions, assisted her to maintain boundaries in her relationships with her children and offered a listening ear as Jai began to try out new relationships for herself. Amazingly, by the end of her DAWN experience, Jai has been able to put down money for a house of her own, has a new job and is in good spirits.

6.3 Comments from 'Angels' Post-DAWN

Feedback was sought from volunteers about their experience as volunteer mentors in the program. Some of this was through face-to-face interviews, and some through written feedback forms and through volunteer group discussions. These comments are so clear and reflective that they are reproduced without commentary.

Observations about clients and their progress

Most 'Angels' commented on their clients' improved confidence, self-esteem, ability to manage, be a better parent and to cope with less support. Many also commented on problems their clients have with practical day-to-day issues, such as parenting issues, housing, social isolation and financial issues. Wherever possible, clients are referred to their closest appropriate service.

A few clients commenced new relationships during their time in the program, and in some cases this proved problematic with the new partners abusing the clients. One was assisted to get an Intervention Order; another successfully broke off the relationship. Although these relationships were unhelpful, the learning for these women was profound. One woman wondered if Doncare was thinking of a new program where women could try an abusive relationship in order to practice the skills needed to regain safety and wellbeing!

"I haven't always been able to respond/visit when (the client) wanted me to – I think this has been beneficial for her, reducing her dependence on me and maybe helping her to realise that she can cope herself."

"Her ability to manage daily life has definitely improved although she still struggles with issues of establishing routines..."

"She is more hopeful about the future and her plans are more realistic, therefore less subject to deflation."

"She is more realistic about how much time, energy, thoughtful reflection and skill it takes to raise healthy kids."

"I believe this relationship has led her to 'give myself permission' to care about herself."

"Sessions usually start off with a lot of anxiety and stress but after the two hours she has always expressed that it has been good to share with me and off-load some of her 'stuff'."

"(My client) is studying and looking for a job. She dresses much nicer and laughs more often."

"(Client) is looking forward to gaining employment after completing her course. She can articulate her vision for a better life for her and her children. She has become an independent woman."

"Very sad and confused/uncertain when we first met. Now stable and confident, and much happier."

"It has been a blessing to walk alongside and support a woman who was vulnerable and in distress, and see her eventually emerge as a woman of strength, courage and hope."

"When I met (client) she seemed to be living more day to day, whilst she awaited the diagnosis of her son and the outcome of her children's care orders. Toward the end she achieved more clarity around these things which allowed her to focus more on her hopes for the future."

"Stress and anxiety is definitely less and this is evident in the way she conducts herself. Her thoughts are no longer scattered."

"(Client) has come from being victim to survivor."

"She understands herself better and is more open-minded in general. She is confident, calm and has inner strength that will help her overcome any challenges for the future."

"She is able to turn her sad moods into happiness more quickly."

"(Client) is managing daily life very well. She is more organised. She has decluttered her house. She has a good routine with school, childcare, etc. She is very resilient and is enjoying life."

"(Client) has certainly improved, she no longer has such a distinct crease just above her nose!"

Carla's story

Carla was a young woman from a non-English-speaking background who had moved to Melbourne from another state, with three young children, due to abuse from her partner. She was keen to study, but lacked confidence in her capabilities, as English was not her first language. She was matched with an 'Angel' who had a background in education, and was able to build Carla's confidence in her own abilities. Carla is now nearing the successful completion of her studies. Her 'Angel' also supported her by accompanying her to several court hearings about access. It was a sign of Carla's growing sense of empowerment that when a court official treated her poorly, she was able to assertively challenge this treatment.

Sue's story

Sue was raising five children on her own after having separated from her husband due to his abuse of her. She was from a non-English speaking background, and experienced a lot of pressure from within her community to return to her husband. Knowing she had regular support from her 'Angel' enabled Sue to remain strong in the face of this opposition.

Sue had not been educated in Australia, and was unfamiliar with how the education system worked. Her 'Angel' initially supported her by accompanying her to meetings with school staff. Sue's confidence increased, and she was then able to liaise with staff herself, to better support her children in their education.

Observations about clients and their parenting

“She does really well as a mum. Her daughter still struggles with not being able to see her Dad.” (Contact disallowed due to child abuse).

“Manages well, has some difficulty imposing boundaries for children’s behaviour due to disparity in father and mother’s expectations.”

“(Client) is always very present with her child and over 12 months has learned about boundaries and values and how they affect her child. (She is) a loving, caring and responsible parent.”

