

### ‘A Year of Covid’ Event - 13/04/21

#### Q&A

#### 1. How can the Police engage more effectively with groups which feel marginalised, to build confidence in disclosing DVA and accessing support?

**Shonagh Dillon ([Aurora New Dawn](#)):** Link in with the specialist independent services that can reach these clients. Particularly for black and minority women. Most importantly use the statistical data available to you for your demographic populations and then seek to respond to need that way. The census should help with this!

#### SafeLives:

- **Publicise good work and initiatives targeting specific communities or groups.** Over the summer period of the lockdown there were a number of media articles suggesting that black victims of domestic abuse in particular could not seek support from the police because their perpetrators would be seriously harmed or killed by police. These claims did not appear to be based on actual evidence, rather anecdotal tales of people who knew people it had happened to, perhaps trying to create a parallel between the UK and the US. Such narratives need to be countered with actual evidence of the opposite. There are a great deal of community initiatives to build trust and confidence from marginalised groups but they aren't as well publicised as they could be. From our experience, those involved just want to get on with the job, but the failure to counter almost allows it to become a fact – ie where enough people say it and it is not countered with evidence therefore it becomes a fact. Public confidence is adversely affected.
- **Identify ways to engage better.** Police used to call such groups ‘hard to reach’ but it is more a case of ‘not trying hard enough to reach’. Police need to be more proactive at engagement in the communities that are **difficult** to work with, not just those that come willingly into the IAG and other networks. We've seen an example of this (some years ago) where the Police were working with the local authority to try and convince them that providing information for newcomers to the UK about what the police can do to help as part of the ‘living in the UK’ course, would be of benefit as it would help break the cultural and perpetrator isolation of such people. In terms of early intervention and awareness raising it doesn't get much earlier.
- **Be Innovative.** During the lockdown a number of forces have used a variety of ways to engage with victims, use of social media, online reporting and conference calling. However there is still lots of further potential for the police to engage survivors of abuse to help inform service provision - across all diverse groups. Until this happens we can't confidently say a service offered meets victim need unless they are regularly asked and then involved in creating the

change. Police often use knowledge experts as tactical advisors- who better to talk about DA than a survivor? (In a safe way of course that is of benefit to the survivor). There was a process implemented to do this in Leicestershire in 2009 that the home secretary instructed all forces to adopt in 2011 but some have yet to do so. It's a huge area of untapped knowledge, but of course it must give something positive to those participating.

- **Training.** Skilling officers and staff with high quality training designed by survivors and experts, not generic offerings or e-learning. For example DA Matters, or as an organisation we run workshops for police dealing with current issues within DA in more depth.
- **Keep doing it.** Constantly evaluate and improve what currently exists using survivor expertise.

**2. What do you feel needs to be done regarding IDVA services working with minority groups? My personal interest is within the LGBTQ+ community, but there are victims/survivors from other groups who may feel unable to contact standard services, leaving them to feel they are falling through the net. More funding is needed all round, but should some be ring-fenced for these groups?**

**Shonagh Dillon ([Aurora New Dawn](#)):** As above link in with specialist groups – [Galop have done some research](#) – the issue that IDVAs have is capacity and also that they don't drive the referrals, often this comes through other agencies.

Similar to above answer, the link with specialist independent services is essential, particularly link in with Natasha ([Karma Nirvana](#)) and [Southall Black Sisters](#).

**SafeLives**

- Victim / survivors from within minoritised groups need to know that Idva (and other DA) services can support them and are actively seeking to support them. A good start would be the service's promotional materials clearly defining who the service is for and explicitly stating they offer a non-discriminatory service for all eligible clients. For example, services' promotional materials should state they welcome and support LGBTQ+ survivors, instead of assuming people know their service is inclusive.
- Accredited training for all Idva and DA services. Every Idva should have a good awareness of the needs of minoritised communities and confidence in how to support clients from diverse backgrounds with varying needs. For example, our Idva training includes specialist modules on supporting survivors from the LGBTQ+ community as well as other diverse groups, and we are currently developing an anti-racist practice module for the Idva training too.

**3. Given the number of female offenders who have experienced DA, I wonder how we can better link with CJS/Female Offender Strategy etc - looking at the part Women's Centres play and ensuring they are well resourced to respond to DA...not quite sure what my question is there, but interested in the overlap**

between criminal justice & domestic abuse and how we can improve responses? (As well as statutory defence in DA Bill) Thanks

**Shonagh Dillon ([Aurora New Dawn](#)):** The Probation Framework should help with this – [The Women's Framework](#) has just been announced and you can find your local service.

## **SafeLives**

- It is vital that all DA victim / survivors have access to an Idva to support and guide them through the CJS process. Training for Idva's is also vital, for example our Idva training includes specialist modules on civil law, the CPS and police responses to DA to support effective multi-agency working and maximise support for clients.
- Probation Service should always play an active part in the Marac process and the voices survivors including of female offenders who have experienced DA should be central to all multi-agency work.

### **4. As a family worker in schools, there is very little support around our emotional wellbeing especially through the pandemic where we were in communication with families. Are we able to access these online wellbeing hubs?**

**SafeLives:** The support and wellbeing groups were funded through to the end of March 2021, and as such have now come to an end. We are in the process of developing a resilience toolkit which will soon be available on our website.

### **5. How can we look to asking SafeLives to attend our organisation (NHS) to speak to our staff?**

**SafeLives:** Thank you for your interest in SafeLives speaking at your organisation. Please email [info@safelives.org.uk](mailto:info@safelives.org.uk) with more information about the event, discussion themes and what you think SafeLives may be able to add. We will respond and arrange with you directly.

### **5. Are there any funding recommendations for MARAC coordinators/administrators?**

**SafeLives:** There used to be bespoke Government funding for 100 Marac coordinators/administrators but that was always intended to kickstart local resourcing, and central funding stopped in 2016.

Since then it has been for local organisations to agree the funding of those posts. We're supportive of all Marac participant organisations working together to ensure that role is properly funded and staffed, as Marac is a multi-agency endeavour, not just the work of a single organisation or agency.

### **6. Interested in your (Natasha's) idea of being proactive rather than reactive to address the knock on effects of Covid on forced marriage. What do you think**

**needs to be done proactively in this area on a multiagency front? And how can we avoid potentially negative stereotypes of communities most likely to be affected by forced marriage and honour-based abuse?**

**Natasha Rattu ([Karma Nirvana](#)):** Unfortunately there are many negative stereotypes of the 'perceived' communities most likely to be affected by forced marriage and honour based abuse.

Poor understanding of the issues, exacerbated by sensationalised media headlines is a huge contributor to this problem. Improving knowledge, confidence and understanding on these issues is the only way to tackle false stereotypes currently held.

It is also important to frame forced marriage and honour based abuse as a form of domestic abuse rather than a 'traditional harmful practice' or culture issue.

Using language denoted to 'tradition' or 'culture' can aggravate its hidden nature. Many people affected by Honour Based Abuse do not recognise abuse and falsely believe that coercive control from family members and partners is normal behaviour.

This issue needs to be firmly recognised as domestic abuse to improve self-identification and confidence to speak out and challenge false assumptions that some abusive behaviours are 'accepted' in particular communities.