

Young people's violence advisor case study

Local authority area 5

Job title: Young people's violence advisor

Role: Full-time caseholder

Location: Voluntary domestic abuse service

YPVA post started: April 2014

Previous role: Young people's domestic violence support worker



The YPVA came into post in April 2014 and is funded by the local authority children and young people's services. For the past 7.5 years, the YPVA has been based at the local voluntary domestic abuse service, originally working as a young people's domestic violence support worker.

The YPVA is a caseholder supporting high risk young women who are in abusive relationships. Since coming into post, the YPVA has submitted data to SafeLives relating to 41 young women, who were aged between 13 and 22 years old. The majority were white British or Irish, and all but one identified as heterosexual. In just over half of cases where a risk assessment was completed, the young person was deemed to be high risk. The majority of young women were experiencing current emotional abuse, jealous and controlling behaviours, harassment and stalking, and physical abuse. Nearly a third were currently experiencing sexual abuse.

Benefits of a small local authority

The YPVA is based in a small local authority area and had already formed strategic and operational relationships with services and agencies when the young people's programme started. The YPVA has been able to embed the service quickly within the area because of these relationships and experiences of working with other professionals. The YPVA also has the benefits of being based within walking distance of many local services, including the local authority children and young people's services. With everything on the doorstep, referrals between agencies can happen easily and interventions put in place quickly and effectively.

The YPVA has been able to make the most of existing relationships to make joint visits and 'welfare checks' with colleagues from the police or children's social care, helping to make a first contact with high risk young people.

Working in a voluntary domestic abuse service

The YPVA is based in a voluntary domestic abuse service. The service is the largest voluntary sector organisation in the area, and although well-established in the community, was seen as a service for older women prior to the YPVA coming into post. Through awareness-raising and use of promotional materials in schools and youth centres, increasing numbers of young people have been confident to visit the service in person. The good reputation of the service has helped the development of the young people's element, as many of the key relationships with agencies had already been formed.

In addition to the YPVA, the service offers support to women aged 16 and over who are experiencing domestic abuse, and to children aged 5 to 14 who live in abusive households. The service also has a project available to clients who want to stay in a relationship with the perpetrator of the abuse. The YPVA has found the project has been a key way to engage young women who refuse to access other services but who are high risk and may have other vulnerabilities, such as substance misuse. Many of these young women have children on a child protection plan and are engaging with the project to meet requirements of the plan. 41% of young women supported by the YPVA had children, and one in ten were pregnant.

The YPVA works closely with the Idva: they often attend Marac on one another's behalf, and the Idva introduced the YPVA to contacts in the local court. The service also has a presence at a local GP surgery as part of an early intervention initiative.

Referral pathways

The local authority has implemented an early intervention panel which meets once a fortnight. Any agency, with the exception of the police, wanting to make a referral to the YPVA must go through via the panel. The YPVA's manager attends the meeting and discusses each case in advance with the YPVA to agree which referrals they can accept. Previously, the YPVA was inundated with telephone referrals, but now the pace of referrals is more manageable. Just over half of the young women supported by the YPVA were referred by children and young people's services. Other cases were referred by criminal justice, other domestic or sexual violence services, health and housing.

Young women can access the YPVA through the weekly open-access drop-in sessions, and 12% of clients were self-referrals. Those who self-refer tend to be slightly older, with children of their own, but who are not engaged with children's social care. This group tend to be engaging with few, if any, other services, and the drop-in session has proved to be an effective way of engaging with this less visible group of young people.

Marac

More than half of the YPVA's cases reached the threshold to be heard at Marac. The local Marac has been hearing cases relating to young people aged 16 and 17 since before the YPVA has been in post. The YPVA has a good relationship with the local Marac co-ordinator and is able to make referrals on both actuarial risk and professional judgement. If a young person does not reach the local Marac threshold of 14 ticks, the YPVA provides information about additional risks, such as domestic abuse in the home, offending behaviour or risk of child sexual exploitation, to ensure the case is heard.

The majority of relevant agencies attend the Marac. There are still difficulties getting statutory services where local authorities cuts have been made, such as the young people's service, child and adolescent mental health services (Camhs) and leaving care services, to attend. The YPVA is funded by the local authority and is able to access their databases, and so often represents statutory children and young people's services at the Marac.