“She sees a bright future with her children and is determined to make a good life for them. They are her priority.”

“(Client) is making her own decisions for herself and her family, inviting friends and children’s friends home. This did not happen (before) as she was conscious of the unpredictability of her husband.”

Observations about the children

“She had disengaged from others outside her immediate family, isolating her and her children, and depriving her youngest children of early socialisation.”

“(Now) my client has taken on board many of the parenting issues we have discussed and has emulated some of the ways I interact with her children. All the children now attend appropriate school regularly.”

“My client frequently demonstrates a more positive and loving attitude towards her children.”

“All the children appear happier now that they are developing more age-appropriately.”

“She has two young children with high care needs and does a wonderful job. From when I started to my finishing, her son had made a lot of progress.”

In relation to those still struggling

Not all the women were ready to finish at the end of the 12 month period, and more than 1 in 5 matches have been extended for a further 3 to 12 months. This is facilitated according to individual circumstances, and these have included one woman being recently assaulted, women with major physical or mental health issues, and some still in the process of being linked into services and supports. There have been some women who finished with the program while still battling significant distress, and also two women who returned to former partners and so left the program. For the volunteers working with women who finish before they are truly safe and recovering, this is especially difficult, and support is offered to them as well. Reading through comments about those who are still struggling gives some insight into life for women who face difficulties with ongoing harassment, poverty, housing stress and loneliness when they try to gain safety.

Some of the comments from these ‘Angels’ were:

“She was extremely stressed and anxious throughout the time I was visiting, with very good reason.”

“At the time I ceased contact there was not a lot to be hopeful about in the future.”

“Our relationship ‘gained’ over time, her trust grew and she became more prepared to share confidential and personal information with me.”

“I know at times she would have a glimmer of insight into how much she was abused by both her husband and her parents and then it would all disappear again ... so maybe it was the planting of a seed that will eventually grow.”

“I found the debrief last week extremely beneficial... It left me feeling that maybe I had supported her through the worst and therefore given her a bit more strength to move on.”

“At times it was exhausting, emotionally draining and left me feeling totally inadequate – but the support from DAWN and my family (plus a scotch) always got me back on my feet.”

“I have observed that when challenges present themselves, my client very easily slips back into a negative/depressive state. However it appears that her level of functioning, when it is in this state, is

higher now than it was in the beginning of our time together.” (Not long before this client started with her ‘Angel’, she had been hospitalised with panic disorder).

“She seems to manage daily life most days. Goes to work, keeps her house nice, takes good care of (her child), but there is no joy.”

“She has ongoing housing problems which stress her and make her sad.”

“I still feel I could not help (client) as much as she needed.”

“There’s a lot of sadness in (client’s) life at the moment. Company, conversation and a walk in the park allows for some happiness to come in.”

“She feels that she has no power to make decisions over her life.”

“Her moods are continually affected by the husband’s behaviour to her, constantly pressuring her to return to him.”

“In (overseas country) his family are pressuring her parents to tell her to return to him.”

“She finds it hard living in the (public housing) flats with so many people on drugs and also now avoids going to the laundry. She washes and dries her clothes in her flat to avoid bullying she was subjected to (by other residents).”

“She wants to get a divorce but is afraid of her husband’s reaction so has not proceeded with this.”

Observations about the mentoring process

“I feel that I have been perfectly matched with my client. I really love her personality and her strength of character.”

“She seems to think that this is a huge gift I am giving her but I enjoy very much my times with her and it is satisfying when you feel that you can connect with someone on many different levels.”

“Looking back, I believe that I transitioned from an ‘occasional support mate’ to being a coach or facilitator, to a full-on case worker. Now, as we wind down, the transition is reversing.”

“It was interesting forming a relationship with a stranger that sat somewhere between professional and personal.”

“I have a very real sense of being a part of a ‘multi-pronged’ approach by Doncare to assist women such as (my client), so the DAWN staff’s assurance that we ‘Angels’ are definitely making a difference.”

“I think she trusted me to listen and understand and accept her reality without trying to offer solutions, and that was very important to her.”

“The simplicity of the program is what works – it leaves you to be flexible and work in with your clients.”

“I like the flexibility of the program for the ‘Angel’ and client to determine when, where and how often we see each other.”

“The thing that worked mostly for (the client) was the consistency of a regular meeting every week. She needed a reliable, trustworthy friend. Previously she had little social contact and was not doing anything for herself.”

