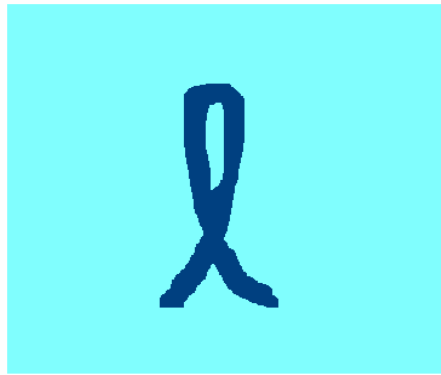


Jamma Umoja

Assessment Programmes



Domestic Violence

Why have a Domestic Violence assessment programme?

As with all our assessment programmes the purpose is to adduce evidence in the form of an assessment to determine if the care offered to a child is good enough or can become good enough with direct interventions offered by professionals in different disciplines.

Families where there has been a history of domestic violence rarely offer the children of the family their best or in many occasions good enough care. Children who have witnessed, or suffered domestic violence, or who live in an undercurrent of fear and violence will not thrive.

The impact on children of Domestic Violence has been well researched. Being a victim of physical abuse in a situation of Domestic Violence and or being exposed to aggressive conflicts are increasingly grounds for determining significant harm.

Victims of domestic violence tend to become isolated by their partner, suffer loss of self-esteem, be constantly criticized by their partner and belittled. Commonly they will be told it is their fault that the partner is hitting them, e.g. 'you wind me up'. Eventually many women will avoid any confrontation and become completely compliant.

One of the key areas of 'good enough' parenting is having a capacity to *set boundaries*. This is what underpins day-to-day routines, keeps children safe, both physically and emotionally. Setting down boundaries requires: - assertiveness, an ability to negotiate and be flexible, an ability to prioritise in terms of the trivial versus the significant, an ability to show love and patience, to allow the child to feel heard but to act in their best interests even if they are resistant.

The parent who has grown up in a home where there was domestic violence has often had a very contrasting experience. They have grown up with models of female passivity and worthlessness, mothers who are passive / aggressive which encourages children to get into patterns of negative attention seeking, fathers who cannot be reasoned with are over-chastising, over-sensitive to criticism, with poor boundaries and neither parent having the ability to act in a parental manner.

Families who come to Jamma Umoja to be assessed often bring a history of difficulties that they are trying to come to terms with and overcome. Many of our families who have experienced violence first hand themselves as children, have later become embroiled in one or a series of violent partnerships and as a consequence their children have also been exposed to violence.

Children in these situations have often had to parent their mother, who has become more of a sibling to the children, have grown up to expect their mothers to be bullied and beaten and to feel helpless or even to blame.

Children growing up in such an atmosphere rarely have any experience of models of conflict resolution, of consistent parenting, of decisions being made through any form of negotiation and that on the contrary the perpetrator imposes his will and other family members are constantly being coerced. Children in situations of continual conflict are rarely allowed to learn through making mistakes and are frequently humiliated.

The children who come to Jamma Umoja have been caught in the cross-fire and have also experienced direct assaults upon them. Many of them have psychological difficulties because of living for so long in the midst of conflict.

The victims have often not experienced love and affection in their own childhood and do not feel it is possible to find love or that they are worth being loved. They may find themselves entrapped in a string of relationships, which play out similarly to their own childhood, to theirs and their children's detriment until the children are removed.

Whilst both men and women are adult victims of Domestic Violence, statistically the majority of adult victims are women. Many women coming to Jamma Umoja have lost children in earlier proceedings through failing to protect them. Often men coming to the centre have lost children because of their history of unmanaged anger, resulting in actual physical abuse and threats of abuse. Their children have learned to live in fear and have seen their parents being beaten, threatened and humiliated.

Why people become abusers is a complex subject; as it is equally complex why people remain in relationships, which are psychologically damaging and where they may be in serious physical danger.

Abuse of any kind whether it is physical, sexual, emotional or neglect is damaging to the person who is the victim of such abuse. Domestic violence is fuelled by power and control; in broad terms the perpetrator needs to control the victim to compensate for their own feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Repeated assaults can lead to the victim suffering a string of serious injuries and sometimes death.

Women who are victims are best protected and most likely to make significant changes by engaging in all female groups in addition to the normal individual assessment sessions. We therefore use both individual and group assessing sessions, as this is the usual format for dealing longer term with issues of domestic violence.

At Jamma Umoja we have also successfully worked with men who are both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence through individual work and also within a separate men's group. Both groups also focus on other areas of parenting.

