



March 2023

'An Angel on my shoulder'
Evaluation of
Affordable Justice

March 2023.

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Executive summary

This is the first evaluation of Affordable Justice, a unique not-for-profit feminist family law firm serving women across England and Wales from its base within Winner, Preston Road Women's Centre in Hull.

Affordable Justice is described as unique by the women it supports, by its staff, and Trustees. Using a non-profit pricing model around a third that of the high street price, Affordable Justice is a sustainability that fundamentally challenges the established business models in its sector. It aims to support women subjected to abuse by ex-partners and women in the 'justice gap' below high-street affordability and not qualifying for Legal Aid. Of women responding to the evaluation, 50 percent had an income below £20,000 (excluding benefits) and 75 percent were survivors of abuse.

The service provides a feminist lens to family law practice, offering compassion and expertise within a relational model that empowers women to make the choices which matter to them within the material realities of their lives. Within a context of overwhelming demand in a failing family law system, Affordable Justice enables more women to access support that curtails the inherent risks and negative impacts of the family law process and contrasts with the quality often experienced at other firms.

At Affordable Justice we found:

- Over 1,000 women living in 100 locations across England and Wales, have been supported
- Estimated total savings to women of over £1,340,000
- Women felt respected, believed, and that staff are on their side
- 96 percent of women achieved the legal outcomes they wanted in full or in part
- The pricing made a significant difference to 80 percent of women
- Rates of self-representation were reduced by 69 percent
- 90 percent of women found the service easy to access all or most of the time
- 87 percent of women felt supported to make the choices they wanted all or most of the time

This evaluation is taken at a juncture when Affordable Justice is looking to escalate its expansion to meet growing demand in family law across England and Wales. It provides a deeper understanding of how the 'golden thread' of feminist empowerment runs through governance, staffing and delivery, to provide a highly impactful service for women at a time of disruption, transition, and fear.

Introduction

Undermined by austerity and in a socio-economic context of entrenched gendered inequality, family law in England and Wales – the legal route for divorce and child contact arrangements – is systematically failing women. A process inherently uncertain and demanding, family law is routinely weaponised against women by male ex-partners, with high numbers of women survivors of domestic abuse brought into the process during which they are often threatened and re-traumatised. Despite extensive research provoking a clamour for change, little has been done to change the structures and actors in the system to better serve women's needs¹. A July 2022 research report by Women's Aid England concluded that in the current workings of the system, 'survivors of domestic abuse have continued to be disbelieved, children have continued to be forced into traumatic and unsafe contact arrangements with abusive parents, perpetrators have continued to use child arrangement proceedings as a form of post separation abuse, and family court professionals have not been held accountable for their poor decision making and the trauma it has caused'².

In 2016 Affordable Justice in Hull was opened by Winner, Preston Road Women's Centre, to provide expert legal advice and representation as a counter to the cultural and structural failings of the family law system. Targetted at women who are financially excluded or whose needs are poorly met by the existing legal offer, Affordable Justice was established with the aim to increase the accessibility, quality of experience, and improve outcomes for the women most vulnerable to the failing system and those who weaponise it. This report is the first evaluation of Affordable Justice, at a point the service has proved demand and is looking at models of growth and replication.

This evaluation explores the Affordable Justice model as a means to better describe the model, both as a tool for replication and as a challenge to existing legal practice and governance models. With a focus on the voices of women who have used the service, we look at how accessible the service is and who is accessing it; at how women find the experience of the service; and what the eventual legal outcomes mean to women and for the wider system. The aim is to produce a definition of the service and a valuation of its impact to help determine Affordable Justice's next steps: growth and replication.

Evaluation methodology

Research for this evaluation was conducted between October – December 2022. The process began with three days of interviews at Affordable Justice in Hull. During the research process, all staff and Trustees were interviewed. Women's perspectives were

¹ Key reports include: Ministry of Justice, *Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases Final Report* (2020); Barnett, Adrienne, *Domestic abuse and private law children cases A literature review* (2020); Domestic Abuse Commissioner, *Understanding Court Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse* (2021); Women's Aid England, *Two years, too long: Mapping action on the Harm Panel's findings* (2022).

² Women's Aid England (2022)

gathered from eight individual women in phone interviews and via an online questionnaire completed by 41 current and former clients.

Secondary research

A light touch literature review was conducted on the family law system and its outcomes and accessibility to women.

Interviews

Staff and board individual structured in person interviews were held with Sue Sedgwick and Becky Brown, the solicitors, and with Amy Bradley, the paralegal. A structured interview was held in-person with board member Lisa Hilder and on the telephone with Board Member Jill Cunningham.

The questions asked are [in the appendix](#).

Service user individual semi-structured telephone interviews were held with eight service users. Another two had been invited to interview and didn't respond. Interviews focused on women's experiences of the Affordable Justice service and on their wider experience of the family law system.

Service user interviews were conducted anonymously and confidentially. Service users were encouraged not to answer any questions they didn't want to and to halt the interview at any point if they wished. Service users whose experiences are captured in case studies have all had the chance to review those case studies before inclusion in this report. All service user interviewees are being given a shortened version of this report so they can see the impact of their words. We are grateful to all these women for their time and candour.

The questions asked are [in the appendix](#).

On-line questionnaire

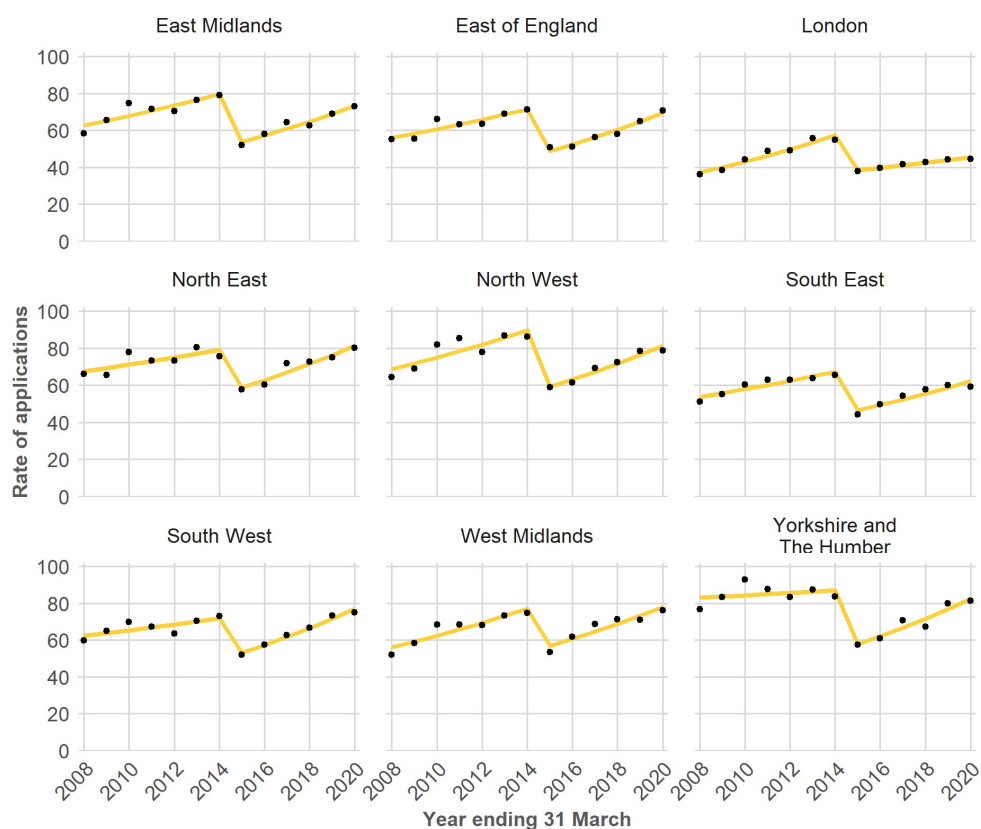
An online questionnaire was circulated to all current and former Affordable Justice service users in November and December 2022. We received 41 responses. Response rates for this cohort will be affected by the fact many women will not want to revisit this period of their lives.

The questions are [in the appendix](#).

The current state of family law

The family law system deals with private disputes, typically around divorce and around childcare arrangements between parents when a relationship has broken down. The family law system in England and Wales is overwhelmed with demand. Applications to the family court are rising year on year, reaching 46,572 in 2019/20, the highest figure since the curtailment of legal aid access in 2013³. Rates of family law cases are over twice that of public law cases⁴. Demand is rising across all England's regions, with the highest rates in Yorkshire and Humber, the North-East and the North-West. The President of the Family Division of the judiciary, Andrew McFarlane, describes attempts to cope with this level of demand as 'running flat out up a down escalator'⁵.

The rates of private family law applications per 10,000 families with dependent children, by region, 2007/08 – 2019



Source: Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, *Uncovering private family law: who's coming to court in England?* (2021). Reprinted with permission of the authors.

³ The highest number of applications was 47,940 (2012/13) and 48,398 (2013/14) before dropping by a third the following year as legal aid was cut. Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, *Uncovering private family law: who's coming to court in England?* (2021)

⁴ Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2021)

⁵ McFarlane, Andrew, *View from The President's Chambers* (2019). Courts and Tribunals Judiciary.

Demand for family law is significantly shaped by domestic abuse which is a factor in between 50 percent⁶ to 85 percent⁷ of family law cases⁸. Domestic abuse is a gendered crime⁹ and the family law courts are routinely co-opted and weaponised by male perpetrators following separation. One report found 88 percent of survivors were subject to abuse after separation and 33 percent seeking divorce were subject to delays as a means to continue control¹⁰. A Rights of Women study found that in 79 percent of family law cases involving survivors of abuse, perpetrators were weaponising the process to regain power and control¹¹. Another study found 94 percent of women being abused through child contact arrangements¹².

The tactics used by perpetrators within a system often lacking the continuity to identify and prevent their behaviour, are myriad. The family law courts present an opportunity for perpetrators to shame, to defame, and to surveil women, while entrapping them in a process that is expensive of time, attention, emotion, and financial resources. Women interviewed for this evaluation described their experiences –

‘He used it to try and gain control. He made loads of false allegations. He used it to try and minimise me. I’ve had every sort of allegation against me. People do not understand the pain of someone using the family courts against me’

‘He tried to make me look bad in front of the court system. He dugged into my past. He said things about my childhood, that my brain doesn’t function like other adults. I had to sit there and read documents about me which weren’t true. It knocked me right to the very bottom.’

Perpetrators are adept at weaponising the objectivity of the courts to create false accusations of abuse and of ‘maternal alienation’, trapping women who are expected to facilitate contact between father and children, yet to do so creates an avenue for sustaining abuse. Perpetrators exploit financial inequalities to delay and expand the process, disproportionately impacting on women’s financial security and impeding equal access to legal advice and representation.

Perpetrators are able to make such use of the family law system in part because it is an institution of a patriarchal context. Though law is designed according to the theory of the ‘non-gendered, non-differentiated legal subject’¹³ feminist legal theorists refute this supposed objective neutrality as a lie to gender equality. The law, they argue, is ‘both

⁶ Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2021)

⁷ Rights of Women, *Briefing on Divorce Law Reform* (2018); Justice, *Improving Access to Justice for Separating Families* (2022)

⁸ The Ministry of Justice does not collect data on how many family law cases involve allegations of abuse

⁹ Office for National Statistics, *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2022* (2022)

¹⁰ Solace Women’s Aid, *Finding the Costs of Freedom* (2014)

¹¹ Rights of Women (2012)

¹² Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, *Third General Report on GREVIO’s Activities* (2021)

¹³ Mant, Jessica, *Litigants in Person and the Family Court: The Accessibility of Family Justice after LASPO* (2020)

actively and passively implicated in experiences of inequality and disadvantage¹⁴. The law's 'supposed objectivity is predicated upon its capacity to selectively recognise certain aspects of people's lives whilst deeming other aspects irrelevant'¹⁵. It is attempting to choose not to see that women enter the legal system with less power, less resource, and with their identities, experience and perspective less valid in the eyes of institutional norms and those making judgements. To counter this, a feminist legal understanding 'advocates expanding the lens of critique to include other structures and institutions which interact with law, such as the family, the labour market, or the tax and benefit system'¹⁶.

Current failings

The family law system is inherently challenging in its uncertainty, adversarial nature, personal exposure, and the high stakes of the resulting legal decisions. Women's material security and the stability of their parenting is often under question and under threat. For women subject to abuse and control or under accusation, the process presents a high risk of re-traumatisation and harm and requires women to live for periods under suspicion and investigation. The significance and stress of the process has implications for all aspects of women's lives during a time of disruption and transition following a separation.

Against this reality, the family law system is failing women on three counts. Firstly, financial and cultural barriers prevent women having fair and equal access; secondly, the poor response to women's experiences and gendered disadvantage and abuse creates a disempowering, often harmful experience; and thirdly, these factors undermine women's opportunity to articulate and choose the outcomes which matter most in the context of their lives.

Access barriers

There is a 'clear link between deprivation and private law applications'¹⁷. Women enter the family law system from a place of gendered economic inequality. Cuts to legal aid by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act (2012) disproportionately affected women who make up 60 percent of Legal Aid users¹⁸. The result was a catastrophic 'justice gap' into which fell many women who no longer qualified for legal aid but could not afford high street legal representation. Public Law Project found just 27 percent of applicants for legal aid for family law are accepted¹⁹. To this day, Legal Aid availability remains at only a third of its pre-LASPO levels²⁰.

¹⁴ Mant (2020)

¹⁵ Mant (2020)

¹⁶ Mant (2020)

¹⁷ Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2021)

¹⁸ Community Justice Foundation (2021); Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2021)

¹⁹ Mant (2020)

²⁰ IDAS, *Domestic Abuse and the Family Courts: a review of the experience of safeguarding of survivors of domestic abuse and their children in respect of family court proceedings* (2021)

Rights of Women – in accordance with other research studies²¹ – have found 53 percent of women needing family law are now delayed or unable to access its mechanisms²² as women unable or uncertain to get Legal Aid are less likely to take legal action²³. Delays mean women only access in a crisis or when disputes have escalated to the point of requiring adversarial and costly court hearing – and cases take longer and are more likely to be adjourned²⁴.