“She needed someone to bounce her ideas off, to give her confidence to try out new things. Someone to say, “Yes, go for it!”.”

Observations about the ‘Angel’ team

“Networking with the other ‘Angels’ is a very special privilege. I am learning so much from them, especially those who have survived domestic violence.”

“My experience of being in that team of women with Doncare staff offering so much support and appreciation is quite amazing.”

“Was great to meet some wonderful women, humbling to hear their personal stories of survival and awe inspiring to experience their care and commitment.”

“Being an ‘old Angel’ I always know that there are good times and positive gains ahead, no matter how challenging the beginnings.”

“I enjoy being an ‘Angel’ so that I can be there for someone who knows that I will not judge them and will be a listening ear and a shoulder for them to cry on.”

“It has been a wonderful experience for me. I feel that I am contributing to such a worthwhile program that helps change the lives of women.”

“I love being with my peers, being surrounded by like-minded strong women.”

“I just feel so honoured being an ‘Angel’.”

“The challenges can be difficult, and outcomes not always go as planned, but the freedom to make choices, and make our own mistakes and successes, is the right of every woman.”

“The challenges can be difficult, and outcomes not always go as planned, but the freedom to make choices, and make our own mistakes and successes, is the right of every woman.”

Angel Quote: Nicole

Observations about the program and management

“The strong, compassionate, skilled support of Carmel (Manager) and Kristin (Coordinator) through policy structure, professional training and supervision was essential.”

“I have nothing but praise for the support and would not have been able to survive the experience without it.”

“I liked to go to the meetings and hated to miss them.”

“Being able to debrief when I needed it helped me process what I was witnessing. It also assisted me in putting self-protective boundaries in place that stopped me from burning out.”

“I used the (contact visit report sheets) to process what happened during each visit. Recording my work in this way gave me a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction.”

“Having Kristin’s (Coordinator’s) support was extremely important. Her follow up work with information and practical assistance was invaluable.” (There were many variations of this comment).

“The support is constant and consistent. I always felt secure and safe.”

“It has been a wonderful privilege to travel with my client. The support offered by Doncare was exceptional.”

“Please get someone on staff who is versed and experienced in housing.” *(Manager’s comment: if only we could get some funding for this! Housing issues are some of the most worrying and long-lasting concerns for women who have escaped domestic violence. Many ‘Angels’ support client through housing applications, rejections and battles. The path through the public housing system is a long, confusing and cumbersome labyrinth).*

“It is reassuring to have Nora (Coordinator) there for me and my client.”

“The follow-up given by Nora (Coordinator) is prompt, personal and helpful.”

“Knowing support is a phone call away has given me confidence to seek help rather than think I have to have the answers in often complex situations.”

“Monthly meetings are a must. We keep learning all the time from staff members and from other ‘Angels’. It’s a very good support system.”

“I think (the program) is in very good hands.”

Breanna’s story

Breanna had experienced abuse as a child, and had always been told she was “no good”. When she became a mother, her partner and family told her she would be unable to be a good mother.

Breanna eventually left her abusive partner, and was, as she put it “in a very dark place”. She lacked the confidence to go out and was very isolated. Being linked to an ‘Angel’ gave her the chance to learn to trust another person and to develop confidence in herself as being someone who has the capacity to make good and wise decisions. She is now actively involved in serving her local community and helping others in need.

Observations about themselves

“Fruitful and healing for my own development.”

“I have had a temporary daughter and three temporary grandchildren.”

“The difficult issues my client faces was very stressful for me.”

“Being involved in the program got me talking so people in other parts of my life admitted to me they were domestic violence survivors and talked about their experiences.”

“Being more flexible than a paid worker meant that I had more time to recognise core issues, prioritise and respond in a way that dealt with both the urgent and the important.”

“To travel with her and not try to change her. To be careful with gifts when there is such a need.”

“I had to forego any need I have for feedback as (client’s) total involvement doesn’t allow for reciprocal feedback. ... this feeling of being ineffectual has been the hardest part.” (This ‘Angel’s’ client said, in her evaluation, “I look forward to her visits. Having an ‘Angel’ has helped me feel like I’m closer to calling myself a survivor”).

“I really enjoyed being part of the program especially being given the title ‘Angel’”.

“It’s very gratifying to know that someone’s life can change for the better if we give them some of our time and listen to them, and share our lives for a small time.”