The purpose of an assessment of the effects on the care of a child who lives in a family where domestic violence is a strong feature is not usually to determine if violence is present, that is nearly always been established first. Rather we are asked to assess if the situation can be changed following the assessment.

This requires some direct interventions to test out the validity or otherwise of the parent's desire, commitment and ability to change. It requires looking at practical, supportive and therapeutic solutions, which produce results of benefit to the child/ren. This requires direct interventions, which could be used in the longer term to promote beneficial changes.

We do hope that the parents will make use of the interventions we offer but our primary function is not therapy and any benefit derived is incidental to our main function, which is assessment. The only exception to this is where we are implicitly instructed to help seek resolution of the

problems as well as assess such. Where we perform a dual role the funding cannot come entirely from Legal Services funding as they only have authority to fund assessments.

The Domestic Violence programme at Jamma Umoja aims to address all these issues, to build awareness of patterns of behaviour, to look at the impact of violence on children, to examine how best to build self esteem and to encourage parents to begin to take control of their lives and make a difference for their children.

All female adult residents are expected to attend as part of the assessment. There is also a facility for women who are not in residence to come into the group on a day basis. Group member's children are cared for either by their partner or by staff during that period.

In the group women will often offer personal information about themselves. However we cannot fully explore such confidences in the group as it the parent may not wish to fully share with others. Nevertheless, these are fully explored in individual appraisal sessions where parents can be helped to examine their own history and circumstances to help them and us to assess their capacity to change.

Although the groups are important it is the individual sessions where the impact of violence can be more specifically targeted in relation to the individual family circumstances and the effect on the children of the family.

However, the group too has a clear assessment function. It is *open* i.e. it has a rolling programme of work so that new members can join at any stage. The participants are aware that the group is part of their assessment and that it is not a closed therapy group. However, the facilitator uses some therapeutic techniques and group work skills to make it a safe space to share ones feelings and experiences.

One of the prime functions of the group is to *raise awareness of professional concerns*. This is done through shared discussion, with the facilitator supporting members but also challenging them to examine their thinking and attitudes. After a lifetime's exposure to domestic violence, service users may have constructed an elaborate defense system to justify

their situation, are often be plagued by feelings of helplessness and have developed a passive / aggressive response to being challenged.

By a process of anecdotal sharing and breaking down research findings into everyday language the facilitator aims to support women to take responsibility for their own learning and to begin to understand the insidious nature of domestic violence and for them to develop their own awareness of the impact of abuse on themselves and their children. In order to assess a parent's capacity to change it is vital that the parent understand why professionals are so concerned about the present situation and to understand that without change their children will suffer harm.

The group will look at individuals' situations and relate this to wider issues like intergenerational abuse, power and oppression and the influences that shape patterns of behaviour. The group explores common stumbling blocks to women moving on e.g. '*children need a father at any cost*', '*I can't manage without him*', '*...but he loves me*' and will encourage women to take control of their lives, many for the first time and to build strategies for survival and further self-development. Their ability to begin this process is vital in determining if change can occur and how long it would take.

The assessment is focused on a clear understanding that the work in the group contributes to a family's assessment and that it is one of many interventions within the assessment to support women to explore their situations and to develop their capacity to make sustainable changes.

The work of the organization is founded on the principles of the Children Act 1989 ie that the welfare of the child is paramount and that the best place for a child to be cared for is within their own family *if that is in their best interests*.

The ethos of the work is driven by the General Social Care Councils Code of Practice for Social Care Workers including: that social care professionals will treat service users with respect and promote their individual views and wishes; will support service users to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive; will promote equal opportunities and respect diversity and different cultures and values.

REFERRALS

How do I make a referral?

It couldn't be easier; phone, fax, or e-mail us to start the process and we can take it from there. **Jamma Umoja's flexible approach means that we will accept emergency admissions and short notice referrals.**

If you have an urgent request, we can take the details by phone and let you have an outline proposal within 24 hours, in a format that can be used in court or at a funding panel.

Who to make a referral to:

Head Office	23 Haling Park Road Croydon London CR2 6NJ
Telephone:	020 8639 0319
Fax:	020 8604 1116
Referrals:	
Ron Crosbie Referrals Director:	020 8639 0319 - 07967 355712 mailto:ron.crosbie@jamma-umoja.org
Referrals: (admin) Michelle Gbadebo	020 8464 3882 mailto:m.gbadebo@jamma-umoja.org
Karen Greene Residential Director	020 8464 3882 - 07773 338519 mailto:karen.greene@jamma-umoja.org