



# Independent Domestic Violence Advisors Under-funded and over-worked

## Who are Idvas?

- Established in England and Wales in 2005, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (Idvas) are trained specialists who act as a single point of contact to help victims who are at the most risk of serious injury or death to become safe, ensuring their voice is heard by statutory agencies.
- An Idva carries out a risk-assessment to identify a victim's level of risk of abuse (high, medium or standard) and supports them with immediate safety plans, such as helping to increase security at their home or accompanying them to court hearings, and implementing longer-term interventions to ensure their safety, such as accessing counselling or mental health services.
- An Idva represents the victim's voice and acts as their advocate at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (Maracs) which are meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives share information about victims at high risk of serious harm or murder, in order to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase victim safety.
- Crucially, an Idva is independent of statutory agencies and can help to navigate the many processes a victim may have to go through before they are free from harm. The Idva's job is to champion the victim's needs, holding agencies to account.
- SafeLives has trained over 1800 Idvas making our organisation the largest trainer of Idvas in the UK.

## A typical Idva's day

*"I start work at about 8am: reading about new referrals (from the police, social services, and charities), liaising with other professionals and checking on the events of my current clients. At the moment, I have about 45 cases (twice as many as recommended) so there is a lot to get through.*

*"I might get to my first client by 9.30am or so, if they're a new referral I will be with them for about two hours. I carry out a risk assessment, and from there establish their needs. We create a tailored safety and support plan. Every plan is unique - they might need the security of their home addressed, they may need to leave or move home, they may need to talk to their GP, they may have to go to court.*

*"I could then see up to another three cases that day. I work in a rural area so cover about 400 miles a week. Finding time for paperwork and training can be tough, but it's essential I stay up to date with the latest procedure or piece of legislation."*

## How do we know Idvas are effective?

Outcomes assessed at the closure of victims' cases revealed significant reductions in abuse and positive changes in safety and quality of life following support and interventions from an Idva service.

- 57% of victims reported cessation of abuse
- 84% of victims reported feeling safer
- 81% of victims felt their quality of life had improved

*"Idvas are like lifelines – they enable you to survive when you're feeling very alone"* – Victim

## But we only have half the number of Idvas we need to protect victims at highest risk

- We calculate that just over 1000 Idvas are required to support the current number of known victims at risk of the most severe forms of domestic abuse, but we only have just over half that number.
- Our survey of Idvas in 2015 revealed that, as a result of increased referrals and under-resourcing, Idvas are carrying excessive caseloads. Last year Maracs discussed over 80,000 cases and year-on-year referrals are increasing. The increased identification of victims and referral to support services is encouraging, but has implications for the funding of domestic abuse services.
- Caseloads vary significantly between services. On average we expect Idvas to work with 60-80 victims each year. The average current caseload is 110. In reality this means that caseloads in some services are dangerously high. Short-term services are being provided in order to keep up with the number of new referrals.
- Idvas typically work with a combination of victims at high and medium risk. Yet, in many cases, Idvas are having to reduce the length of their service provision. Our data shows that this is impacting on the quality of service they are able to provide.
- In an area where service referrals rose by 30% in one year without any increase in capacity, the percentage of women saying they felt sustainably safe fell by 20%.

*“We are most successful when supporting victims/families for a sufficient period of time to be effective... because of workloads the support we offer isn't for as long as needed, this results in victims/families coming back for further support at a later date which would not happen if the support had been tailored appropriately in the first instance.” – Quote from an Idva, SafeLives survey 2015*

*“The key issue we face is that funding does not match the level of need and is precarious... there are not enough resources for the problem.” - Quote from an Idva, SafeLives survey 2015*

## Pressures on Idvas mean that victims aren't getting enough support

- As a result of high caseloads, insecure funding and increasingly complex cases, Idvas are at risk of burnout and ill-health and this is reflected in a high turnover of staff in these crucial, life-saving positions.
- Victims have told us that they value their Idvas, but that they wish they could be in contact more. In some cases victims hardly saw their Idva at all.

*“My Idva was very busy so more of them would be good.” – Victim interview 2015*

*“Just make sure the support stays, they keep saying they are being cut all the time. I would have liked to have seen someone one-to-one for longer.” – Victim interview 2015*

## What can we do to support Idva provision?

- Many areas of the country need to double the number of Idvas to ensure they can continue to provide a safe service to victims at high risk. We think this is realistic and achievable, **if** there is a concerted effort to identify all the relevant sources of funding, and integrate these much more closely. This could include pooling of budgets at a local level, with contributions from the local authority, the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and other statutory agencies such as the NHS. Prioritising support for domestic abuse should be 'everybody's business'.
- The Home Office has announced that direct funding of Idvas will come to an end in March 2017 which will require PCCs to act to protect the sustainability of their local Idva service.
- SafeLives can provide you with the current level of Idva provision in your local police force area so that you can ask questions of local commissioners.
- Meet with an Idva in one of your local services, find out how they help to keep victims safe and hear first-hand about the pressures they are facing.
- Sign our pledge committing your support to find sustainable funding for your local Idva service.

## Contact

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