“Seeing my clients become stronger and more confident in themselves, feeling that they matter, that they have support and a friend and that they are not alone encourages them to be brave and takes steps to improve their life and become part of society again fills me with joy.”

Recommendations made by the volunteers (‘Angels’)

“Maintain and even extend training and resources for the volunteers. The monthly team meetings are essential, and guest speakers are particularly valued.”

“Keep and distribute minutes of the team meetings so that those who cannot get there can keep in touch.”

“The availability of good information and access to other types of workers is very valuable.”

“A full time coordinator.”

“Some case management help for situations where clients have specific needs, but they fall outside the scope of the ‘Angel’ role.”

“Dealing with boundaries is the trickiest issue and ‘cannot be stressed enough in training’.”

“A need to reinforce the concept of self-care for ‘Angels’, to help protect them from becoming over-involved.”

“An occasional evening get-together for ‘Angels’.”

“Some more informal type meetings that encouraged ‘Angels’ and their matches to meet one another and share experiences.”

“Better funding could help ‘Angels’ to support clients more fully. Money and paying for bills is a big problem for women who are survivors of family violence. Psychoeducation programs for money management, accessing educational institutions and dealing with the courts.”

All these recommendations have been taken on board since the program started. The volunteers enjoy the monthly meetings and minutes are indeed distributed to members. Guest speakers attend some meetings, and there have been some excursions to courts and domestic violence forums as part of professional development for these very special volunteers. Existing ‘Angels’ attend training to speak about their experiences and to answer questions about the role. There is now an annual dinner for the ‘Angels’, and former ‘Angels’ are also invited to attend. Both volunteers and clients are given self-care packs made up from donated goods, as they become available. Events that include both ‘Angels’ and their clients have been a great success though are not a regular part of the DAWN experience.

The only recommendation that has been impossible to implement is to have a full time coordinator. Current funding simply does not allow this option.

7. Discussion

The DAWN Program has gained a lot of expertise and wisdom over the last nine years. There are increasing numbers of referrals and requests from potential 'Angels'. The program is efficient, practical, and manifestly powerful in an overwhelmingly positive way. Along the way we have heard terrifying accounts of women's and children's experiences, and inspiring stories of survival and growth. The volunteers demonstrate endless patience and creativity, and staff members have a level of expertise that is most impressive. Doncare is immensely proud of DAWN.

The complexities of the work involve assessment of safety, mental health, and sometimes child protection issues, involving a wide array of services from police to legal and allied health professionals. We are always mindful of the care of children and their recovery and progress delights their mothers and their family 'Angels'. One of the most impressive and common spinoffs in the program is the improvements in the quality of life for the children involved. When mothers are supported, they can establish routines, reassure frightened children and encourage their children to become more involved in activities that build their confidence and resilience. Domestic violence frequently restricts children's lives and development, and depletes both the mother's confidence in her parenting and her capacity to attend to her child's needs. Children of mothers in the DAWN Program are often described as 'blossoming', or 'settling'. Conversely, one of the ongoing causes of stress is the worry mothers have about their children spending time with their fathers, when those fathers habitually use violence, coercion and bullying towards both their children and their ex-partners.

The assessment of referrals to this program is both highly sensitive and highly complex. The assessment of clients has been fine-tuned, and needs to be in the hands of staff who are very experienced in the field of domestic violence recovery. The evaluation measures, outlined in this report leave no doubt that DAWN staff assess and assist women with alarming levels of depression, anxiety and trauma symptoms. Some have long standing mental health issues and many are still living in fear of their former partners.

Anyone who has worked with survivors of domestic violence, in a supportive or therapeutic role, knows that the effects are dire, diverse and persistent. Whether the abuse includes physical or sexual assault, the psychological impact stems not from bruises and broken bones, but from broken hearts. It stems from humiliation, manipulation, betrayal, shaming and constant disparagement. The effects are similar to brain-washing. Contrary to common belief, women resent and fear psychological abuse and its effects more than physical abuse (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, and Polek, 1990).

Women sometimes need medical attention, usually for a number of days or weeks. The psychological healing can take many years, and this is one of the reasons that domestic violence is the largest contributor to preventable death, disease and disability in Victoria for women aged under 45 (VicHealth, 2004). Much of the support funding goes to short-term and crisis services and many studies have recommended more long-term support services, including Patton, (2003) the Dimensions Report (2006), and the recent Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016). Doncare is one of very few services that offers regular long term counselling and group support, and the DAWN Program compliments this commitment to the long term recovery process that many women require.