Cultural barriers sit alongside the financial to prohibit access to justice for women fearful of having experienced not being believed, respected or kept safe. Many women anticipate and understand that within the system they can be viewed as subversive and disruptive. Research shows mothers are often seen as ‘implacably hostile’, mistrusted, and suspected of false allegations against their ex-partners²⁵. Women interviewed in this evaluation expressed feeling that ‘you cannot do right for doing wrong’, that their realities weren’t respected (‘obviously didn’t have my best interests and felt they could do this regardless of risk’), and every detail of their lives, choices, parenting, and moral self was exposed. One interviewee described the system mischaracterising her case as ‘tit for tat’ while another similarly observed there was ‘a lot of judgement and the assumption that both parents are bad – not understanding gender inequality’. So hostile is the system to women who resist, that 100 percent of domestic abuse survivors in a recent Women’s Aid England study had been at some point accused of ‘parental alienation’ or ‘alienating behaviours’ for their preferences on child contact arrangements²⁶. These experiences should be recognised as part of a process in which women will have already been challenged to make the decision to leave abusive partners, and many may already have left and returned repeatedly and faced instances already of being disbelieved and misrepresented by services and other people²⁷.

For Black and minoritised women, their intersectional identities risk being subjected to amplified prejudices. Interviews with family law professionals have found women of South Asian heritage are less likely to be believed and perceptions of them become more negative as women raise questions, contributing to multiple reasons why women of South Asian heritage are less likely to go to court²⁸. Black British, Black African, and Black Afro-Caribbean women are perceived by professionals as ‘less open and as lying’²⁹, with the result these women are less likely to trust ‘the system’³⁰. In turn, this creates

²¹ Mant (2020)

²² Rights of Women (2018)

²³ Mant (2020)

²⁴ Community Justice Foundation (2021)

²⁵ While the ratio of false claims is ‘rarely tested’ a study found in divorce cases the ratio of men to women making false claims was 4:1. Barnett, Adrienne, *Domestic abuse and private law children cases A literature review* (2020)

²⁶ Women’s Aid England (2022)

²⁷ Rights of Women (2012)

²⁸ Thiara, Ravi and Gill, Aisha, *Domestic Violence, Child Contact and Post-Separation Violence: Issues for South Asian and African-Caribbean Women and Children A Report of Findings*, (2012)

²⁹ Thiara and Gill (2012)

³⁰ Thiara and Gill (2012)

disproportionate and enduring risks by forcing women to resolve contact informally in which relationships for children are less secure and women remain at risk of abuse³¹.

The policy and practice context

Despite attempts to improve understanding within the system, survivors report feeling the quality of support is 'stalling or even reversing'³². The Ministry of Justice *Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Family Law* (2020) was received as a watershed report. Amongst other endemic issues, it agreed with existing studies about the harms of a 'pro contact culture' between fathers and children putting women under pressure to concede child contact, even when unsafe. More recent reports from Women's Aid England, SafeLives, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and others have identified the continuing failure to understand and mitigate against power dynamics within the system that sustains exposure for vulnerable women and children.

Solicitors are widely reported to lack the skills and knowledge to redress the safeguarding risks and personal harms inherent to the current system. A recent study of women's experiences of solicitors in the family law courts found solicitors had a poor understanding of risk and coercion³³. A study by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found just 12 percent of women highly rated the support they received during the court process³⁴. Poor understanding of trauma, as well as training to be non-emotional, can contribute to a culture experienced as 'cold and distant' by women. Solicitors often fail to empower and prepare women, providing inadequate information about the process meaning women are poorly positioned to exercise their choices. Recent research by IDAS found six in ten survivors didn't feel safe in their experience and over half felt poorly prepared for the process³⁵.

Legal outcomes

Legal outcomes for women are heavily affected by the lack of gendered knowledge and expertise within the system. When women's choices aren't understood, legal outcomes are unlikely to serve them. This risks the safety and security of women and children, if women's safeguarding knowledge is not acted upon. Legal frameworks are failing to properly assign accountability or provide the clarity needed for safe, sustainable decisions.

The family court process and resulting legal outcomes are dominated by the need for evidence. This is hard to do. For many, the binary nature of being believed/not believed is disempowering and produces considerable anxiety. The process of evidencing abuse can be deeply traumatic. Women commonly report not having enough suitable evidence. The focus on recent events, the types of evidence deemed acceptable, miscasting of abuse as 'high conflict' relationships, and women's fear of counter allegations and other negative

³¹ Thiara and Gill (2012); Barnett (2020)

³² Women's Aid England (2022)

³³ SafeLives, *Hit and Miss: family lawyers' understanding of domestic abuse* (2022)

³⁴ Domestic Abuse Commissioner, *Understanding Court Support for Victims of Domestic Abuse* (2021)

³⁵ IDAS (2021)

consequences all prevent evidencing of abuse³⁶, the result of which is poorly founded legal outcomes which do not provide sufficient safeguarding. A recent IDAS study found women in 37 percent of cases didn't have the necessary prescribed forms of evidence for the court³⁷ and 56 percent of women felt the result was the courts didn't have the information they needed to make a decision³⁸. Others felt that because staff compiling reports lacked understanding about abuse, reports contained inaccuracies and omissions.

Women's legal outcomes are negatively affected by the rise in self-representation forced by the collapse of access to Legal Aid. Studies find around half of those self-representing have one or more of learning difficulties, high anxiety, extreme nerves, language barriers, and higher rates of poor mental health and experience of domestic abuse³⁹. Self-representation has been found to be distressing and retraumatising, placing significant burdens on women to the concern of judges⁴⁰. The majority of those self-representing say they would have preferred qualified legal representation⁴¹ and the result of the rise in self-representation is lesser outcomes for women already most marginalised and at risk.

³⁶ Ministry of Justice (2020)

³⁷ IDAS (2021)

³⁸ IDAS (2021)

³⁹ Mant (2020)

⁴⁰ IDAS (2021)

⁴¹ Mant (2020)

The Affordable Justice approach

'The most important part is supporting people who have gone through trauma, where the legal process can be traumatic on top of that existing trauma' – solicitor

Affordable Justice values the experiences of women in the family law system as much as their outcomes. The approach is affordable, approachable, and centred in understanding women's trauma. It is a unique legal offer by a not-for-profit feminist legal model operating with a gendered lens. The approach reclaims instruments of power otherwise used to perpetuate abuses and undermine women's self-determination: an all-women Board and staff; avoidance of adversarial events; and a pricing model affordable to women whose access to justice has been curtailed by the 'justice gap'.

Re-defining what matters

'Women are at risk when they try and take back their power' – Board member

Affordable Justice recognises that going through the family law system affects every aspect of women's lives. Health, housing, wellbeing, relationships, and security are all affected, often perilously so. This breadth of impact matters to women, and it is this that Affordable Justice recognises and uses to shape its holistic, empowering offer to women.

The service targets women often failed by the existing legal offer and the experience of the system. It targets women in the justice gap who are financially excluded – women left 'utterly removed from the ability to reach safety for them and their children' – and women subjected to abuse by ex-partners – those 'actually at risk throughout this process'.

The Affordable Justice approach also expands the relationship between 'client' and their legal representative so that the professional relationship is based on a practice of compassion and communal care between women. The relationship has more than just a legal function: the relationship is acknowledged as intrinsically humanising, enabling, and rooted in feminist thinking around community care⁴².

Service principles

'We enable women to have a more active role in their decisions. The way we do it is more collaborative rather than just railroading them through' – solicitor

A 'golden thread runs through all our services'. This manifests in principles articulated by women using the services and in the resulting legal outcomes which meet women's

⁴² Held, V., *The Ethics of Care. Personal, Political and Global*. Oxford (2006)

particular choices for their lives. Interviews and questionnaire feedback identified a set of six core principles:

Affordable

- Accessible to women on low income
- Transparent charging
- Non-profit prices

Relational and compassionate

- Accessible
- Caring
- Respectful
- Creating trust and feelings of safety
- Redressing power imbalances

By and for women

- 100 percent of board and staff are women

Empowerment

- All women are believed
- Women's choices are respected
- Reasserting power after abuse

Expert and informed by trauma

- Gendered violence expertise
- Knowledge that 'no two cases are the same'
- Able to articulate context and the impacts of abuse
- Legal outcomes designed to protect against future abuse

Holistic

- Prioritises experience (not just outcomes)
- Embedded within a specialist women's organisation
- Childcare offer

These principles enable Affordable Justice to advise, support and represent what women want within a patriarchal context and failing family law system. The result is legal representation and advice which is uniquely knowledgeable around gendered violence and gendered power, grounded in self-determination shaped by women's unique lived experience, and conscious of how the legal system impacts on women and children. The result in women claiming significantly better experiences at Affordable Justice and achieving the legal outcomes they want. This comes from a culture of responsibility about

women's experience and re-empowerment and control at every stage of – and after – the family law system. Women are supported to articulate their parameters and objectives – in contrast to other law firms focused only on maximising legal entitlements, no matter how adversarial they make the experience. As staff members describe, at Affordable Justice staff 'have [women's] their needs and future feelings at heart' and believe that 'women should have more say and more control in what happens'.

Located within Preston Road Women's Centre

'Being based at Winner means we understand more about the impact of domestic abuse because of the exposure we get via the services here' - solicitor

Affordable Justice is intimately shaped by its location within Winner, the Preston Road Women's Centre, a specialist domestic abuse voluntary sector organisation. The two organisations share offices and a trustee, internal signposting for wraparound support, and free childcare for women during appointments. Location at Winner reinforces feminist practice. It means staff are better informed about gendered abuse and feel better able to articulate and manage the dynamics, trauma, and impact of abuse on the women they support.

The location within offices specifically designed to support women and children contributes to creating a safe, community-based environment and 'is entirely important to the women we support'. The layout of the women's centre mirrors the service pathway, beginning in the informal community setting of the Winner charity shop, and providing open services including nursery, laundry, and community events and training. Women are able to be in an environment shaped by other women ('when I turned up into the building there were other mums there. Straight away it put my mind at ease'). Being at Winner gives women a greater sense of safety and increased confidence and trust by association. Winner provide Affordable Justice with a profile, legitimacy, and reach, making them credible and more accessible to women and to Winner's existing network of relevant statutory, voluntary, and community referring agencies.

Staffing model

'Other organisations are steeped with patriarchal structure and processes, even when these are invisible. You can feel that you're working against something which you're told doesn't exist. Here we feel women can deliver anything. We support everyone to achieve what they want to achieve. A lot of service users, they've never experienced this environment of women supporting women, ever' – Board member

Like the service model, the Affordable Justice staffing model is feminist. A retort to the restrictive and in-built inequalities within UK legal firm working practices and structures ('the legal profession isn't a good place for women'), Affordable Justice extends holistic and empowering principles to staff. Working models prioritise flexibility and flat structures to enable contribution from all staff. The result is a dynamic team, united in purpose and

Samia's story – 'it was all to hurt me'

Years earlier Samia had fled her abusive ex-partner and used legal aid to secure a Non Molestation Order for protection. Samia was recommended Affordable Justice after her ex-partner made false accusations of child abuse and refused to return their two children.

At the time Samia approached Affordable Justice,

'My whole world had flipped upside down. My ex had had them [her children] for the weekend and refused to return them. I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. It was the summer holidays. I wasn't sleeping, I couldn't focus. It was the most upsetting time of my life. One day I thought, 'what's the point? I'm never going to see my kids again'. I just wanted the pain to end.

*'Making that first call [to Affordable Justice] I was panicking, I was upset, I was heart-broken – every single emotion. **The thing about my situation is there is always stigma, wondering 'is the solicitor going to believe me? Is she going to believe these false accusations? Is she going to fight for me?***

*'**But right away [Sue] made me feel at ease.** I'd thought this would take ages and would be weeks of waiting, but I got a consultation the next day and she was on it telling me the form to do to get a court date. In 24-hours the ball is moving.*

*'I wasn't scared to ring back. In between [hearings] I would think 'what about this?' and Sue would be like, 'don't worry: this, this and this'. It was very black and white and put me at ease straight away. **Hand on heart everything was absolutely brilliant.** I had Sue represent me [at hearings] both times. Sue would say before the hearing, 'I'm going to say this, I'm going to say that'. She'd say our best and worst outcomes. I was terrified but I was prepared for it [not getting her children back].*

*'She [Sue] turned out to be right about everything. **When we went to court she was amazing.** I didn't have to speak unless the judge asked me something: a little thing, but a big thing. I was frightened to speak in front of my ex-husband. I was trembling and shaking.*

*'The judge wiped the floor with my ex for what he'd done. They said, 'your kids are coming home on Saturday'. The whole process from ringing Sue to the second court date was two and a half weeks. It was fast, but at the time it felt like years. I had my dad help me out financially. **It was my kids and I would have given life or limb to pay for it.***

*'A lot of people don't understand what happened was a carry on from domestic abuse and it was all to hurt me. It's a realisation how many women this happens to. It's made me a stronger person: I did it, it was a happy ending. It's made me open my eyes to the fact he can't really do anything else because he has done the worst. **If anything, I've been able to come out of this and can say, 'I'm a really good mum'. I'm a great mum.'***

values, enabled to contribute to their fullest professionally while maintaining balance with their personal lives.

Staff and Board member interviews identified the characteristics of the staffing model:

Women only

Embedded in the firm's governance, the women-only staffing model creates the safety, focus and culture necessary to successfully deliver objectives.

