



IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE, RECOVERING TOGETHER (DART) SCALE-UP

IMPACT AND EVIDENCE BRIEFING

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EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Impact and Evidence series

This report is part of the NSPCC's Impact and Evidence series, which presents the findings of the Society's research into its services and interventions. Many of the reports are produced by the NSPCC's Evaluation department, but some are written by other organisations commissioned by the Society to carry out research on its behalf. The aim of the series is to contribute to the evidence base of what works in preventing cruelty to children and in reducing the harm it causes when abuse does happen.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Domestic Abuse, Recovering Together (DART) is a recovery service for children and mothers who have been exposed to domestic abuse but no longer live with the perpetrator. DART has been previously evaluated, with positive outcomes for the mothers and children who received the service (Smith, 2016). Once services like DART have been evaluated, it is part of the NSPCC's strategy that consideration is given to whether other agencies may be able to replicate the service – a process called scale-up. This is a way of reaching and helping more children than the NSPCC would be able to do alone.

The NSPCC is in the early stages of scaling up services, with five services currently being scaled up, one of which is DART. This is the first time that the NSPCC has scaled up services and so an implementation evaluation is being undertaken of each service to understand how the process of scale-up is working and what the barriers and facilitators to scale-up are. The findings will be used to inform how the NSPCC can make scale-up more successful in future.

The NSPCC has been scaling up DART since 2014. This briefing summarises early evaluation findings of the scale-up of DART. Strategic leads, practice leads and practitioners from local authorities and voluntary organisations in scale-up sites were asked their views on the DART training, manual, programme and delivery experience.

Key findings

The key findings were:

- Professionals gave very positive ratings for the DART training experience, programme and manual. They could see a need for DART and felt that it had advantages over other domestic abuse programmes that only worked with either the mother or the child, because it aimed to improve the relationship between the mother and the child, as opposed to working with these individuals in isolation.
- Professionals felt enthusiastic and confident about delivering DART. However, although eight local authorities and voluntary organisations have been trained in DART since September 2014, only two were actively delivering by April 2017. Professionals reported barriers to running the programme, many of which they did not foresee. These included barriers with funding, staffing, transport, venues and issues with taking children out of school. Feedback from the NSPCC implementation manager in October 2017 was that only one site was continuing to deliver DART.
- These findings have been used to inform the future development of the scale-up of DART: stronger readiness assessments are used with organisations interested in delivering DART; enhanced support to tackle barriers is given; and a breakdown of anticipated costs is provided. The NSPCC is also facilitating sites to link up to share waiting lists, costs and staff members. Organisations are also now able to deliver the programme with two volunteers and two staff members, instead of the previous four staff members.

Background

Domestic Abuse, Recovering Together (DART) is a group work programme for mothers and children aged seven to 14 who have previously experienced domestic abuse. Children participating in the programme are considered (by referring social workers) to have been harmed by this experience but no longer live with the perpetrator. The programme runs over 10 weeks, with weekly sessions lasting between two to two and a half hours.

DART is unique among domestic abuse programmes because it consists of joint group work sessions with mothers and children, as well as individual groups with mothers and with children separately. This approach is based on Humphreys et al's (2006) research, *Talking to My Mother*, which found that outcomes for children who experience domestic abuse are improved when the non-abusive parent is involved in supporting the child's recovery. In this way, DART aims to: improve the mother-child relationship; enable the mothers and children to share their feelings about the domestic abuse with one another; reduce the difficulties experienced by the child, such as conduct problems; increase the self-esteem of the mothers and children; increase the mothers' confidence in their parenting abilities; and promote a better understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Originally, four members of staff were needed to deliver DART, to keep both the groups for mothers and children running and then for staff to be able to support anyone on an individual basis who becomes distressed in the group. It also requires two group work rooms to be available, as well as break out rooms for anyone who gets distressed.