Home visits to clients, and the personalised matching of needs and interests, as well as the flexibility of the nature and timing of support seems to be a vital factor in the enthusiasm of clients to participate. Volunteers engage very well with their clients and demonstrate a strong commitment to the program. They seek support when needed and demonstrate appropriate support to each other with enthusiasm and compassion.

Volunteers can identify changes in client attitudes and behaviour. Some of the changes have been significant and volunteers notice a clear and positive impact on the children of DAWN clients.

Doncare introduced the idea of a relief 'Angel' in the third year of the program. If a volunteer needs to take early retirement, or extended leave for any reason, we will ask another volunteer to support a client for the

duration, or in order to extend the client's time in the program. Relief 'Angels' also can sometimes be found to accompany a client to court or an important meeting when their usual 'Angel' is not available. Volunteers are encouraged to keep up regular contact with each other by attendance at team meetings. Contact sheets completed by volunteers are a good way for the coordinator to be made aware of issues that need attention and other supports that may need to be put in place.

All clients have expressed immense gratitude to the service and some clients have expressed a desire to become an 'Angel' for DAWN in the future. Linking clients to other services is important throughout the life of the program. These links need to be active and timely.

Initially it took longer than hoped to recruit volunteers and, due to the sensitive nature of this work. However, for the last three years there have been sufficient enquiries from women seeking to become volunteers and we are constantly grateful for their patience in waiting for training to occur.

Not all volunteer applicants have been accepted into the program. The most common reasons are that some are still too close to their own experience of domestic violence, or they are not deemed to have the right combination of skills and qualities to perform the role.

Now that the DAWN Program is well established, there is a steady stream of referrals. It is unfortunate that we turn so many away because they do not live on Manningham or because we can only maintain so many volunteers and clients with the current level of funding.

The feedback received from the 'Angels' shows what a tremendous commitment they make as volunteers with DAWN. The experience for them, while enjoyable, can be demanding, challenging, and at times, they can be genuinely worried about their clients. The feedback confirms how important the training is, and how well supported they need to be, so that volunteers do not feel over-responsible or become distressed by the mentoring experience. This program can only be effective if it is well resourced by experienced, professional staff.

This program is also one of the most cost-efficient forms of support that can be offered. Up to 20 volunteers and clients can be supported by a skilled worker in a 0.6 EFT position, with added agency and supervisory support. These volunteers give an average of four hours per week each to the program, not including training and regular professional development. In order to provide a home visiting program to 15 to 20 clients with serious mental health and complex domestic violence issues using paid staff, one would need at least 4 full time staff, or between 5 and 6 times the current level of funding!

"The whole family, including the dog, has embraced what I have had to offer and I have seen them nourished and grow because of this personal type of involvement."

'Angel' Quote: Jill

8. Summary

There is no doubt that the women who are matched to a volunteer in the DAWN Program usually finish their 12 months with DAWN feeling and functioning much better than at the start. The huge improvement in mental health is almost astonishing. There are certainly a number of factors contributing to this improvement, and in many cases the mentoring provided by DAWN was complimented by other services such as counselling, attending a group or receiving practical help. Time itself is a great healer. Notwithstanding this, after a year of support from their 'Angel' in the DAWN Program, women are likely to be far less stressed, depressed, anxious and traumatised, and to report that they are calmer, happier, more confident, more able to function well and more hopeful about their future.

One of the most heartening and important facets of the DAWN Program is the impact on the children of these clients. They, too, are without doubt happier and more settled, and have brighter futures, thanks to the progress made. This generational impact is a gift not only to these children, but also for the future of the community, and a great reason to promote the program.

The best evidence of the effectiveness of the DAWN model is the feedback received from the clients themselves, and they are unanimous in their gratitude for the experience, and are convincing in their attribution of much of their recovery to their relationship with their 'Angel'. For this reason alone, it is vital that DAWN flourish.

The major funding body, the City of Manningham, should be truly proud of their commitment to this program. In the future, it is hoped that other agencies will take up this model to assist women who are recovering from living with abuse.

Carmel O'Brien,
for Doncare
September, 2016

*"I miss my 'Angel' –
the title is 100% accurate."*

Client: Kerry
Post-DAWN Questionnaire

9. References

Edwards, Robyn

Staying Home, Leaving Violence. Australian Domestic Violence Clearing House, 2004.

