

Journey to Freedom

Journey to Freedom is a personal development group process, for women who have experienced (or who continue to experience) domestic violence.

It was adapted from a model widely used throughout Canadian refuges and was initially developed by staff in North Down and Ards Women's Aid. Over the years, the programme has proved to be an exceptional tool in assisting women to recognise patterns that exist within abusive relationships. As a result, the "Journey to Freedom" process has been rolled out across Women's Aid groups in Northern Ireland. "Journey to Freedom" can help women to establish peer networks, encourage women to talk about their experiences and access much needed support as well as creating opportunities for learning and safety planning.

Overall aim of Journey to Freedom

Provide a safe and supportive group process to enable women to explore their experiences of domestic violence and to empower them to move on.

Objectives include:

- help women explore types of domestic violence
- help women explore possible impact upon themselves and their children
- enable women to examine processes and patterns of abuse
- enable women to build self confidence, make informed choices and create positive change
- encourage women to stop blaming themselves for the abuse they have suffered
- empower women to look to the future with positivity and hope
- assist women to examine differences between healthy and abusive relationships
- promote safety planning and self help by encouraging women to explore safety strategies and options.

Anticipated outcomes for women

- increased confidence/self esteem
- establishment of peer support
- clear understanding of domestic violence
- improved awareness of healthy and abusive relationships
- reduction in feelings of isolation, guilt and shame
- increased ability to process thoughts and understand experiences

- improved access to information, advice and support
- provision of opportunities to access other services within Women's Aid and with other agencies
- increased skills and abilities
- development of a more positive outlook for themselves and their children
- improved relationships and attachments with children
- increased confidence in parenting role and abilities.

What women say about Journey to Freedom

"Journey to Freedom has helped me in so many ways. It's hard to put it into words. There have been weeks when I have felt happy and released and other weeks when despair seems to surround me. And on those days, when I have needed answers most, you have been my rock.

It is as though we have all fallen into the same hole but we haven't been able to climb out at the same pace. Sometimes, one of us has been left behind, but then we have stopped and listened and, if needs be, we have reached out a hand and helped them up.

Now I am at the top, ready for new challenges.

I would be lying if I said I now felt totally confident, but I am enlightened. For years, I felt like a coward, unable to stand up for myself and I hated it!

Now I can remove that thought from my head and replace it with a better thought. I am not a coward, I am a survivor."

A Journey to Freedom participant