

Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocacy Service (IDSVA)

The IDSVA role

We have two full time IDSVA's in Knowsley and our role is to provide a premium service to 'high risk' victims of domestic abuse/violence. We provide information, advice, support and advocacy on a variety of issues pertinent to our client's situation and individual needs, so each person gets a bespoke service that identifies, assesses and manages their risks whilst increasing their safety through various interventions.

Referrals

All our referrals have to be referred to the Knowsley Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The majority of our referrals come from the Police but can be from any agency or organisation as long as it meets the MARAC threshold which is one of the following criterion:-

- Scores 72+ on MeRIT
- Escalation in either frequency or severity (or both)
- Professional judgement

Once we have received a referral our case management follows 5 stages:-

Stage 1 Initial contact

We endeavor to contact all new referrals. During the first phone call we would introduce ourselves, the IDSVA service and explain MARAC to them and why they have been referred. At this point the first question is about their safety which usually leads onto a conversation about their situation. If the client wants to engage and work with us we arrange a face to face meeting between us as soon as possible. A successful first meeting between the IDSVA and the client is a crucial stage in establishing a trusting relationship.

Stage 2 Identifying risk Factors, issues and goals

At our first face to face meeting with a client we complete our safety checklist where all risk factors, issues and goals will be identified and used to create an Individual Safety Plan. All clients are asked to sign an Information Sharing Consent Form to allow us to share information with relevant agencies who are signed up to the Knowsley MARAC Working Protocol.

Stage 3 Individual safety planning and goal setting

- **Prioritise**
Completing the safety checklist helps to separate out and explore each component of the client's situation such as legal issues, housing, financial, health, children's needs. This helps clients to make decisions about what needs to take priority
- **Inform, advise, evaluate**
We will talk clients through their full range of options and resources available to them to help them determine as many alternatives as possible. Once alternatives have been identified, the client will need to evaluate each one before he/she can make a decision as to what is the best option for them
- **Act together**
Once goals have been established and priorities set, we need to make sure the client understands what actions they will be responsible for and what we will undertake
- **Empower**

The client should understand that the IDSVA role is to act on their behalf and to support them. However, by encouraging clients to take responsibility for some of the actions, we can help them to take back some control over their lives and situation. This empowers clients and helps them to believe that they can achieve by themselves. We use our judgement about how much the individual can take on so as not to overwhelm them before they are ready.

Stage 4 Advocacy; individual and institutional

We advocate for clients at MARAC to ensure their voice and wishes are heard (they do not attend MARAC). We relay the outcome of MARAC to the client and liaise with other agencies to promote the delivery of actions decided. **We advocate with a wide range of services**, agencies and organisations from the private, public and third sectors. The main ones include; the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, children's social care, vulnerable adults, children's services, health practitioners (including mental health workers, health visitors, A&E staff, GP's, substance misuse workers, midwives), probation, prisons and housing.

Advocacy with Housing; many of our clients need or want to move; often it is not viable or safe for them to stay in their property. We would explain their options and the process of moving, if appropriate we would explain how to get homelessness status and guide and support them through until they are settled in a new property. We will often advocate for them with housing officers, panels, write support letters or reports providing evidence of the domestic violence to the housing association.

Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System is a significant aspect of our role. We offer support to clients throughout their dealings with the CJS including; dealing with the Police, CPS, probation, solicitors, barristers, judges, court ushers, court listings, other court administrative departments (e.g. bailiffs or fines), CAFCASS, witness services and witness care.

Advocacy in the Civil and Family Courts is also a significant part of our role, offering information and advice to clients about injunctions, occupation orders, prohibitive steps order and child contact which is an area perpetrators commonly use to further abuse, intimidate or harass our clients long after the relationship has ended.

Advocacy in Child Protection is another aspect of our role. It is our role to make sure their safety is not compromised in the proceedings or the actions that come from the meetings.

Institutional Advocacy, there are times whilst advocating for a client when it becomes apparent that the individual worker we are dealing with is powerless to put in place the actions or outcomes needed to increase our client's safety because of the restraints of the policies or systems of the agency or organisations they work for. It is our role to challenge these systems or policies in an appropriate, relevant and effective way. This can be done in a number of ways, such as; offering training on the dynamics of domestic violence, attending agency staff meetings to discuss a specific system or meet with the policy makers of a particular organisation to negotiate changes that will benefit all IDSVA clients.

Stage 5 Closing a case

A case will be closed when there is no longer a role for the IDSVA.

Criminal court support

The court support we offer is a wrap around service for victims who have to give evidence at a criminal court, this can include:

- Explanation of court processes and procedures
- Advocacy with police, witness care, witness services, CPS and if relevant prisons and probation
- Ensuring special measures are in place and taking client to and from court for a pre-trial visit if one has been arranged
- Picking up client on court day and taking them to and from court
- Staying with them throughout the hearing, supporting, explaining and advocating for them when necessary
- Ensuring client knows the result from the hearing
- Managing the clients expectations and emotions