Department of Human Services, Victoria

Women's Journey away from Family Violence: Framework and Summary, 2004

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The Dimensions Project Report. Doncare, 2006.

Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, and Polek

The role of emotional abuse in physically abusive relationships. *Journal of Family Violence*, 5, 107-120, (1990).

Patton, Shirley

Pathways: How Women leave Violent Men. Government of Tasmania, 2003.

Other resources:

I.E.S.

<http://members.iinet.net.au/~gmt/IES-R-Scales.pdf>



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Attachment 1. Role of the Volunteer

A DAWN 'Angel' can:

- Listen well
- Be non-judgemental
- Provide support when attending essential meetings
- Help women access information
- Help women access leisure activities
- Help link women with professional services
- Provide support whilst shopping, parenting, etc
- Provide companionship.

A DAWN 'Angel' is not:

- A counsellor
- A housekeeper
- A babysitter
- A crisis support worker.

Examples of What an 'Angel' might do:

- Go out for coffee
- Attend a movie
- Go with her to a movie
- Go with her to a doctors or lawyers appointment
- Go with her to court
- Help her take her kids to the park
- Join in a leisure activity.

Examples of what an 'Angel' is not expected to do:

- Give money to women
- Be on call to women all of the time
- Mind children without the mum present
- Speak on behalf of or act on behalf of the women
- Housework (but may assist as part of support)
- Counselling.

Attachment 2. DASS21

DASS21	Name:	Date:
<p>Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you <i>over the past week</i>. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.</p> <p><i>The rating scale is as follows:</i></p> <p>0 Did not apply to me at all 1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time 2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time 3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time</p>		
1	I found it hard to wind down	0 1 2 3
2	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0 1 2 3
3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0 1 2 3
4	I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g., excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0 1 2 3
5	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0 1 2 3
6	I tended to over-react to situations	0 1 2 3
7	I experienced trembling (e.g., in the hands)	0 1 2 3
8	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0 1 2 3
9	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0 1 2 3
10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0 1 2 3
11	I found myself getting agitated	0 1 2 3
12	I found it difficult to relax	0 1 2 3
13	I felt down-hearted and blue	0 1 2 3
14	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0 1 2 3
15	I felt I was close to panic	0 1 2 3
16	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0 1 2 3
17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0 1 2 3
18	I felt that I was rather touchy	0 1 2 3
19	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g., sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0 1 2 3
20	I felt scared without any good reason	0 1 2 3
21	I felt that life was meaningless	0 1 2 3

Attachment 3. Pre-DAWN Questionnaire

PRE-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate your mood most days at present, on the following scales.

Calm Agitated/Angry
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

Happy Sad
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

Safe Fearful
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

How would you rate your ability to manage the problems you are facing?

Excellent Poor
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

How would you rate your hopefulness about your future?

Excellent Poor
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

Can you say what you would like to gain from the support offered by the DAWN Program?
(For yourself, your health, your children, etc)

Attachment 4. Post-DAWN Questionnaire

POST-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate your mood most days at present, on the following scales.

Calm Agitated/Angry
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

Happy Sad
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

Safe Fearful
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

How would you rate your ability to manage the problems you are facing?

Excellent Poor
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

How would you rate your hopefulness about your future?

Excellent Poor
5.....4.....3.....2.....1.....0

Comments _____

Can you comment on what you would think you have gained from the support offered by the DAWN Program? (For yourself, your health, your children, etc).

What aspects of the program were the most helpful?

Do you have any suggestions to improve the program?

Attachment 5. 'Angel' Feedback

POST-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE – 'ANGEL' FEEDBACK

What differences, if any, have you noticed in your client in relation to:

HAPPINESS/SADNESS

LEVEL OF STRESS/ANXIETY

ABILITY TO MANAGE DAILY LIFE

HOPEFULNESS ABOUT THE FUTURE

PARENTING EFFECTIVENESS

If Not Applicable, tick here

What are the main gains your Cherub has made since you met her?

Can you comment on the training and support given to you?

What do you think worked well in the program?

Do you have any suggestions to improve the program?

Can you say something about what your experience has been of being a DAWN 'Angel'?

Please add any further comments you wish on the back or on a separate sheet.

Return this form to Doncare, Suite 4, Level 1, 687 Doncaster Road, Doncaster VIC 3108.