Outcomes evaluation of DART within NSPCC service centres

NSPCC service centres have delivered DART since October 2010 and it has been evaluated with positive results (Smith, 2016). The evaluation found that mothers had greater self-esteem, more confidence in their parenting ability, more control over their child's behaviour and were more affectionate toward their child after attending DART (Smith, 2016). The children also had fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire after attending DART (Smith, 2016). Importantly, these outcomes for children participating in DART were greater than those achieved by an alternative domestic abuse programme. You can [click here](#) to read the full evaluation report.

Evaluation of scale-up of DART by other organisations

The NSPCC's strategy (Link) for 2016–21 outlines the organisation's commitment to ensuring that more children and families have access to NSPCC evaluated services to help them to get back on track. To enable this to happen, the NSPCC has embarked on a programme of scaling up its piloted and evaluated services by supporting other organisations to successfully implement them.

The NSPCC has been scaling up the delivery of DART since 2014, when local authorities and voluntary organisations were given a licence to deliver DART. One and a half days training was provided to practitioners who would deliver DART by NSPCC staff who had previously delivered the programme. The training started with an overview of domestic abuse and how DART works, then went through each of the 10 sessions in DART, explaining the aims and activities. Trainers used PowerPoint slides, handouts, audio and video clips, and involved the participants in some of the DART group activities. The NSPCC also provided manuals and offered implementation support by telephone for the other organisations' first DART groups.

Few organisations have started to deliver DART despite the high level of interest among local authorities and voluntary organisations. At the time the evaluation was done, eight local authorities and organisations have been trained, but only two were currently delivering DART. A third organisation was planning to deliver later in 2017. Feedback in October 2017 from the NSPCC implementation manager responsible for DART was that only one site was continuing to deliver DART. The other delivery site had stopped as they wanted to reduce the number of sessions in the programme, but under the conditions of the licence this was not accepted as it would constitute a significant change to the programme. The site that intended to start delivering DART had not done so and none of the five sites that were trained but not delivering went on to deliver at a later date.

Scaling up evidenced services to other organisations is a new activity for the NSPCC. As the NSPCC seeks to be evidence based in its planning, it is important that we embed the learning from this evaluation to optimise future scale-up success. This is particularly pertinent as a further eight organisations have started delivering DART since this evaluation was conducted and another six agencies have expressed an interest in delivering DART and are expected to become licence holders later in 2017. This evaluation focuses on early findings of the scale-up of DART and the barriers and facilitators to scale-up.

Methodology

At the time the data was collected for this evaluation, DART had only been scaled-up to eight organisations and so the subsequent sample size for the evaluation is small. However, staff in all eight organisations were asked to take part in the evaluation so that we could understand their progress with scale-up. This included those organisations that had not gone ahead with the delivery of DART so that we could learn about the reasons that scale-up did not go ahead. Staff in six of the eight DART sites agreed to take part in the evaluation.

Post-training survey

All professionals who completed DART training were invited to complete a post-training survey. Twelve professionals completed and returned the survey, which used open and closed questions focusing on:

- Professionals' roles and responsibilities regarding DART
- Previous experience of group work and other domestic abuse recovery programmes
- Initial thoughts about DART
- DART training experience
- DART programme
- DART manual
- Implementation and delivery experience

Interviews

All staff were asked to take part in a telephone interview to explore the topics of the post-training survey in more detail. Fourteen interviews were conducted: seven practitioners who were delivering DART and three managers who oversaw the delivery of DART; and four managers in sites that did not go on to deliver DART. The interviews explored the topics covered by the post-training survey in more detail. They were semi-structured and averaged approximately an hour in length. With the consent of professionals, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analysed using the framework approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

The results from the surveys and interviews are outlined in the following sections.

Results

DART training

Positives

The findings from the post-training survey showed that professionals were positive about the overall quality of the training, the course structure, the knowledge and skills of the trainer(s), the quality of the response to participants' questions and the opportunity to participate in training. As one professional noted:

"The ladies who delivered were really knowledgeable and really quite passionate about it. And it wasn't like some training you go to and it's just somebody reading out of a manual, it was really interesting because they'd actually facilitated, they'd delivered the programme loads of times so they knew, they'd done it and they were quite experienced in it so they really knew what they were talking about and they were quite passionate about it and they said it was a really good programme."

