FINDAWAY

Powered By wwin Specialist Domestic Abuse Service

Briefing Paper

A mixed-method evaluation of support for informal supporters of victim-survivors of domestic abuse

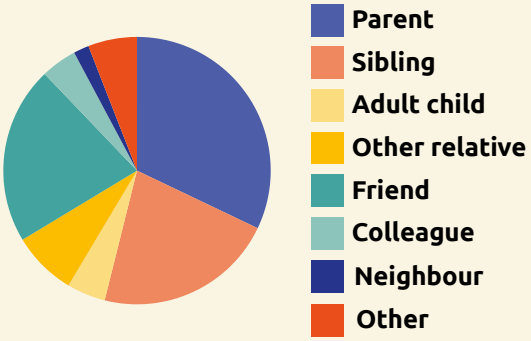
Professor Catherine Donovan, Zuzana Zilkova, Amy Rogers
Durham University, Sept 2026

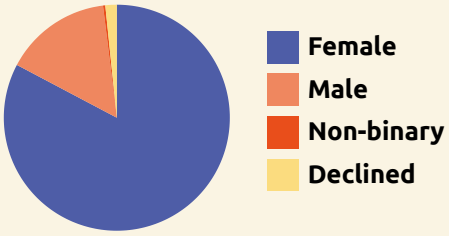
Findaway is a five-year pilot developed by WWIN, a domestic abuse service based in Wearside. It provides information, practical guidance and emotional support to family members, friends and other informal supporters who are concerned about someone experiencing abuse in an intimate-partner or family relationship.

This evaluation focuses on the helpline (including webchat & email support) and draws on 300 case files, case-management data, interviews with callers, partners and staff, and a caller survey. The evidence indicates a clear need for a dedicated service for informal supporters and shows that Findaway is meeting its core aims.

Who uses Findaway?

Most users of Findaway access support over the phone, although a small number of webchats (n=17) and email (n=11) support are included in the 'caller' data. Most callers are women relatives worried about somebody in an intimate partner relationship. Relatives represent 64% of the informal supporters who call and of these, parents are the largest group (32%, n=103) followed by siblings (22%, n= 70). Friends make up 21% (n=69) of the users.





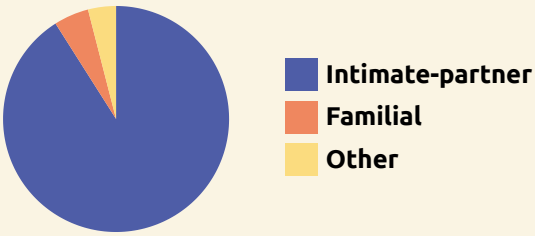
The vast majority of phoneline users are women (of those asked, T=306), 83% are women and 15% (n=47) are men, 1 was a non-binary caller and 4 declined to answer.

I was in a bad place before this call but I knew I could call because you said you were here for me last time and I needed to talk to someone who understands

- Case 185

What are they worried about?

The overwhelming majority of callers are concerned about someone in an intimate partner relationship 91% (T=309), with the rest concerned about familial (5%), carer, multiple, and other forms of abuse.



Headline Findings

The Findaway Model is a robust and successful one. It's five principles are that:

- A coordinated community response to domestic abuse must include informal supporters.
- Everybody knows somebody affected by domestic abuse.
- Everyone can be enabled to do something, safely, that can make a difference and contributes to ending domestic abuse.
- Informal supporters are secondary victims and need practical and emotional support themselves.
- Adopting reflective practice to flexibly respond to new information means the project can improve its reach and practice, and develop the case to become a national helpline for friends and family.

The typical caller is a white woman over 35 years of age who is worried about her daughter.

Most callers are women relatives worried about somebody in an intimate partner relationship.



Parents are the largest group of callers

Findaway set out to provide call times of up to one hour. Most calls take over 30 minutes with approx. 15% taking over 60 mins.

This speaks to the range of concerns callers have and their need for emotional support in their own right.



Callers are motivated by:

- Fears that things are escalating.
- Wanting advice about how to support and what practical information they can provide.
- Because contact between them and their loved one is being restricted.