Positive and supportive

A supportive environment underpinned by 'training and development of staff in many directions' (including feminist philosophy, domestic abuse, and trauma informed practice) and affirmative 'yes, can do' culture. Recognising and giving opportunities to staff, the approach 'encourages strength from within'.

Active role for all staff

'Anyone can go to the Board with a project. you don't feel there is a ceiling' – solicitor

In a direct response to women's marginalisation by the legal sector's hierarchies, imbalances of power, and working culture (e.g. the archaic partnership model, side-lining of junior staff, structural inequalities in employment and earnings⁴³) Affordable Justice prioritises transparency and 'encourages all staff to take an active role in the centre'.

Flexible working

'It was always essential that staff have ultimate flexibility in how they balance their work and family hours. It is key to use to enable them to be successful career women and successful mothers' – Board member

Staff spoke passionately about the 'transformative' flexible working model. This enables staff to 'balance the conflict of priorities which emerge in traditional workplaces', work full time ('I wouldn't have been able to work full time in a traditional firm'), do a better job ('having that flexibility means I can work better and I can concentrate') and reduce or avoid prohibitive childcare costs ('nursery fees would have nearly been my fees for the month – it pushes women out').

The model allows staff to flex their working hours as needed ('which is a great help') and be contracted to work a non-traditional number of hours (e.g. one staff member works 32 hours a week). This flexibility works for women using

⁴³ Across all employment, the average working-age woman in the UK earned 40% less than her male counterpart in 2019 and per-hour women on average earned 19% less than men. Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Women and Men at Work*, (2021)

the service, allowing them to access sport around their caring, work and parenting schedules.

Needs-led

Staff spoke positively of the needs-led culture focused on the experience and outcomes which matter to the women they advise ('it's about getting an outcome for the client for their life, rather than the profit margin'). Specialism and focus were cited as core aspects of job satisfaction.

Competitive terms and conditions

Salaries and flexible working terms are competitive.

Governance and legal structure

'For me the difference is we're very open to risk and to failure, as an organisation and as individuals. We know we have everyone's support to fail. It's a very empowering way to run a service' – Board member

Affordable Justice is unique as a feminist legal firm registered as a charity. Founded to drive change ('we're here to subvert the system and give women a fairer option') the governance model continues the 'golden thread' of empowerment ('let's get on and find a way rather than seeing barriers as blockers').

Using a charity legal model anchors pricing to purpose and affordability, not profit. This is a refutation to the presentation of profit as integral to quality legal practice and has the result of offering fees at a third (often less) of the price of high street law firms. Operating as a registered charity provides additional assurances through the security of its binding charitable purpose and the transparency of published accounts. The Trustees provide assurance, transparency, and accountability, and a principle of volunteerism which confirms the replacement of profit with purpose.

The Board is described as 'a group of mutually supportive women with a shared vision of what we're doing and where we'll end up'. The Board's working culture is 'very adaptive, about understanding what each of us can bring to the table and supporting one another to do that. We all pitch in and do what we can'. The affirmative culture encourages new ideas – a direct lineage to the ambitious and innovative founding of Affordable Justice.

Rose's story – 'a huge, monumental step in my life

Rose came to Affordable Justice for help with her divorce. Although amicable, after 33 years of marriage the divorce 'turned upside down' Rose's world.

Rose tried two high street solicitors before a friend referred her to Affordable Justice. Rose likened these first solicitors to Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

'They really wanted me to take everything I could off my husband. They wanted to put words in my mouth. They were trying to make out he was something bad and wanted me to stitch him up for his pension. But it's not the person I am to have taken him for everything I could.'

'The woman wasn't compassionate or empathic. I thought they were looking down on me, as if I was stupid. But I'm not stupid – it was emotional. We'd been married 33 years so it's not something you take lightly. This was huge for me. It was a huge step.'

To escape being made to feel this way, Rose contacted Affordable Justice.

*'The call I had with Becky was wonderful. I cried with her. She was so compassionate. I think because she's used to dealing with vulnerable women, I think **she saw me as a full person, not a number or a client.***

*'**She respected what I wanted to do and that was huge for me.** I felt she was kind and considerate. I've recommended her to somebody else. I can't praise Becky enough after the experience I had with the other solicitors. It was so huge because they didn't realise what a huge, monumental step in my life this was, whereas Becky did, and she respected me. She made sure I understood what I was asking for and all the implications.'*

*'**Cost was huge for me.** Because the fees were so affordable, I had some money left over, which was good for me because I suddenly only had my salary to live on. It was a big learning curve. It sounds pathetic but he'd taken care of the bills and now suddenly I was. Becky understood that.'*

Accessibility

'Not having legal advice is a big reason women stay in relationships as long as they do. That was definitely a consideration for me. I used to have all sorts of threats from my ex-partner and I knew I would need legal advice at some point but it was always a thought whether I could afford it or access it. If women knew they could have it, it would be another step in the direction of leaving the relationship' – client interview

The aim of Affordable Justice is to make expert, effective legal advice, and representation accessible to women who otherwise could not afford it or whose experience of abuse is poorly responded to by the existing legal offer in England and Wales. To evaluate the extent to which accessibility is achieved we reviewed the profile of women accessing the service, how they experienced accessing the service, and the affordability of the pricing structure.

The profile of women accessing Affordable Justice

Client questionnaires enabled us to draw a demographic profile of women accessing the service (disability, ethnicity, and citizenship)⁴⁴ and their life circumstances including income, experience of abuse, and caring responsibilities. A review of client files identified where in the country clients are located.

Presenting needs

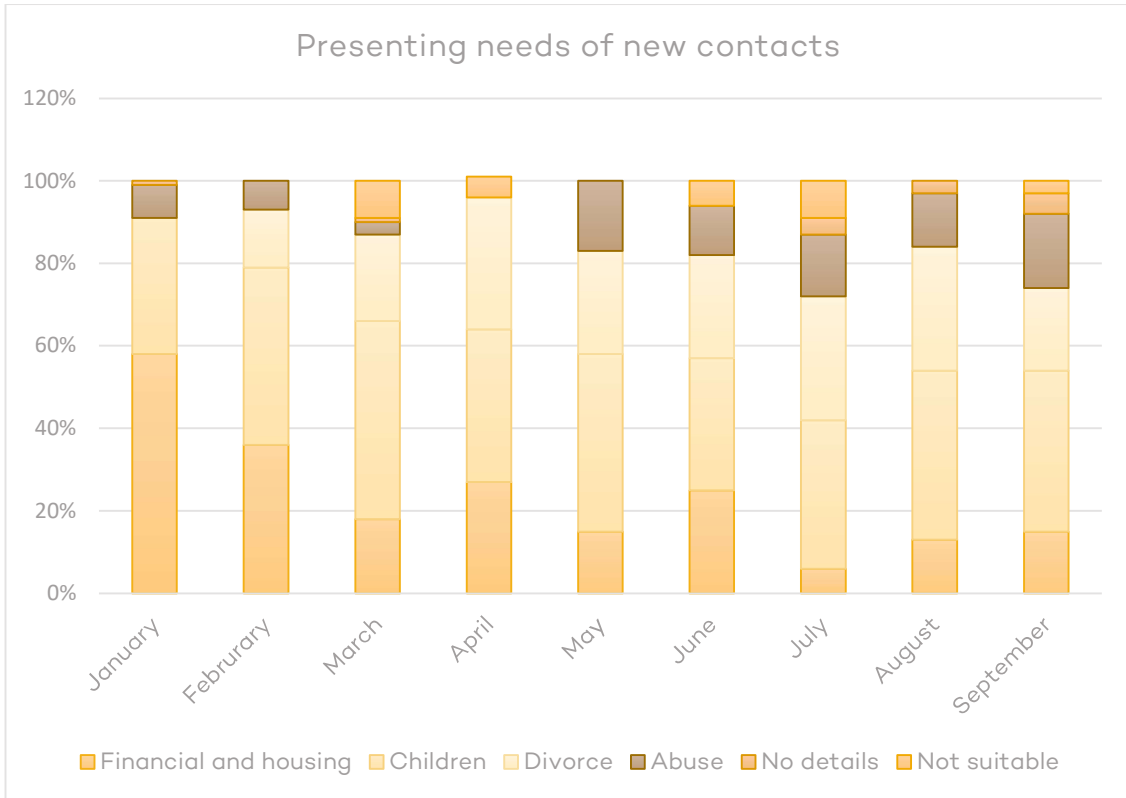
Since Affordable Justice began work in February 2016 it has provided legal advice and representation to 1,002 women up to 23rd January 2023⁴⁵. A snapshot of open cases in September 2022 showed Affordable Justice providing services to 99 women that month.

Women typically present to Affordable Justice with multiple, interlocking issues. Not all needs are disclosed immediately. The main needs women describe when first presenting to Affordable Justice are divorce; finance and housing / assets; child contact; and injunctions related to abuse. Divorce and finance for example, often go hand in hand. An attempt (with caveats⁴⁶) to analyse the rates of presenting needs is complicated by their interrelationship, however it suggests child contact arrangements to be the driving need in a third to a half of cases (32 percent to 48 percent, between January and September 2022).

⁴⁴ Affordable Justice does not currently collect women's demographic data.

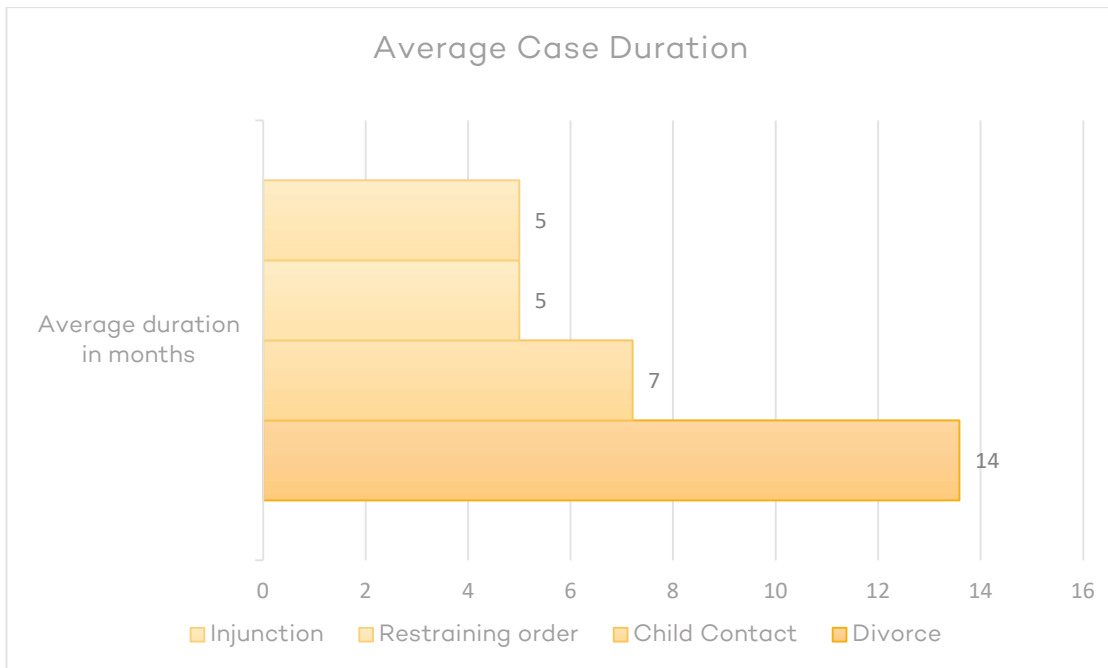
⁴⁵ For context, there one solicitor for the first couple of years; then an additional part time solicitor was added; and has now grown in January 2023 to three and a half full time solicitors.

⁴⁶ Data was organised according to the following rationale: 'domestic abuse' was tagged in cases of injunctions and where it was immediately disclosed; 'child care arrangements' were tagged where this issue was a lone issue or amongst other issues; 'finance' often included financial abuse and coercion. Issues determined 'unsuitable' included social care cases or cases out of English legal jurisdiction.



Source: records of new client first contacts (January – September 2022)

A snapshot of cases in November 2022 found that amongst the four main case types – injunctions, child contact arrangements and divorce – the average duration was 5 to 14 months. On average, divorce cases took twice as long as other cases.



Source: open cases (November 2022)

Reasons given to for approaching Affordable Justice by new contacts in September 2022 included:

- Poor experiences with an existing solicitor –

'I have solicitors who are extremely expensive and who have given me questionable advice on a number of occasions'

- Women experiencing continuing abuse in the process so far –

'My children and I are victims of domestic abuse and unfortunately in the first court hearing, the abuse was continued due to power and control'

- A woman whose children were advising her to leave after 55 years in an abusive marriage.