Engaging young people effectively

The YPVA has found young women with more 'chaotic' lives, and therefore more service involvement, easier to engage. This group is used to the process of engaging with a caseworker and the language used by professionals. In these high risk cases, there are usually other agencies involved, and joint-working and visits with these professionals ensures young women have a range of people they can contact.

The more difficult group to engage are those who are 'under-the-radar', with little or no engagement with other services. The YPVA takes a gentle approach to gain trust and form a relationship with these young people:

- Carry phone and diary only – leave the clipboard and assessment at home
- Reassure them that not there to judge, catch them out or tell them what do to – just to keep them safe
- Offer practical support first – broach the subject of the abuse later
- Don't pressure them – ask for a first meeting but offer opportunity to say no after that
- Get to know them – over a hot chocolate or walk around town

If still unable to engage the young women, the YPVA will speak to other professionals about where the young person goes, for example a youth centre, and reach out to them there.

Keeping in touch



Supporting vulnerable young women

The YPVA has found that each young person responds in different ways to the support offered. The YPVA takes elements from many different programmes, including Crush, the freedom programme, Spiralling and My Dangerous Loverboy, and adapts them to suit the young person. Safety planning also forms a key part of the YPVA's work, and is completed with the young person.

Alongside colleagues from the local youth offending team (Yot) the YPVA co-facilitates a weekly vulnerable young women's group, focusing on confidence, awareness, respect, direction and safety. The group, of up to 12 young women plus 2 mentors, focuses on reducing vulnerabilities around domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, substance misuse, gangs and self-harm. 90% of the young women supported by the YPVA were self-harming, and more than a third misused drugs.

As well as being a key referral route into 121 support from the YPVA, the group is also an alternative for young people who want to engage but do not want 121 support. The YPVA has found that getting the young women involved in decisions that affect them is a key intervention for reducing risk. The local Children and Young People's Voice and Influence Team is available to under-18s. For over-18s, the YPVA tries to get volunteer placements or appointments with the local Learning and Skills department to help build their confidence and be themselves.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a particular problem in Calderdale, with many young girls being found in houses across the region including Bradford, Rochdale, Burnley and Rotherham. In most cases, the perpetrators of the domestic abuse are also involved in the CSE. For young women aged 16 and over, the CSE risk may be reducing as younger girls are being exploited by the groups. At this point, the domestic abuse tends to get worse as the young woman is seen as worthless.

The YPVA works with many young girls who are experiencing or at risk of CSE, in addition to domestic abuse in their own relationship. One young woman was referred to the YPVA because of CSE, but for more than half of young women, CSE was identified as a risk during their case. The YPVA has been working closely with the local specialist CSE service who are based in the same building as the domestic abuse service. The YPVA also attends the weekly CSE operations meeting to share information and identify young women who could benefit from the support of the YPVA.

Training other professionals

In addition the caseworker, the YPVA has undertaken some champion work in the area. This includes training 8 youth workers, around working with young people experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse, who can support lower risk cases. The YPVA also take queries about cases from the youth workers. There are plans for this training to be extended to professionals in other agencies.

The youth workers have also received training on using the young people's version of the SafeLives Dash risk checklist and have been using it in their cases. The part-time young people's domestic violence support worker also uses the SafeLives Dash risk checklist. No other agencies in the area use the tool, but the YPVA will complete it with the young person once the referral has been received.

Plans and hopes for the future

The YPVA would like to expand the team within the domestic abuse service to provide high risk casework, support for young people from abusive homes, young people who harm and prevention work in schools.



Currently, there is a part-time young people's domestic violence support worker also based at the service. She works primarily with children living in abusive households but also holds a couple of high risk cases to build confidence. The YPVA would like to see the role made full-time and for the worker to attend SafeLives YPVA training.

There is a part-time male worker at the service. The YPVA would like to see this role expand to include work with young perpetrators. The work would not focus on offending behaviour, but help young men understand how their abusive behaviour could impact on their lives.

To date, the YPVA has been doing some prevention work in schools, but high risk caseload, group work and strategic activity has taken priority. A prevention worker focused on education would ensure this vital work could continue in the local area.