[Findaway] was able to help me understand about how he might be using our conversation that's making my daughter turn against us

- Caller 1

Callers benefit in two connected ways:

- First, they become better equipped to support the person they are concerned about. These are through the five categories of 'how to' advice they are given.
- Second, they receive emotional and practical support as victim/survivors in their own right.

Just under half of callers are from outside the North East

Originally Findaway was set up to provide a service across the Northumbria policing area (Sunderland, Gateshead, North and South Tyneside, Northumberland, Newcastle). Just over half of the callers are from these areas. However, just under half are from across England and the project has been responding to need from across the UK.



> **I found the phone call much more helpful than I expected, and instead was on the phone for about an hour, while [Findaway] listened and responded so well to our (myself and my husbands) concerns ... I can honestly say the support we received was extremely good and very professional, but also caring**
>
> **-Survey, 1**

The support offered falls into 5 'how to' categories:

- Better understanding about domestic abuse and its impacts.
- Fostering a sustainable relationship with the victim/survivor.
- Offering support to a victim/survivor.
- Supporting victim/survivors with other services.
- Engaging with perpetrators.

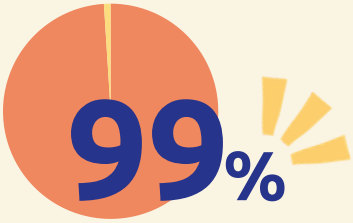
A sixth category involves Findaway providing emotional support to callers themselves.

Domestic abuse is often well established and agencies are involved

Most situations callers describe are where domestic abuse is well established and other agencies (most often the police) are involved.

Callers are often frustrated that whilst the 'right thing', i.e. reporting, has been done, nothing seems to happen to end the abuse.

Callers are also often concerned that professionals do not understand the impact of a range of complicating factors on their loved ones behaviours and/or decision-making: including mental health, alcohol or drug use, neurodiversity.



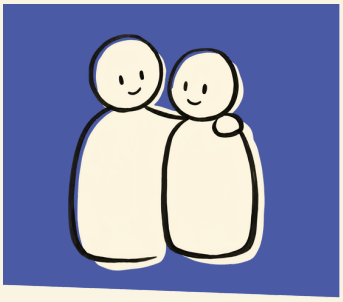
of users asked reported finding the contact helpful



There are four primary groups of beneficiaries: victim-survivors, callers, children, and a wider circle of informal supporters who callers share Findaway's guidance with.



Children feature in more than half of the case notes, often alongside concerns about safety, welfare, contact and the response of statutory services.



Where callers were asked, 96% (n=285) agreed that they felt more confident to support the person they were concerned about.



Findaway's reflective, collaborative model has enabled the service to adapt its call length, outreach, webchat and resources in response to evidence and lived experience.

Priority Recommendations

1) Continue the campaign to establish Findaway as a national, dedicated, helpline for family and friends affected by domestic abuse, while also exploring a licensed delivery model for a national rollout of Findaway to local areas.

2) Explore the possibilities of a targeted strand of work focused on how family and friends can best support and safeguard children affected by domestic abuse.

3) Increase engagement and awareness of Findaway among LGBT+ communities, racially minoritised communities, and people affected by familial abuse.

4) Secure sustainable funding for the four arms of Findaway: the helpline, community education, regional partnership, and national campaigning, including sufficient staffing for longer calls.

5) Further develop the work started and build the evidence base on the role of informal supporters in MARAC, safeguarding and risk-assessment processes.

> **And for somebody [Findaway] to say, no, actually, there is a process you can call and chase it. Because... I wouldn't think to chase police... I wouldn't call back and say can I find out about my case? And.. I felt empowered to say, no, this is something you've reported and you won't necessarily get information back, but you can certainly find out if you have more to give**
>
> **- Caller 2**

> **[Caller] is currently off work due to stress and has been for 2 weeks, she said she found it helpful to talk to someone who understands**
>
> **-Case 229**

> **She said she has read lots about domestic abuse and ... things which say 'we are here for you' but that you 'meet a brick wall' when you try to access support. [Caller] said she feels we are here for her**
>
> **- Case 054**

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