- Women seeking to protect their children from perpetrators, including a woman who had overdosed as a result of her ex-partner preventing her from seeing her children

'I protect my daughter from my ex-partner – he is pushing for increased access to her and I have serious concerns'

'In desperate need of help for a final hearing in trying to get my babies back from my controlling ex'

- Women overwhelmed with the costs incurred by perpetrators' weaponisation of the system –

'We are in debt through trying to represent ourselves in proceedings he has initiated, and I already had to declare bankruptcy last year because of the debt I was left with following our divorce and his financial control'

- And women facing perpetrators' abusing their elevated social status –

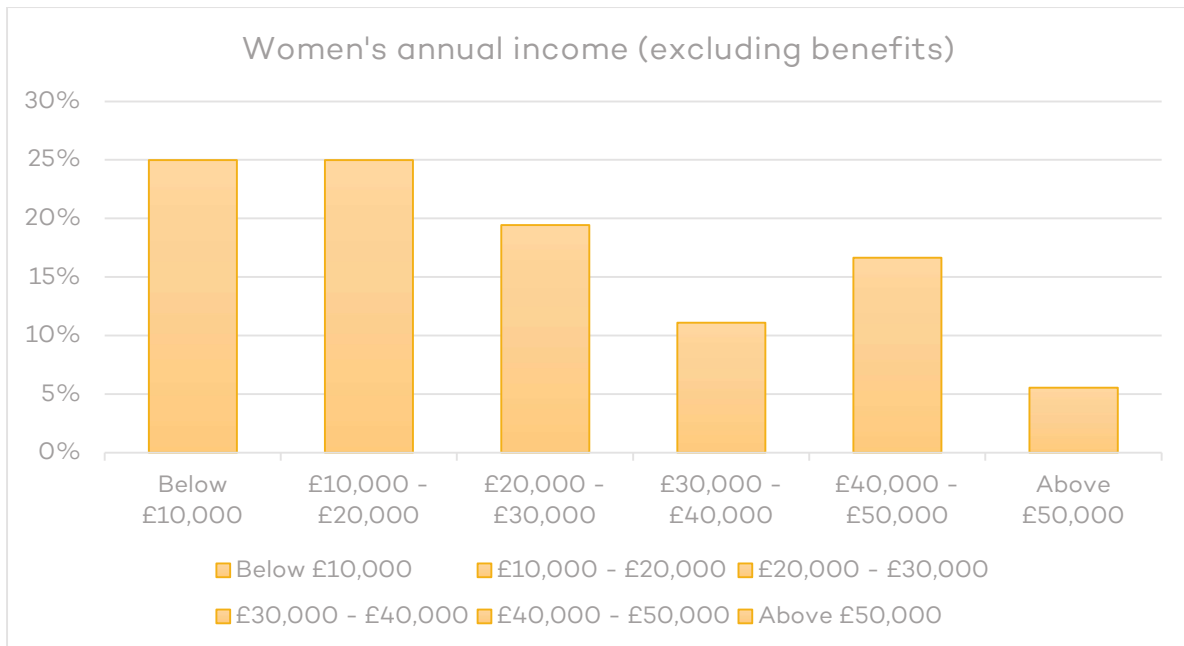
'The fact he is a solicitor he is using this to continually abuse me financially and emotionally after I have left him.'

'He is a serving Police officer. We've almost become homeless because of his smear campaign against us'

Income

As intended, Affordable Justice is primarily accessed by women on lower incomes. Questionnaire responses show seven in ten women (69 percent) are on incomes under £30,000 (excluding benefits), and half of women (50 percent) are on incomes lower than £20,000 (excluding benefits). Only two of the questionnaire respondents (6 percent) were on incomes over £50,000. The average annual pay for women in full time work is £30,368⁴⁷

⁴⁷ ONS, *Employee Earnings in the UK 2022*, (2022). Figure of £30,368 calculated on basis of £584 median weekly earnings for women in full time employment.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

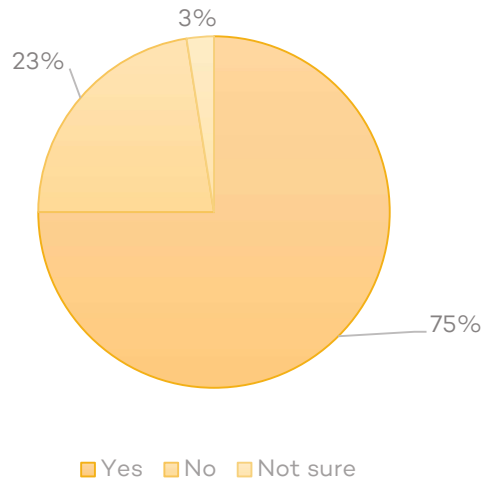
Questionnaire respondents with an income below £20,000 were more likely to have intersecting needs and pressures. They were twice as likely as other clients to have a disability (25 percent as opposed to a cohort average of 12 percent) and more likely to have caring responsibilities (35 percent as opposed to a cohort average of 24 percent). The only two non-British nationals who responded to the questionnaire were in this lowest income bracket

Prevalence and impact of abuse

'It turned my life upside down. Horrendous for the kids as they were told all sorts by my ex, that mum didn't want them anymore. My youngest had separation anxiety thinking I was never gonna pick him up again. My eldest staying up all night saying "they said this, they said that" – client interview

Affordable Justice is being well accessed by victims / survivors of abuse perpetrated by their ex-partners. Three in every four (75 percent) questionnaire respondents described themselves as having been subject to abuse by their ex-partner. Responding to this figure, the Affordable Justice solicitors feel that across the overall client-base the rate of survivors is even higher.

Self-identifying as victims and survivors of abuse perpetrated by ex-partner



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

Interviewees and questionnaire respondents provided numerous accounts of the prevalence, tactics and intent of ex-partners using the family law system to continue their abuse against women and children. Perpetrators use the system to exhaust, disrupt, and threaten, using public, potentially punitive settings, with high stakes and high risk. One woman recalled how the process required her to recall and articulate the abuse while still in a state of trauma –

‘There’s some stuff I still haven’t told anyone. I just want to forget it... not that you ever do. I don’t want to think about it. I couldn’t evidence it.’

The following example of Mary (not her real name) illustrates the weaponisation of the system by a perpetrator, both using child contact arrangements to sustain harm and control, and by abusive, disruptive, and costly behaviours throughout the process. As Mary noted, ‘a lot of people don’t understand that what happened was a carry on from domestic abuse, and it was all to hurt me’. Another, speaking of the sense that the system had failed to protect women like her, said, ‘there needs to be more awareness of perpetrators going through the courts as another means of control. He knew how it would make me feel. He waited. He hasn’t seen our daughter for all them years and he waited to do something about it’.

Mary's story – 'you know the tone of his voice – you know where it's going'

Mary had been subjected to sustained, horrific abuse by her ex-partner and repeatedly dismissive responses from the Police when she sought help. After Mary fled, her ex-partner adopted new tactics of abuse, using their child. This resulted in an extensive child contact arrangements process in which the ex-partner continued to lie and threaten and erode Mary's finances.

'I wouldn't be in the position I am now without Affordable Justice. My ex had frustrated the process at every turn. It was just awful. He tried to get me out of the house. [Later] he knew the only way he could get to me was through my child because I'd blocked every other method. My child has additional needs, so he tried to make my child's life awful to make my life harder.'

Social services and Cafcass continued to support child contact with the father.

*'Social services were saying that if I allow harm to come to my child then as the primary carer that's on me, but then legally I had to give him access. **You cannot do right for doing wrong!** Cafcass were awful. Their attitude was pretty disgraceful – shocking to see from someone who is meant to be there for the child. I just remember this woman coming in the room and saying that as parents we should be able to get along. I remember feeling, 'you just have no idea, you try sitting and having a conversation with him'. He's horrible, he's abusive.'*

'After a [domestic abuse] situation like that you're already doubting yourself, wondering was it you. The first solicitors I saw were really unhelpful, really intimidating. I'm really good at communicating, but they weren't interested. People walking around in expensive suits. I felt out of place and not able to communicate with them.'

(continued overleaf)

At a low point and with abuse on-going, Mary contacted Affordable Justice.

*'At the time I wasn't really engaged with myself. I was just doing what I needed to do. Not a great coping strategy. Becky was just really down to earth, really fab. They're approachable and really honest as well with the whole process. I had to serve him [papers] several times in the workplace. Affordable Justice helped him complete forms and steered him through the process. Everything they did was to make it as smooth as possible. **They were so dedicated and genuine.***

*'In court he made out it was all lies and in my head. That was really difficult. He was very aggressive. I remember being stuck in a small room in the court and **I remember him screaming and shouting at Becky.** I remember trying to ignore it and just reading the only thing – the telephone book. I wouldn't have been able to cope with that without her [Becky]. I would have left.*

*'Things he said were so unpleasant. You know the tones in his voice, and you know where it's going, like I was right back in that situation. **Having someone next to you between them makes so much difference.** It was Becky stepping in saying something to bring me back to know I'm doing the right thing, just to follow the procedure and they'll soon realise he is lying.*

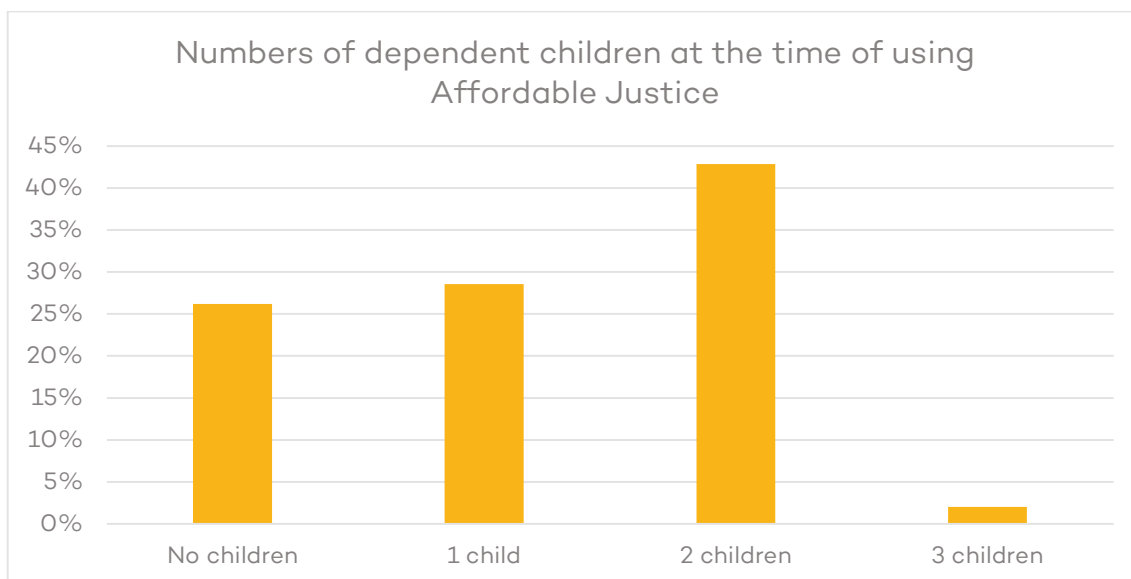
*'Without Affordable Justice I couldn't have afforded to do it and my child would have been stuck in a terrible situation. I wouldn't have been able to get justice. I wouldn't have been fair and equitable. I can work things out, **but I wouldn't have been able to represent myself. The headspace I was in with a child with very demanding needs and all the paperwork... there is no way** I could have followed the process without someone doing it for me.'*

*'I would have been financially worse off **because I would have given up the house to have had a better life.** It was still very expensive but nowhere near the cost it would have been. It probably cost twice as much as it needed to because he disrupted as much as possible. But it was worth every penny. It was really difficult at the time to manage, but it was worth more than what I paid for it.'*

Parenting and caring responsibilities

In describing how family law proceedings impact on their lives, women often referred to the impact on their children, their ability to parent, and the pressure on wider family relationships. Around three in four (74 percent) of questionnaire respondents had a dependent child aged under 18. Among a cohort of 41 women responding to the questionnaire, there were 18 dependent children.

Around one in four (26 percent) questionnaire respondents didn't have a dependent child under 18; among the remaining women there were 51 dependent children. One in four (24 percent) had caring responsibilities additional to childcare.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

Disability

More than one in ten (12 percent) of women responding to the questionnaire self-identified as disabled. This is lower than the 21 percent of working age adults in the UK⁴⁸. This group of women had strong intersecting vulnerabilities. All were on an income below £10,000 (except one who declined to say) and all were either survivors of domestic abuse (80 percent) or “not sure” (20 percent). All were mothers (higher than the cohort average of 74 percent).

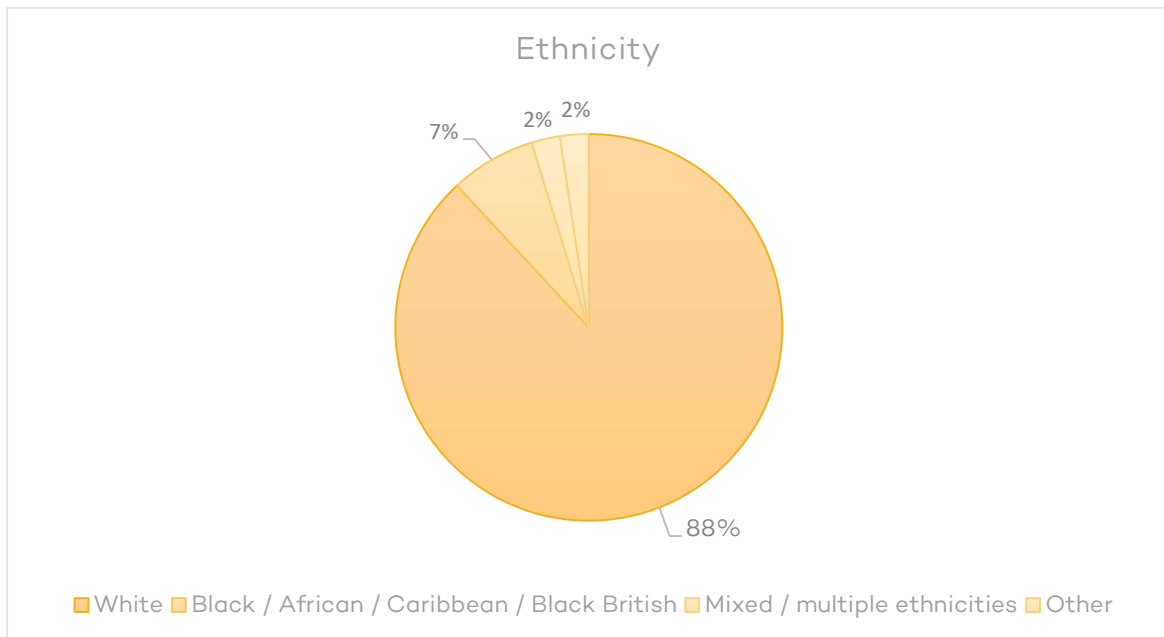
Ethnicity and citizenship

Reflecting the accessibility and reach, over one in ten (12 percent) women responding to the questionnaire were Black and minoritised (BME) higher than the 8.2 percent BME population of Affordable Justice's home city of Hull⁴⁹. All BME women were survivors of abuse perpetrated by their ex-partners and all had at least one child.