[Local authority practitioner]

Professionals felt that the training gave them the knowledge and skills to deliver the DART programme, which made them feel confident to deliver their first few DART groups.

Improvements

Despite professionals describing many positives about the training, they suggested that there should be more time allocated to teach unfamiliar concepts, such as the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & McDonnell, 1984). They also felt that there should be a wider range of methods used to deliver the training, such as role-playing mothers and children, and delivering the training in the same structure as an actual DART session.

DART programme

The professionals interviewed were also positive about the DART programme itself. They felt that it was useful and relevant for their service in terms of supporting the recovery of mothers and children who have experienced domestic abuse, as this practitioner found:

“I am currently based in a DV [domestic violence] Refuge as a Children’s Worker, supporting them through what is usually a very traumatic time. The DART Programme is very relevant to my role.”

[Local authority practitioner]

Professionals valued the joint work with the mother and child, and they could see a need for this type of programme, as highlighted here:

“The focus on relationships is key. It has a huge impact and is quicker to achieve outcomes than individual work. The outcomes spoke for themselves. The feedback from participants was fantastic.”

[Local authority practitioner]

Professionals who had not yet delivered the programme said that they were likely to deliver it in the next six months and they could not see any difficulties in delivering any of the activities or sessions.

Delivering DART

Barriers to scaling up DART

Despite staff giving positive views about the DART programme and training, six out of eight local authorities and organisations have not yet delivered DART. This was due to a number of different barriers:

- Difficulties with funding streams for prevention work
- Costs to deliver DART, such as paying for the transport of mothers and children
- Staffing capacity
- Getting the right referrals and long waiting lists
- Issues with taking children out of school in the mornings when they would miss core subject lessons
- Restructures in their organisation
- Finding appropriate venues to deliver DART

The next section of this briefing explores these barriers in more depth and how professionals tackled them, or their suggestions for what would enable them to overcome the barriers. The NSPCC will incorporate this learning into the advice it gives to other organisations thinking of scaling up DART.

a) Funding

Professionals often reported that funding was a barrier to delivering DART. They felt it was sometimes difficult to get funding because children are seen as less at risk because the mother had left the perpetrator:

“I think the reality is, and we need to understand that while I think there is an appetite for this work, because in the case of DART, it's post-abuse, and therefore the children aren't seen as at risk. It is not going to be a commissioner's priority in a time of funding constraints.”

[Manager in a voluntary organisation]

Professionals suggested tackling this barrier by using evidence from literature or conducting their own outcome evaluations to illustrate how effective DART is for children and mothers who have experienced domestic abuse:

“I think that's why you need those sorts of contextual things like NICE guidance and all that because you need to be saying to people, 'Well we need to work with parents as well as children if it's going to be effective for children'.”

[Manager in a local authority]

b) Costs and resources to deliver

Professionals also found it difficult to fund the additional costs that they had not anticipated, such as paying for taxis for mothers and children to and from the venue, particularly in geographically dispersed areas, initial set up costs like paints and paper, and finding a suitable venue that had two rooms and good transport links.

c) Staffing capacity

DART requires four members of staff to deliver the programme: two for the work with mothers and two for the work with children. Respondents found it difficult to find four available practitioners to deliver DART each session. This was a big financial and resource commitment:

“It’s taken four members of staff out of doing their one-to-one work for a whole day every week for ten weeks. So, there was a big financial commitment, not only for resources and coordinating how people were going to get there and things like that, but also worker time as well.”

[Local authority practitioner]

In order to tackle this barrier, some managers decided to share staff members with other organisations delivering DART to reduce the staff required from any one organisation:

“So one of the things we did was in this partnership we agreed that we would have two of their staff running our group with two of our staff who have run it before. So because we can’t afford four staff to do it every time but we wanted to still deliver it.”

[Manager in a local authority]

Establishing a partnership with another organisation that is also delivering DART helped with another common problem. DART sessions run better when children are of a similar developmental age. However managers found that they could end up with very long waiting lists if they aimed to recruit groups of children of the same age when they were receiving referrals across the age range for DART. They suggested that sharing waiting lists, as well as staff members, could increase the capacity and flexibility to reach mothers and children more quickly and also enable them to share costs.

d) Children missing school lessons

Professionals found it difficult to persuade schools to allow children to miss their morning lessons to be able to attend DART sessions. Some of the children already had attendance issues and conduct problems at school which made this more difficult. However, having discussions with schools about DART often helped with this:

“What we’ve found is we’ve struggled with schools agreeing but besides the barrier I do feel like it is becoming better. And saying that was a barrier at the beginning I think as time goes on they realise what potential it’s got that will change. Obviously the schools are concerned about the criteria, about the core groups, core learning so they are concerned with that and it’s about trying to find a happy medium of how we can work together. It’s to go into schools and talk to the safeguarding officers who deals with that side of the safeguarding and maybe have that conversation as a group, I don’t know, invite them to somewhere where you do the DART and show them what work the children do because it’s very effective what they do, especially the latter things right at the end.”

[Local authority practitioner]

Overall, it seems that professionals had not anticipated these barriers to scale-up as they reported after training they could not foresee any difficulties with delivering DART. These difficulties only became apparent when they started trying to deliver DART:

“It wasn’t until facilitating the programme that I was made aware of the amount of time the programme takes, i.e. not just the 2-hour session but the assessment process, further support identified, home visits during school holiday periods and post programme.”

[Local authority practitioner]

Views on using the DART manual

Professionals had very positive views on using the DART manual. They felt that the overall quality was very good: that it was user-friendly; that the range of activities provided for both the mothers and children was suitable; and that the activities matched the desired session outcomes well. However, they did feel that the activities and language used should be adapted to be appropriate for all ages:

“But because we’ve now done it once we would not use those cards again; we would have some simpler feelings words cards or feelings faces. There was ‘demoralised’, ‘glorious’, ‘repulsed’, ‘courageous’, ‘overlooked’, ‘cooperative’, and ‘downhearted’. There’s no ‘happy’, ‘sad’, ‘embarrassed’, and ‘anxious’ – there

are none of those words in there. None of what I would say are the normal everyday feelings words that most people know.”

[Local authority practitioner]

Some professionals found that, as there were too many activities to do in each session, this allowed them to choose from a menu of activities. They felt that this was an advantage as it meant that they could switch the order of activities if they felt the mothers and children were not emotionally ready for them:

“It’s easy to use and read and understand but the amount of time you’ve got to run the session there’s a lot to do in it if that makes sense to you. It’s probably asking to do too much but maybe what you could do is, like, pick what to do because sometimes when you start the sessions you pick up on what the children’s needs are and maybe you could tailor what the next session is around the children.”

[Local authority practitioner]

The original evaluation of the delivery of DART by NSPCC staff also found these same issues with delivering DART. Namely, the language used in some activities was too complex for mothers and children, there was not enough time allocated for each activity, and that practitioners would stick to the manual but often choose from a menu of activities rather than doing them all. This suggests the language used in the DART programme needs reviewing.

Sustainability

The two organisations that are currently delivering DART both hope to continue running groups, although, for one site, this is dependent on their funding continuing and being able to continue to free up staff to deliver DART.

Professionals said that it would be useful to have more contact with other professionals who are being trained to deliver and implement DART so that they can share barriers and how to overcome these common issues with each other.

NSPCC support

Most professionals reported that they felt well supported by the NSPCC and they did not feel that they needed any other support to enable them to deliver DART effectively. Also, most practitioners reported that they did not intend to use the telephone support offered by the NSPCC while running the first DART group. This may have been because a lot of practitioners reported that they were already experienced in delivering domestic abuse programmes.

However, some professionals mentioned that it was useful to have regular supervision and contact in between sessions, especially those who had not had much experience delivering domestic abuse recovery programmes. One manager mentioned that it would be useful for the NSPCC to help them to evaluate their DART service as they had previously used evaluation measures, but they would like to use more advanced evaluation tools. This may help with barriers regarding funding as all services that are commissioned have to demonstrate outcomes and provide evidence that DART is a successful programme to fund.