⁴⁸ UK Parliament House of Commons Library, *UK Disability Statistics: prevalence and life experiences* (2022)

⁴⁹ Hull JSNA, *Race and Ethnicity*. Retrieved from www.hulljsna.com/?s=ethnicity 16th January 2023

Three respondents (7 percent) to the questionnaire were Black British / African / Afro-Caribbean; one respondent (2 percent) was mixed ethnicity, and one respondent (2 percent) listed her ethnicity as “other”. No respondents were British Asian / South Asian despite this being the largest ethnicity minority group in England and Wales.



Source: *online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)*

All but two women responding to the questionnaire (95 percent) were British nationals.

Geography

To-date, women from 100 locations in England and Wales have used Affordable Justice. The map overleaf shows this geographic spread.

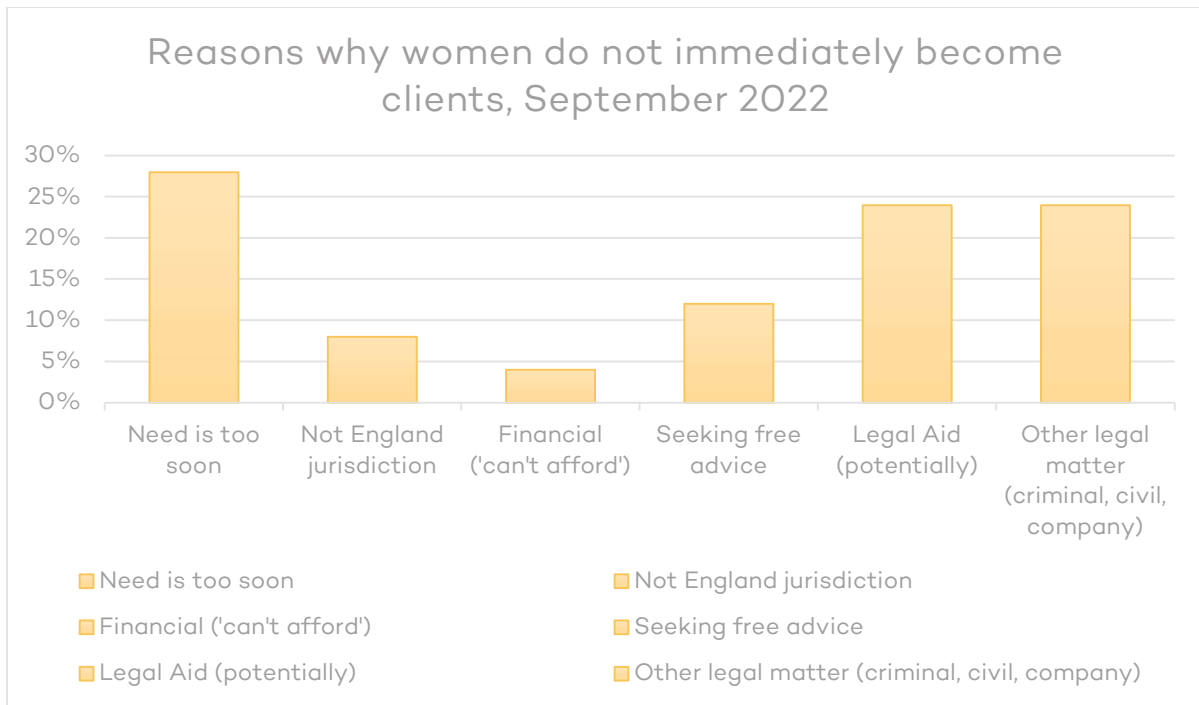


Source: Affordable Justice case files. The numbers refer to locations (not client numbers)

Understanding women who aren't becoming clients

Many women who contact Affordable Justice do not go on to access their service either immediately or at all (we do not have the data to differentiate between the two). Looking at the 60 new contacts made in September 2022, 20 percent immediately became clients and 33 percent had to make further considerations – typically around organising their finances and checking whether a first appointment being offered in November 2022 (a waiting time of over a month) was suitable for their needs.

Amongst the 47 percent of September first contacts who did not immediately / at all become clients, there were several reasons for not accessing the service. The reasons for this included: the need was too urgent (28 percent) (e.g. the house had already been sold; a two day hearing was due the following month; a Section report was due the following month); seeking free legal advice (12 percent); likely eligible for Legal Aid (24 percent); not a family law matter (but instead is criminal, civil or company law); and outside the jurisdiction (8 percent were cases for Polish and Romanian law).

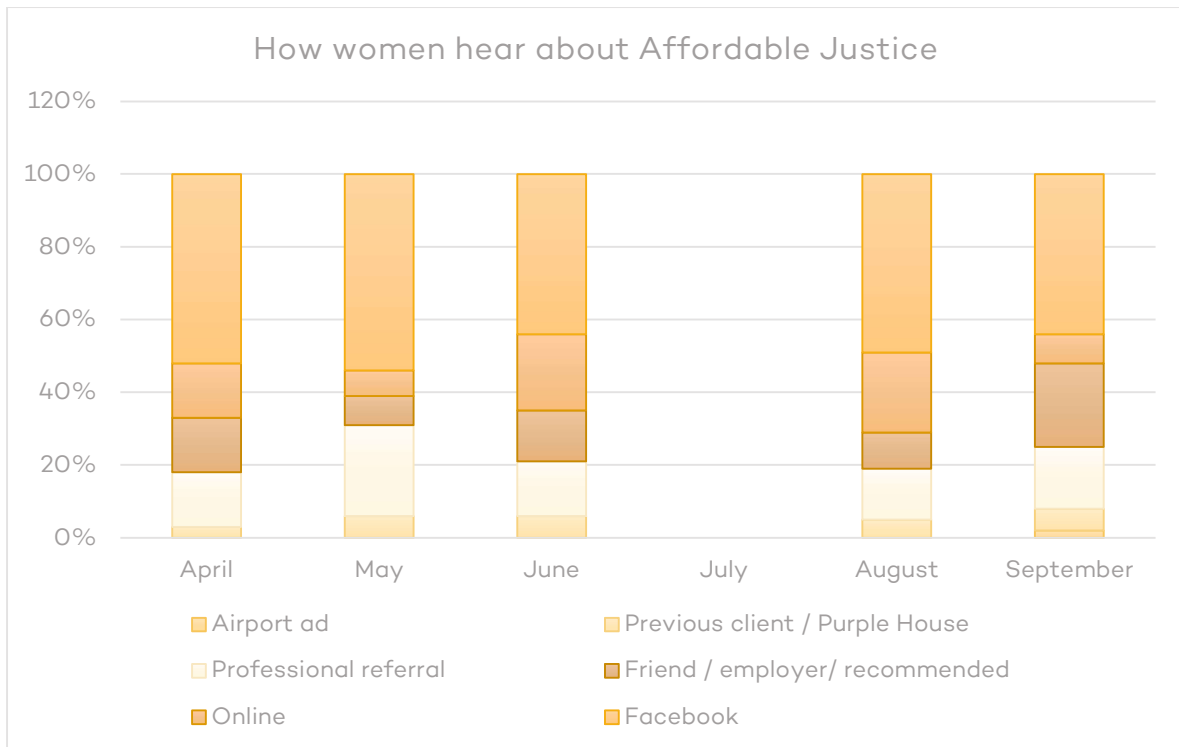


Source: records of new client first contacts (January – September 2022)

Where do women first hear about Affordable Justice?

‘[The thought of approaching a solicitor] was daunting. I’d only seen it on TV. I had no experience of the law., I didn’t know if I was doing the right thing because I was always told I was doing the wrong thing, for years. I thought I was stupid, could never make it on my own. It was nerve-racking to approach someone and to have the confidence that this is it, I’m going to end it and get a divorce’ – client interviewee

Affordable Justice is continually looking at how more women, particularly those excluded from existing legal support, can access Affordable Justice. The approach has been to explore different channels (e.g. advertising in airports) based on an intention to not make assumptions about how women access and trust information.



Source: first contact data (April – September 2022).⁵⁰

Recent data shows Facebook is the most consistent and effective marketing tool, prompting around a half (44 to 54 percent) of first contacts each month. The true figure may be higher as another 7-22 percent of women first accessed Affordable Justice ‘online’, which may include Facebook. Staff believe promotion on Facebook redresses perceptions of elitism in law and note Facebook Messenger conversations provide an accessible informal route of contact often preferred by women on lower incomes.

Recommendations from other organisations make up between a quarter and a sixth of referrals (14 to 25 percent). These come from a range of agencies, such as the local Hull domestic abuse partnership, social services, and Police. Internal referrals from Winner are low but steady, at around one in twenty referrals (6 percent on average). The number is likely low because evidence from Winner domestic abuse services supports often enables women to access Legal Aid.

As would be expected, word of mouth through family and friends is a source for recommendations. This varies at between 8 and 23 percent each month. In theory, this route will grow as the client base grows as almost nine in ten (88 percent) clients would recommend the service to others.

⁵⁰ Staff vacancy in July led to insufficient data quality. Across all months there was no standard categorisation.

Approachability

'Amazing. She put me at rest straight away. She was with me every step of the way. When I turned up into the building there were other mums there. Straight away it put my mind at ease' – client interview

Women repeatedly described the importance of Affordable Justice's approachability. The culture is experienced as 'kind', 'considerate' and 'calming'. The women-only nature of the service and location within Winner was integral to this warmth. One woman described how this eased her access –

'it looked good because it was [only] women. I was going through a difficult situation and I needed someone to understand what I was going through. At that point I was wary around men.'

The location within Winner, Preston Road Women's Centre, further added to women's sense of safety, ease and trust. The impact of this is described by another woman who –

'liked Purple House because it felt homely. It didn't feel scary and clinical and expensive. You see it in the building [of other solicitors] and start panicking about how much it cost. Purple House felt more intimate and I felt like I could open up more.'

This approachability and safety is a contrast to perceptions and experiences of other solicitors described as 'unhelpful', 'not really interested', and frequently 'intimidating'. Negative practice revealed disempowering power differentials that acted to silence women's experiences and choices as well as behaviours which consumed women's energy and attention undermining confidence in themselves and the legal process. One woman compared the 'very easy back and forth' at Affordable Justice with her previous solicitor where, 'I was always having to contact them. It got to the point where I felt I couldn't keep contacting them anymore, feeling like you're a bit of a nuisance, a bit of a pain to keep ringing'. Similarly, another woman recalled with her previous solicitor –

'constantly chasing, which on top of the stress already, certainly didn't help. It didn't feel like they had much empathy, you were just another person. Whereas with Affordable Justice it felt, like, really open, they weren't going to judge or anything like that. I never felt I was being a nuisance by giving them a call or asking to speak with Sue about something. I felt if I had any questions I could ring and ask whereas the other law firm I never got to that stage. I felt maybe they wouldn't do the best for me because I keep ringing and maybe they think I'm being awkward.'

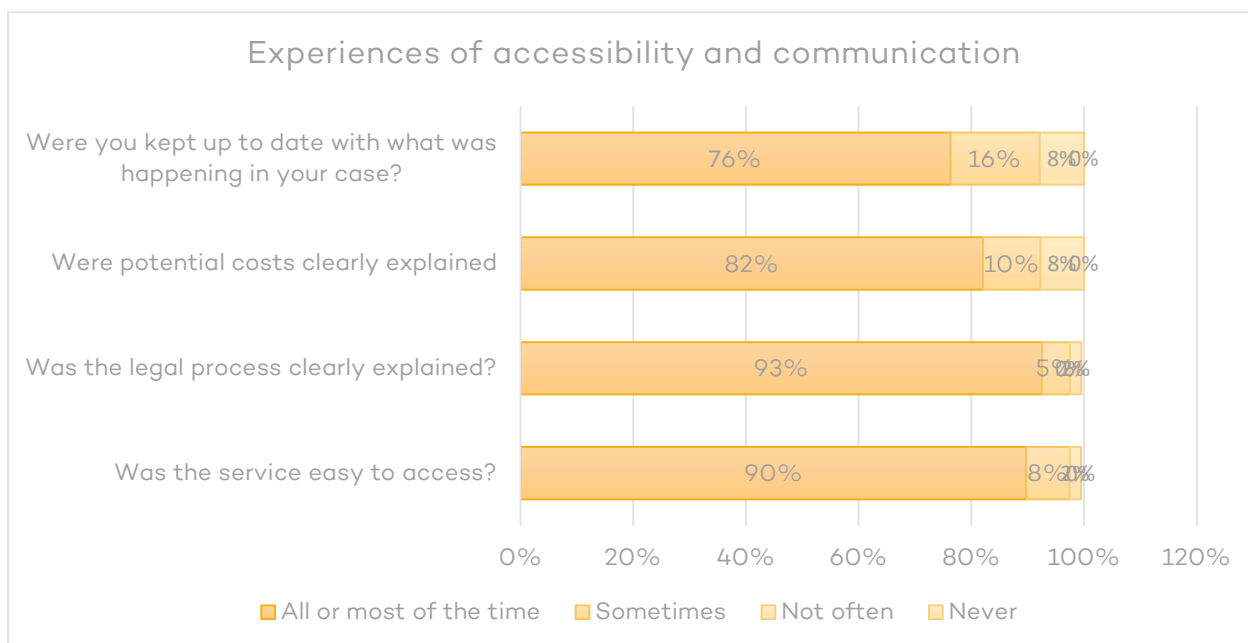
Professional behaviours like these are patriarchal in design and effect, mirroring the abusive dynamics perpetrated by ex-partners and prevent or inhibit women's access to justice through legal advice and representation.

Communication

'You've been amazing with communication & support. I felt listened to and respected. Thank you' – client

Good communication is core to women's experiences and outcomes of the family law process. Information empowers choices, control, and self-determination. Women accessing Affordable Justice described how clarity of communication countered their fears around the inherent uncertainty and opacity of the process.

Women value good communication and rated Affordable Justice highly. Nine in ten (90 percent) questionnaire respondents rated Affordable Justice as easy to access "all or most" of the time and ongoing communication from Affordable Justice regarding the legal process and costs, were all rated highly. Over nine in ten women (93 percent) women felt the legal process was clearly communicated "all or most" the time; over eight in ten women (82 percent) felt the potential costs were clearly explained "all or most" of the time; and three in four (76 percent) felt they were kept to up to date with their case "all or most" of the time. Responding to these figures Affordable Justice felt rates would have been higher still but for the vacancy in the team's Administrator role in summer 2022.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

Women spoke of valuing ease, transparency and flexibility in communication which fitted around their availability and communication preferences. Comments focused on the positive attitudes and behaviours of staff: 'friendly', 'easy to talk to' and 'reassuring'. Women spoke of the 'calm' manner in which options were set out and the case approached. A culture was described where staff are 'willing to go the extra mile' and 'above and beyond'. The honesty and pragmatism by which legal parameters and possible outcomes were explained from the start was valued ('brilliant'; 'really appreciated') because it 'didn't

say it was all going to be fine’ and enabled women to hold ‘realistic expectations’ which gave them a greater sense of control and foresight.

Affordability

‘It is virtually impossible to access help which is affordable through a solicitor. I was quoted £285 an hour and a £1,000 holding fee from a local solicitor, and this is not unusual unfortunately’ – client

Affordable Justice is priced at around a third of the price of high street solicitors. The price is designed to cover costs and enable service sustainability, but as an asset locked charity, not to deliver any extractable personal profit. The contrast to women’s other financial options was stark. One woman described spending £6,000 including barristers, to secure a child contact arrangement (‘a huge amount of money especially when I had nowhere to live’). Other women had their homes and solvency at risk because of the legal costs incurred using other firms.

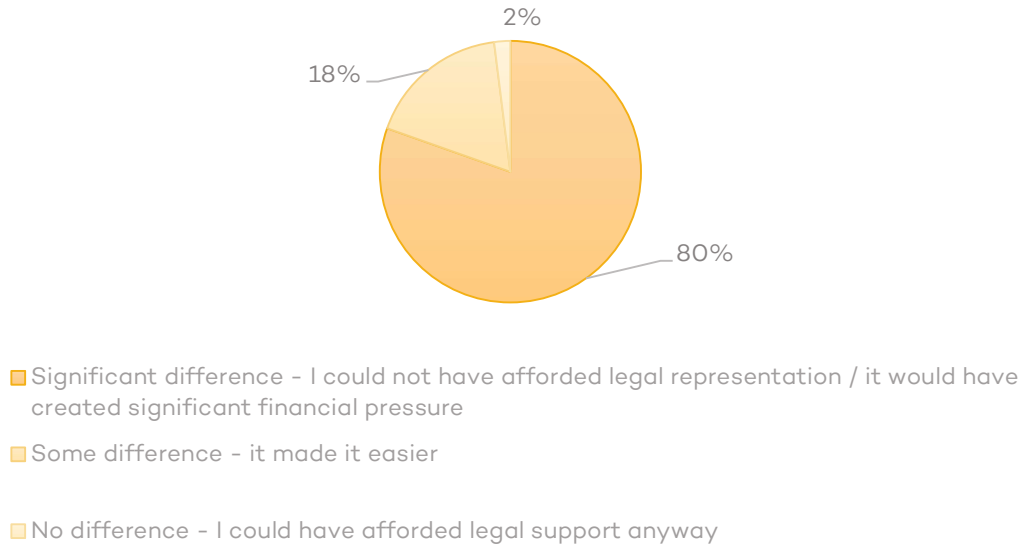
A comparison of final case costs for seven of the women in this report shows a cross-section of complexity and need (see table below). As one interviewee observed – ‘it was a lot, lot cheaper than it would have been’. The total savings (including VAT) for seven women were £91,989: an average of £13,141 per woman.

Case number	Affordable Justice cost		High Street solicitor (estimated minimum)		Total saving to client (inc. VAT)
	Excl. VAT	Inc VAT	Exc VAT	Inc VAT	
2	£9,119	£10,942	£36,720	£44,064	£33,122
3	£756	£907	£3,060	£3,672	£2,765
4	£5,481	£6,577	£22,185	£26,622	£20,045
5	£1,449	£1,739	£5,865	£7,038	£5,299
6	£2,394	£2,873	£9,690	£11,628	£8,755
7	£1,512	£1,814	£6,120	£7,344	£5,530
8	£4,505	£5,405	£18,233	£21,879	£16,474
Total savings across the seven interviewed women					£91,989

Source: Affordable Justice transaction reports

The pricing model is positively received – and demonstrably impactful – for women. The costs of the process still impacted on women’s lives, especially in cases where perpetrator delays and obfuscation artificially increased solicitors’ time and costs. Women noted that without Affordable Justice they ‘couldn’t have been able to afford it’, ‘would have been stuck’, and were ‘panicking about how much it cost’. For questionnaire respondents, the Affordable Justice pricing model made a ‘significant’ difference to eight in ten (80 percent) women using the service. To all but one questionnaire respondent (98 percent) it made at least ‘some difference’.

How did the pricing at Affordable Justice affect your ability to fund your legal support?



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

The pricing model potentially has repercussions for women long after the legal process concludes. Extended families were affected by costs as women frequently reported reliance on family loans and financial gifts to pay fees. Women welcomed the monthly billing, which while costly at the time, helped keep costs contained to the time period around the legal action ('I didn't feel like I was hounded for money'; 'it was never a bang massive bill at the end') and helped better financial planning. All these factors worked with the pricing model to help build women's financial standing during a period when they are often re-establishing themselves legally and financially.

Quality of experience

It's always a little bit daunting when you're approaching anyone with any sort of things about domestic abuse. You don't always know what to say. After the first call I felt relief. Definitely relief. I felt - I don't know if more control is the right word - of the situation. I felt like I had someone on my side who could help me and who wanted to help me. It felt like a genuine interest to help me. I've had interactions with other law firms who I could tell wanted to or didn't want to take me on. It felt it was about the money. After speaking with Affordable Justice, I felt more confident in my situation' - client

Women's experience of Affordable Justice is one of compassion and security, rooted in expertise. Women experience Affordable Justice as an anchor through the unknowns and judgements of the family law process. They spoke often of staff being personally invested and of a sense of communal care. In interviews and questionnaires three characteristics came to define women's experiences: empathy and kindness; being believed, respected, and not judged; and expertise. Together these shape women's self-determination, enabling women to assert choice and control during a time of uncertainty, transition, shock, and sometimes trauma, so that women can reach the outcomes they need from the most positive possible vantage.

Empathy and kindness

'So dedicated and so genuine. And that really comes across. They're approachable and really honest' - client

Examples of and appreciation for kindness and empathy from Affordable Justice staff were widespread in women's feedback. Staff's behaviours and attitudes provided a consistency and softening for women often feeling highly threatened by ex-partners and the potential results of the legal process. Women described the importance of empathy as a response to that specific moment in their lives ('the staff are wonderful. I never thought as a person in my 50's I would find myself in the situation I'm in. The staff are very sympathetic and supportive') and reported feeling that staff were genuinely invested in a shared endeavour around their case ('when we got the result we wanted I could feel the emotion from her, that she was really, really happy'; 'Sue rang and said "take care, just cuddle them" even though I've never met her face to face').

The care experienced by women reinforces more explicit messages from staff that women merit compassion and are not alone in their experience. Particularly for women subject to abuse, this experience of compassion is a powerful and fundamental part of recovery.

Being believed, respected, and not judged

'That I was believed. One of my main issues was that I was believed' - client

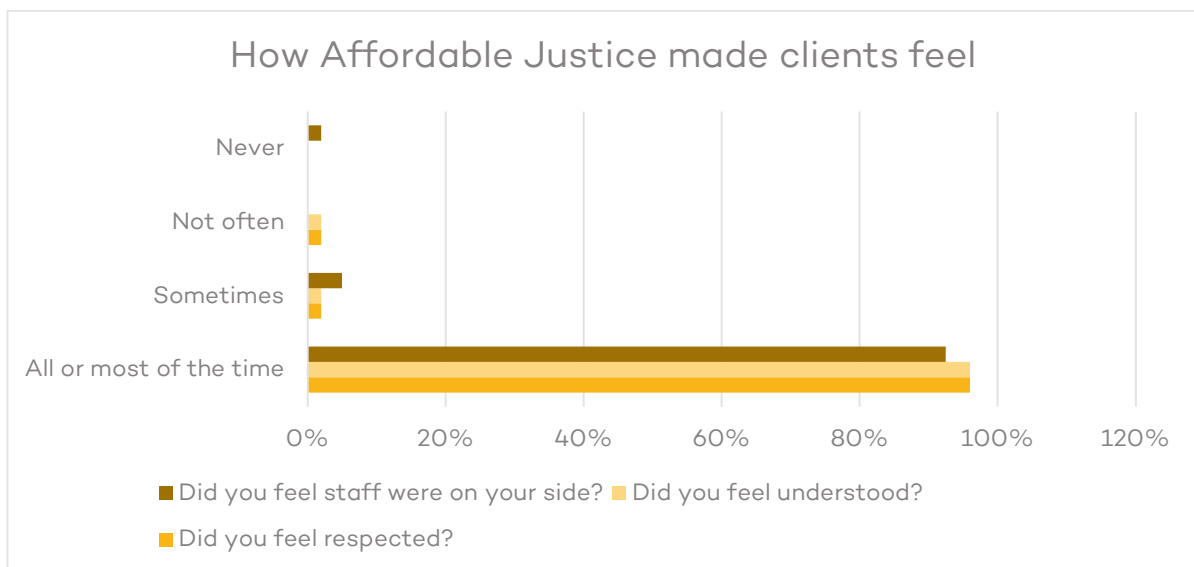
That all women are believed is a principle of feminist practice, a founding principle at Affordable Justice and at Preston Road Women’s Centre. All women reported feeling immediately believed. This created an experience of sanctuary and a reciprocal trust between solicitor and client which engendered trust in the legal advice, the legal process, and women’s trust in themselves. The resulting security of being believed was fundamental to alleviating the hardships of the process -

‘I can’t thank Becky and the team enough. They understood & respected my choices and were thoroughly understanding and kind to me during a terrible time. I will always be grateful.’

Questionnaire respondents felt respected and understood ‘all or most’ of the time (96 percent) and that staff were on their side ‘all or most’ of the time” (94 percent). All women from ethnic minorities felt respected, understood, and that staff were on their side ‘all the time’. This helped counter negative internal voices produced by ex-partner’s abuse and provided a relief from being judged -

‘I’m educated. This would never happen to me no way, I’d get out. It is hard to admit I’m in this situation and I’m stuck, and I need to get out of it. When you’re going in somewhere you need to feel safe, that you’re not being judged and being asked why you didn’t get out sooner. You need to have that relaxed informal environment to feel safe and open up’

The two women who didn’t feel understood and believed throughout the process were both women subject to contentious investigation by children’s social services, Cafcass and/or Police resulting from false accusations made by highly coercive and dangerous ex-partners. Future evaluations can look further at these correlations between abuse, not being believed by other concurrent investigations (‘I felt like I wasn’t believed, especially by the Police’) and the ability of Affordable Justice to make women feel they are believed. It suggests there are some women whose experiences require additional support to feel believed – or whose experience of coercion remains so acute at the time of support they are unlikely to feel believed, no matter what additional efforts are made.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

Expert

'This was a first-rate service and I felt supported throughout. Having a solicitor speak to me on the phone who was very knowledgeable about the particular areas I needed help with was very reassuring' – client

Expertise was the third characteristic of women's experience of Affordable Justice. This expertise wasn't just legal but included a wider understanding of women's lives, the behaviours and intentions of ex-partners, and the impact of the context in which women found themselves. This expertise was reassuring, manifesting in the precision of legal documents, clarity of explanations, and ability to articulate women's experiences and wants –

'Very on the ball, very professional. I didn't doubt for one minute what she was saying. She made me feel more confident in my situation. Knowing I had Sue to speak to and to put it into words I knew the courts would really understand my situation.'

'She did a lot of work on the case. She has gone above and beyond. Her statements have been amazing. She's produced amazing and effective responses. And she's really helped me to be reasonable and rein it in a bit.'

The experience of expertise and therefore women's confidence in Affordable Justice remained strong and sustained throughout the process. This created trust women hadn't had in previous solicitors –

'I got a solicitor who had understanding about everything, about how I was feeling, not just someone off the street'

'I've had interactions with other law firms. It was only after speaking with Affordable Justice I felt more confident in my situation.'

In court hearings solicitors' expertise was a shield against the instability, threats and gaslighting of ex-partners weaponising the system. Women gave examples of Affordable Justice taking on extra work ('she was making sure he would show up. She was managing his end and being civil with him') and managing behaviours ('he rang a couple of times and was aggressive to the receptionist. They humoured him and that stopped him being such a monster') to curtail the impact of ex-partners. Solicitors supported women to understand and reframe their experiences, enabling women to move through feelings of guilt and shame towards determination to rebuild their lives. Women valued the confidence that the solicitor had supported so many other women in similar cases, finding intrinsic value in knowing they weren't alone and other women had survived these experiences before them.

Jasmine's Journey



Criminal Law



Family Courts

Abuse Begins

2013

Jasmine, a single mother of one, begins a new relationship. They have a child in 2015. Serious verbal and physical abuse and surveillance escalates over time, including abuse of the eldest child. Poor response from Police increases the partner's control.