How these findings are being used

The evaluation has shown that despite managers and practitioners seeing the value of a programme like DART and feeling confident to go and deliver the programme after the training received from the NSPCC, few have actually gone on to deliver groups. Staff identified a number of barriers that prevented them from going on to deliver the programme. The NSPCC have considered the barriers and the suggestions for how to overcome them that came out of the evaluation, and have made some changes to how DART is scaled up to try and mitigate some of the difficulties experienced. These changes are outlined in Table 1 below.

There was also feedback about the content of the DART manual and training programme that the NSPCC will consider. This included not having as many activities in a session and letting practitioners choose the activities that best meet the needs of the mothers and children, reviewing the activities in the manual to ensure they are suitable for all ages and stages of development between 7–14 years, and reviewing the language used in some of the exercises in the manual.

A community of practice for DART has also been launched so that organisations can learn from each other.

Table 1: Barriers to scaling up DART and how the NSPCC has responded

Implementation barrier	Actions NSPCC have taken
Staffing capacity: DART requires four members of staff to run each DART session and professionals found this a major financial and resource commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option given of running the programme with <i>two volunteers</i> (recruited by the organisation) and two staff members, rather than four staff members. • Option given of organisations delivering DART in partnership and sharing staff to increase staffing capacity and share costs. • Developed a Train the Trainer model so organisations can train their own staff, reducing their reliance on NSPCC and making the service more sustainable.
Lack of funding: organisations reported that funding was often a barrier to delivering DART. We have learnt that sites need <i>more support</i> when they are scaling up DART to think through some of the challenges including how they will fund the service sustainably.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NSPCC has built in more implementation support to provide advice and support through the first few months of implementation to new sites.
Long waiting lists: DART sessions run better when the children are of a similar developmental age. However, sites found in order to construct DART groups including children of the same age they would end up with very long waiting lists of children of different ages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching up sites so that they have another local organisation with which they can share waiting lists (and staff), therefore increasing capacity.
Costs and resources to deliver: sites often did not anticipate additional costs, such as having to pay for suitable venues and to provide taxis to transport mothers and children to and from the site, particularly in geographically dispersed areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a stronger readiness assessment for all sites. This will be a prerequisite to make sure that organisations are more aware of the resources and capacity needed for delivery of DART. • Produced a breakdown of anticipated costs that is discussed with organisations interested in scaling up DART.
Schools are reluctant to let children out to attend DART sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness for organisations that this has been a barrier. Part of their readiness assessment is to consider how they would overcome this. The NSPCC offers advice about how to discuss with schools if this is an issue.

By adapting DART following the learning from the evaluation, it is hoped that new organisations taking on DART will experience fewer challenges and barriers to successful scale-up. The learning has also helped the NSPCC become more aware of the real-world challenges that need to be addressed before future services are scaled up.

Conclusion

This evaluation shows that professionals are positive about the DART training, the programme, the manual and their delivery experience. However, the evaluation also highlights problems with the scale-up of DART, as professionals faced many barriers to delivery. It would be beneficial for the NSPCC to inform professionals of these common barriers before training and to consider ways in which the NSPCC can help other agencies to deal with the issues they may face. In addition, suggestions given by professionals to improve the DART training and manual should be addressed as these issues were also found in the original evaluation of DART (Smith, 2016).

These findings have informed how DART is now scaled up to new organisations. For example, there is now a stronger readiness assessment to check that organisations are able to deal with the resources and costs DART requires, and more implementation support will be provided by the NSPCC.

Of the initial eight sites, only one is still delivering DART. However, since this data was collected, an additional eight sites have started delivering DART and six more have expressed an interest in taking it on. With these improvements to the approach to scaling up DART, hopefully more sites will go on to successfully deliver the programme in the future. These findings also have wider applications for other NSPCC programmes and tools that are being scaled up with similar organisations, and the learning is being applied to these initiatives too.

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