Escape

March 2018

Jasmine flees with the children.



Protection Orders

The ex-partner begins sustained harassment and intimidation, often using the children. A June 2018 Restraining Order is continually breached, resulting in a December 2018 suspended sentence and a June 2019 Non Molestation Order.

Hostile Child Contact Attempt

October 2021

Despite not fulfilling any parental role since 2018 the ex-partner applies for a Child Arrangement Order and Prohibited Steps Order in which he misrepresents his behaviour. The threat of contact causes significant distress in Jasmine and the children. Jasmine contacts Affordable Justice. A Cafass safeguarding inquiry begins.



Unsafe Process

January 2019

In order to avoid court, Jasmine is required to attend mediation at a solicitor's office, despite the ex-partner posting photos of himself there the same day.



Mediation as Threat

October 2018

The ex-partner initiates mediation proceedings despite abuse and previous threats to punish Jasmine by taking their child. This prompts the beginning of a negative experience with a firm of solicitors.



"From the first call with Sue I felt relief. I felt more control. I felt like I had someone on my side."

"The thought of being in the same building as my ex-partner was horrendous. From the day I got the first letter it was all I could think about. It affected me massively. It just took over my life."

"I was chasing the solicitor - they weren't interested. That made a really rough time much harder."

Affordable Justice Hearings

November 2021 & February 2022

Affordable Justice represents Jasmine in two telephone hearings where the ex-partner continues to misrepresent and lie.

"It was evident he wasn't bothered about the outcome. The process was just another way of him saying 'I can still do this'."

Safe Outcomes

July 2022

Affordable Justice represents Jasmine in a concluding telephone hearing. A Child Arrangement Order is put in place confirming no direct contact to be allowed by the ex-partner. Jasmine and children remain safe from harm.



Affordable Justice charge: £1,512
Jasmine's estimated saving (inc. VAT): £5,386

"I got all sorts of threats from my ex-partner and I knew I would need legal advice, but didn't know how I'd afford it or access it. Affordable Justice is a step in the right direction of leaving the relationship. You can never have too much help when you're going through something like that."

The impact of positive experiences

The quality of experience of legal support and advice affects women's confidence and reduces the risk of re-victimisation through a challenging and all-encompassing process⁵¹. A good experience leaves women in a better position for the next step in their lives for recovery from the process and any abuse which preceded and continued through it. Fundamental to the Affordable Justice approach is recognising this importance by providing a relational and compassionate service. While it is not possible to quantify the value of this impact, there was a marked contrast to how women were affected by previous solicitors compared to Affordable Justice. In a process described by women as negatively impacting across all areas of their lives, Affordable Justice was a tool for women to reduce and control that impact.

Empowerment

'I'm at the start of the process but the support I've received so far has made me feel more positive I can get my life back' - client

Women described in different ways how, despite or because of the hardship of the process, they gained confidence in themselves. The experience of being respected and believed by Affordable Justice was validating, helping women rebuild. For survivors whose lives had been systematically broken down by abusive ex-partners, proof of agency and affirmation of their experience and reality was fundamental to recovery –

'There was no blame. That was one of the other worries which I think women in general who have been in domestic abuse tend to blame themselves because you feel you've allowed it to happen. And subconsciously [Affordable Justice were] confidence building.'

This was echoed by another survivor –

'Unless you have confidence, you're not strong enough to be able to leave. The solicitors standing there for me gave me that confidence to build my own self-esteem, that it wasn't my fault, that what I experienced wasn't my fault. To be listened to and no one judge you for what you're saying.'

Mental wellbeing

The family law process is associated with increased mental health pressures⁵². In previous research women have described being emotionally and psychologically ground down by the process, and experienced problems of stress, depression, sleeplessness, anxiety, and panic⁵³. One woman at Affordable Justice described how –

⁵¹ Barnett (2020)

⁵² Justice (2022)

⁵³ Rights of Women (2012)

'It affects everything. It affects sleep. It affects my whole life. It affects me in every single way. My health. I'm now ill and I've always been healthy – borderline diabetic, iron deficient.'

Affordable Justice countered negative impacts on women's wellbeing inherent to the family law process and was described by women as 'having made the whole process less stressful'. This positive impact was often significant, as one questionnaire respondent wrote –

'Thank you for doing what you do. The impact on my wellbeing has been immediate and substantial. I'm truly grateful knowing that I and other women can access this to.'

A survivor whose perpetrator took her through the family law system, described how the support from Affordable Justice affected her in a traumatic time –

'It was a horrible, horrible time in my life. It was so frightening for me and the children. Knowing the divorce was in safe hands and not ringing up the bill took that worry from it.'

One woman facing false accusations of child abuse by her ex-partner described the impact of Affordable Justice at a time she contemplated suicide –

'It affected me massively from the day I got the letter... to even now. It was my only thought at the time. It just took over. Just worrying about it all the time. So having someone who obviously knows the ins and outs of what's going to happen and who can put you at ease as much as possible, to know I wasn't by myself.'

Family and financial security

'I felt the divorce could just be left with Affordable Justice to sort out and I didn't have to worry about it. I felt I had the choice. I just let Becky run with it and that helped me deal with everything else' – client

The family law process represented a time of transition, disruption, and threat for the physical and financial security of women's families. Women undergoing the family law process are subjected to the costs of the process and potential loss of assets – including being forced to sell their homes⁵⁴ – as a result of the process. For many women this compounds years of financial abuse by their ex-partner. One study found 90 percent of women suffering impoverishment through the process – mounting debts, spending savings, and selling assets⁵⁵. Affordable Justice's pricing tempered these financial risks.

The effectiveness and responsiveness of Affordable Justice freed women's immediate capacity to cope with tasks like re-housing, maintaining employment, and maintaining

⁵⁴ IDAS (2021)

⁵⁵ Rights of Women (2012)

children's routines and schooling. Long-term advantages included the financial gain of being able to retain full time employment by reducing the administrative pressure –

'If I'd had to do it all myself, I wouldn't have had anything else in my life. There wouldn't have been any balance. It would have been like a full-time job. I wouldn't have been able to go to uni. I don't know what avenues I would have gone down.'

The positive impact extended to women's parenting and the impact of the situation on their children –

'I was petrified. The trauma for the kids and what they've been through... but the amount of times I've said, "thank god for Sue"'

The service's affordability and the ending of financial disputes with ex-partners strengthened women's financial position. One woman described how she wouldn't have been able to get a mortgage without the divorce that separated her from her ex-husbands' debts and credit rating ('it was my final freedom being able to use my old surname'), while another described how the affordability was the first in a sequence of re-building her family –

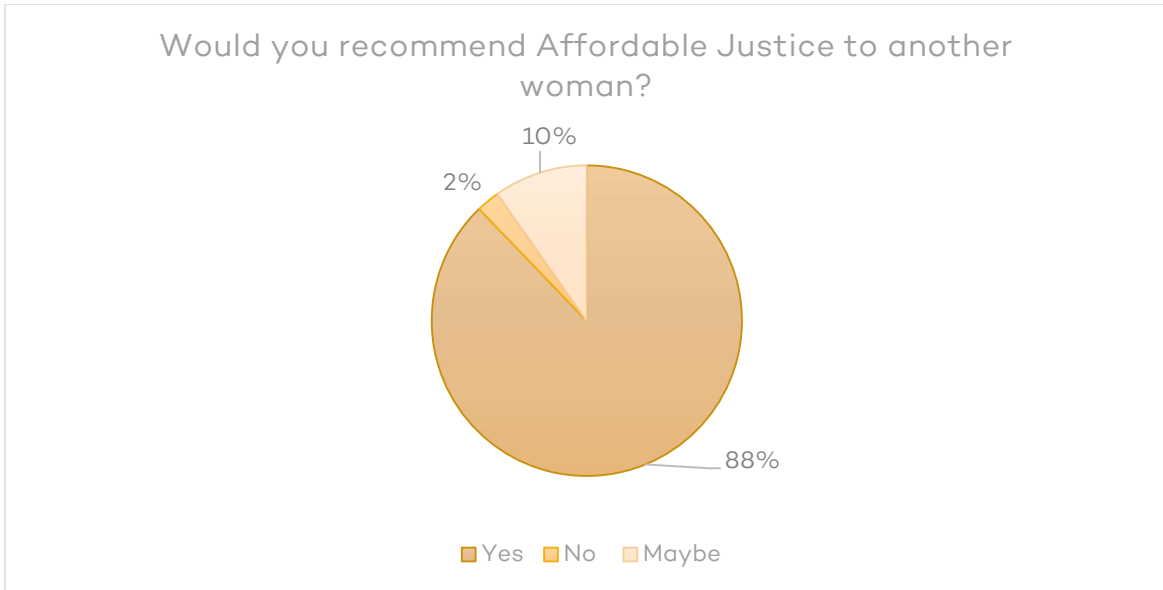
'If it hadn't been affordable and I hadn't got the divorce, I wouldn't have been able to move on, to get married, to be adopting my little boy. I wouldn't have been able to turn my life around like I have now.'

Another woman described how being believed and effectively supported by Affordable Justice 'put me on a positive path with other services' that helped resolve a hostile relationship with children's social services.

Would women recommend Affordable Justice?

'I have already recommended Becky and the team to a friend. I can't praise them enough' – client

The quality of women's overall experience is indicated by nine in ten questionnaire respondents (88 percent) saying they would recommend the service to other women ('most definitely'). 'I wouldn't hesitate to contact them again if I do need them' said one woman; while another said 'I've been able to help another family by signposting and reassuring around my own positive outcome that this process can work, daunting as it is'.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

Interviewees asked what they thought about plans to replicate and expand the services responded –


'It would be amazing to think of the support women could get'

'I hope this can be replicated, rolled across the country. We need it. There are a lot of women in the same situation as I am – as I was – who it could really help. It would be amazing if it could take that bit of worry away. It's a shame there's not more of it'

'I was so grateful and I felt really privileged. I'm just so grateful I got to benefit, and I just hope it's something which can be set up elsewhere because I think it should be universal.'

Victoria's Journey

 Criminal Law

 Family Courts

AFFORDABLE JUSTICE
LEGAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN

Abuse Begins 2011

Victoria's partner begins an escalating campaign of physical, sexual and emotional abuse during her first pregnancy. Both are in the military. Victoria has a second child. The abuse becomes more controlling.

"I became his possession. I wanted to leave but at the time I was so low, I didn't think I could."

Strangulation March 2020

Victoria leaves after a strangulation, but is coerced to return. The military offer no support or route to safety.

"The military were appalling for me and my children. They told me if I didn't like it, I could leave. How was I supposed to do that? It nearly destroyed me."

False Allegations September 2020

To prevent Victoria leaving, the partner makes false allegations to the school. With Victoria's consent the school reports to children's social services and support Victoria and the children to flee.

Social Services September 2020

The children are placed on the Child in Need register where they remain until the family law process concludes in July 2021.

"He was saying things about me to try and take the children away. I automatically thought the system was going to fail me because of how he made me feel about myself."

Prevention Order October 2021

Homeless but working full time, Victoria makes a Prohibitive Steps Order which the ex-partner disputes.

"My little boy was terrified."

Affordable Justice October 2021

Victoria contacts Affordable Justice to help make a Child Arrangement Order.

"When you're in the situation life feels 100 miles an hour. For a very long time I thought I was on my own. Affordable Justice helped me know what first step to take."

Safe Outcomes

November 2021 is the first of four hearings to agree the Child Arrangement Order. In July 2022 the court confirms the ex-partner is not allowed direct contact with the children. Victoria and her children begin their recovery with counselling.

"At the final hearing when I was believed and he was told he was a liar, I felt like someone took their foot off my head. I could finally breathe."

Affordable Justice
charge: £5,481

Victoria's estimated
saving (inc. VAT):
£20,045

"Affordable Justice standing there gave me that confidence to build my self-esteem, that what I had experienced wasn't my fault. I always knew what I wanted. I needed the backing of Affordable Justice and the evidence."

"It meant I could speak freely and to say what happened to me without consequences. Before that there was always a consequence of me standing up to him."

Legal outcomes

'I was able to stop my ex-partner bullying me into making decisions as I knew what my rights were' – client

Having provided access to legal advice and representation for women otherwise excluded or poorly served and having provided a compassionate and expert experience which helps empower women in the midst of an inherently challenging process, the final value of Affordable Justice is in the legal outcomes produced at the end of the service.

In this section we look at what legal outcomes Affordable Justice has produced and the extent to which these provided what women wanted. We also look more widely to consider how the service affected women's overall experience of the family law system and whether the service created a reduction in the number of women self-representing.

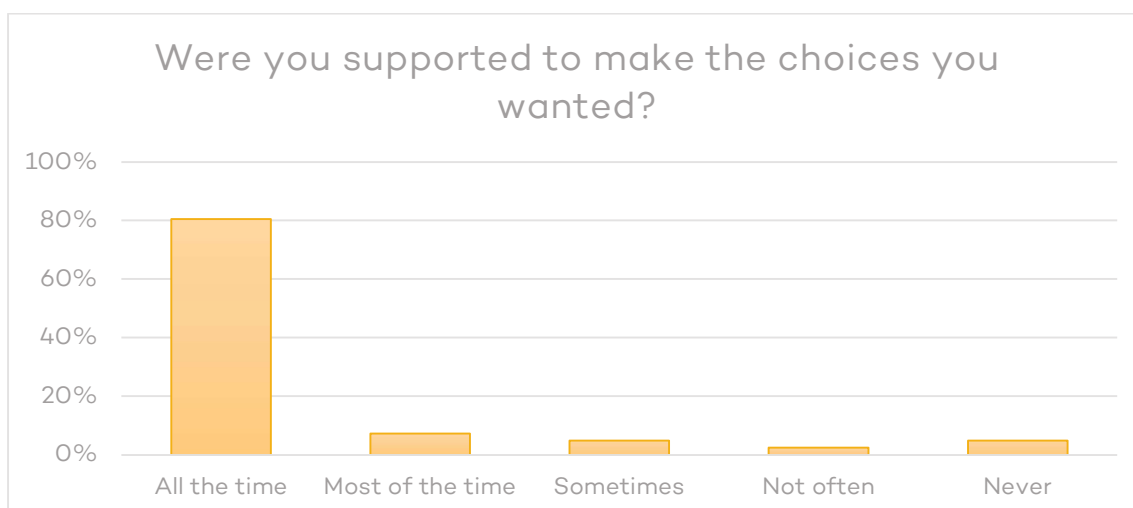
Number of outcomes achieved

In the past six years Affordable Justice has supported, 1,002 women (up to 23rd January 2023) with legal advice and representation.

Self-determined choices

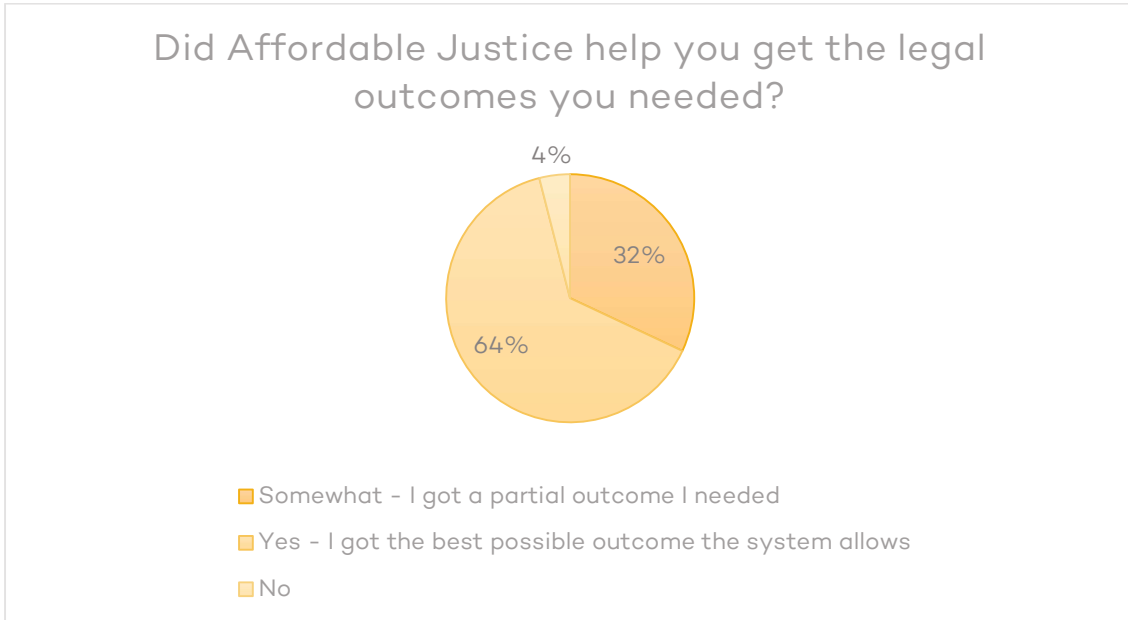
'It didn't change my choices, but it explained them more. I always knew what I wanted. I needed the backing of them and finding the evidence to prove what had happened. It helped me build on what I already wanted to do' – client interviewee

Overwhelmingly women felt supported to make the choices which mattered to them. Women frequently spoke of being supported to make choices which created a balance between material legal outcomes and their wish to reduce the duration of the process and exposure to adversarial contact with ex-partners. Nearly nine in ten (87 percent) of women felt supported to make the choices that they wanted 'all or most' of the time. This contrasted with anecdotal evidence from interviewees that other law firms worked on the basis of what material advantages were possible according to law, rather than according to what women wanted.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

The resulting legal outcomes from the process were the ‘best possible’ for around two in three women (64 percent) and ‘partial’ for around a third (32 percent)⁵⁶. One woman reported not receiving the outcome she wanted. The positive implications for this are a correlating increase in women and children’s safety and the re-gaining of women’s capacity and agency to direct towards the next stage in their lives.



Source: online anonymous client questionnaire (November – December 2022)

How did Affordable Justice affect your experience of the legal system?

The inherent burdens and harms of the family law process were ‘substantially’ or ‘somewhat’ reduced for nine in ten (92 percent) of women using Affordable Justice. This was only not felt to be the case for two women responding to the questionnaire.

Rates of self-representation

‘I don’t know how I’d have coped without Sue. If I’d had to represent myself, I dread to think how bad I’d have been’ – client interview

Self-representation is often distressing and re-traumatising for women. Research shows self-representation can exacerbate or trigger mental issues and have a detrimental impact on physical health⁵⁷. Research finds self-representation – which has grown significantly in the post-LASPO justice gap⁵⁸ – often produces worse outcomes for women. Self-

⁵⁶ These figures represent that fact that the court, not Affordable Justice, has final decision in what outcomes women receive.

⁵⁷ Mant (2020)

⁵⁸ Exclusions resulting from LASPO drove self-representation up from 43 percent to 74 percent in the year following the legislation. Mant (2020)

representation is the cause of increasing pressures in the family law system due to 'consistent' difficulties with deadlines, quality of written submissions and forms, terminology, and the presentation of evidence according to 'social rather than legal interpretation'⁵⁹, and inequalities within specialist tasks of presentation and cross-examination.

Only 12 percent of women using Affordable Justice had to self-represent at any point – compared to an 81 percent of women generally⁶⁰. This is a huge reduction of 69 percent. When we combine this with the fact that three in every four Affordable Justice clients are survivors of abuse, this significantly reduces the risk of traumatising contact with perpetrators ('just the thought of being in the same building as my ex-partner was horrendous').

As one woman described her relief at avoiding self-representation against her abusive ex-partner –

'In all honesty I was too scared. I was frightened to speak in front of my ex-husband. Knowing what he'd done and at that time he had my children. I didn't want him to hear me. Would I have said everything I wanted to say? Sue knew what to say, what was relevant, what was important. It was 100 percent worth her representing me. It completely took the pressure off.'

⁵⁹ Mant (2020)

⁶⁰ Mant (2020)

Conclusion

There is a significant relationship between family law and poverty, and between family law and domestic abuse. Affordable Justice set out to counter both these inequalities by increasing access, quality of service, and self-determined outcomes to women whose socio-economic status and subjection to abuse leaves them poorly served and excluded from existing legal support. Affordable Justice has been successful in these aims. It has widened access to women on lower incomes and who felt marginalised and not understood by other law firms and helped over a thousand women retain a total of £1,340,000 which would have gone on fees and VAT. It has provided a quality of service recognisably feminist, and experienced as being compassionate, respectful, believing of women, and expert in quality. It has respected and supported women's choices around legal outcomes and helped achieve these, while lessening the wider potential negative impacts inherent to the adversarial and uncertain family law process.

The feminist characteristics of the service comes from a rejection of the legal idea that law is genderless. Instead, Affordable Justice – by way of its mother organisation, Winner, Preston Road Women's Centre – brings into the legal space the characteristics of successful feminist frontline practice. Women using the service experience it as compassionate, equalising, holistic, communal, and detailed and expert in its delivery of legal advice and representation. This results in the sharp edges of the family law process being blunted, and women being supported to rebuild and self-determine the next stage of their lives beyond the courts.

This golden thread of empowerment is a simple yet disruptive challenge to the paradigms which currently fail women at all levels of the family law system. Empowerment serves women receiving the service and it is a foundation for creating flexible, inclusive working practices which allow staff to structure their professional lives in ways impossible in traditional law firms. The non-profit model of the service is also a challenge to a sector disadvantaging women by the assumption that price equates to quality, which makes some women pay and excludes some women entirely.

The scaling of Affordable Justice would mean scaling these advantages. Imagined across England and Wales there would be a significant alleviation of what Community Justice Fund calls the 'massive cost burden for society and significant harm to the individual'⁶¹ caused by the 'justice gap' created by LASPO and austerity. Community Justice Fund estimates that the average cost to the Treasury of those experiencing a legal problem for which they cannot access advice is two and a half times those who receive fully funded free specialist legal advice⁶². For policy makers who have failed to action the recommendations and optimism of the Ministry of Justice's *Harm Report (2020)* – 'the Panel concluded that nothing short of structural and cultural change was sufficient to address systemic barriers for domestic abuse victims'⁶³ – Affordable Justice provides an

⁶¹ Community Justice Fund (2021)

⁶² Community Justice Fund (2021)

⁶³ Justice (2022)

impactful, financially self-sustaining, and independently scalable route to bringing into family law increased access and the promised cultural change around domestic abuse.

Recommendations for Affordable Justice

Scale

The evidence in this evaluation strongly recommends the Affordable Justice model for scaling. The potential impact of scaling includes:

- Significantly increasing access, quality, and outcomes for women
- Providing non-profit competition to lower market costs for all women
- Modelling women-focused flexible working within the legal sector
- Representation, specialism and reach to equally serve all England and Wales communities
- Pooled learning across solicitors and influencing local family law practice
- Offering a financially self-sustaining model of providing family law support which relieves pressure on the public purse

In the process of scaling, Affordable Justice has an opportunity to platform its practice model and evaluation findings, in continuation of its wider strategic interest to challenge the culture and actors in the family law system.

Evaluation, learning and data

Affordable Justice should formalise its evaluation approach, so women have regular points to feedback. In addition to questions asked in this evaluation, measures could be taken to better understand the outcomes achieved for women by asking:

- If repeat litigation has been avoided
- Whether child contact arrangements feel safe
- How women rate the impact of costs on their financial standing

There is a growth of research into family law and the impacts of the current system. Given Affordable Justice's specialism and the significant data gap within the family law context ('we often say that we are operating in the dark in the family justice system because of the lack of data to inform decision making'⁶⁴) Affordable Justice could work with researchers with a long-standing commitment, such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, and Women's Aid England to bring women's voices and into the fore.

Potential recommendations for practice at Affordable Justice

The evaluation identified areas where outcomes could have been stronger. It is recommended that:

- Affordable Justice grows capacity, so solicitors are able to respond to the significant number of women who seek urgent support

⁶⁴ Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2021)

- Actively recruit from Black and minoritised communities
- Ensure remuneration / working conditions are sufficient to attract and retain effective Administrators.

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Appendix

Staff and Board interview questions

1. Impact:

- a. What has been the quantifiable impact across the cohort?
- b. How does access and impact vary according to demographics or other trends / characteristics?
- c. What does the depth/breadth of the impact look like across selected cases? Does this create a first description of what the impact is of a wraparound affordable justice model looks like?
- d. What is the potential cost-benefit to the public sector?

2. Demand

- a. Indications of the ways in which the model fill the gaps where the criminal justice model has failed?
- b. How is this more /differently accessible to the high-street offer?

3. Quality:

- a. What are the strengths of the service and which are most valued to users?
- b. How are these qualities differentiated from the high-street offer?
- c. Where is Improvement required?
- d. To what extent is the Affordable Justice model unique?

4. Business, financial and staffing model

- a. What defines the intended 'feminist business model' and what impact/value does this bring?
- b. What is the approach to dissemination of the AJ model that's been taken and why? What are the comparable strengths and limitations of this approach?
- c. How does the flexible working model affect quality, impact, staff, and business sustainability?
- d. How do staff experience the model as different to other legal structures and firms? What is the impact of it being women-only?
- e. How does the pay and financial model function and sustain and what impact does it have?
- f. What are the start-up barriers to replication (including staffing, licencing, financial, governance etc)?
- g. What are the enablers to replication?
- h. The relationship and impact of the relationship with a women's centre?

5. Principles and wider discussion

- a. What is revealed about patriarchal and sexist advantage within the legal system?
- b. What is revealed about perpetrator alignment / use of coercive control in the justice system?
- c. Where is more research / further work recommended to understand more about the model?

Service user interview questions

- A. How did you find out about Affordable Justice
- B. About your experience with Affordable Justice
 - a. How would you describe Affordable Justice?
 - b. How did this compare to other solicitors and legal process experience?
 - c. How did this help offset the abusive dynamic?
 - d. How did it change your choices?
 - e. Did it change legal outcomes?
 - f. Did you access other Winner services?
 - g. What improvements could there be?
- C. What was your legal pathway
 - a. Experience of other solicitors
 - b. Barriers i.e. Costs, skills, disclosure
 - c. How did it make you feel?
 - d. How did it affect your legal/safety choices?
 - e. Did it impact on your life - work/kids/wellbeing?
- D. Anything else to add

Online questionnaire questions

Quality of the support

How well did Affordable Justice understand and support you –

- Did you feel respected?
- Did you feel understood?
- Did you feel staff were on your side?
- Was the service easy to access?
- Was the legal process clearly explained
- Were you kept up to date?
- Were you supported to make the choices which mattered to you?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the quality of support you experienced?

Impact of the support

How did the pricing at Affordable Justice affect your ability to fund your legal support?

Did using Affordable Justice affect whether you had to self-represent during the legal process?

Did Affordable Justice help you get the legal outcomes you needed?

How did Affordable Justice affect your experience of the legal system (which can be challenging for many women)?

Would you recommend Affordable Justice to another woman?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the impact of our support?

Anonymous information about you

What is your ethnic group?

It is important we are affordable to as many women as possible. To help us understand this, please tell us about your annual income (excluding benefits)

At the time of using Affordable Justice how many children did you have aged under 18?

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

At the time of using Affordable Justice did you have caring responsibilities (other than non-disabled children)?

Was there any form of domestic abuse in the relationship with your ex (including, for example, financial abuse, controlling behaviour, surveillance, etc)?

What is your UK citizenship status?

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