



Practice Note 12

Project Name: Safer Streets - Domestic Abuse Pilot/Operation Fade

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Topic Areas: Safety of Vulnerable Groups, Public Space Safety and Partnership Working.

Project Background and Aims

Since 2007 the Scottish Government has provided funding through the 'Safer Streets' grants scheme with the aim to reduce violence over the Festive Period. West Lothian Community Safety Partnership (CSP) obtained Safer Streets funding over 2007/08 and 2008/09 for a domestic abuse initiative which provided support and assistance to victims of violence alongside the implementation of enforcement measures.

Subsequently in October 2009, at a West Lothian Domestic Abuse Multi-agency Group (DAMAG) planning meeting it was identified that women's safety would be further increased by having timely support, accommodation, health and medical intervention, protection from perpetrators and protection that specifically addressed threats to women and children, without the removal of women and children from their own home if necessary. It was agreed unanimously that all partner agencies should have the accountability to do their utmost to provide this service for victims of domestic abuse, be pro-active in responding to incidents, be consistent with witness support, provide a robust evidence collection framework with timely prosecution processes, with appropriate sentencing and rigorous probation monitoring.

West Lothian CSP again applied for Safer Street funding for the period 2009/10 to tackle domestic abuse. The main aim of the two month **Safer Streets - Domestic Abuse Pilot** was to provide an immediate response to victims of domestic abuse within 24hrs of it being reported to the police.

The project would provide additional resources for sessional support workers to be available 24/7 and to work in collaboration with the police to support women and children experiencing domestic abuse. The outcomes and data collected from the domestic abuse initiatives for the years 2007/08 and 2008/09 were used for the planning for 2009/10.

Resources

Funding £4,000 was dedicated from the £12,116 Safer Streets funding awarded to West Lothian.

DAS A dedicated team of women and children workers were identified to work the Safer Streets initiative from the West Lothian Council Domestic Abuse Service.

A post was created from the funding to enable the data to be recorded and entered onto a computerised system and keep updated files on the ongoing cases.

DALO A police Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer was utilised to assist with this initiative.

Woman's Aid A Woman's Aid worker was identified to assist with the initiative.

Victim Support Victim Support dedicated trained staff to support men and women.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The stakeholders in the initiative met regularly to maintain good communications. They ensured that strategically everything was aligned and that any issues requiring to be addressed were resolved.

A key part of this process was the weekly collection of monitoring data, which was then disseminated to partner agencies. This proved valuable; the ongoing monitoring process highlighted that amendments to the existing plan were required which then led to the revisions of the intervention.

In addition, service users were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the support provided and managers of the Public Protection Unit (PPU) and West Lothian Victim Support provided partner agency feedback at the end of the first initiative deadline date. Both sets of data were used in the compilation of an end of funding evaluation report.

Activities

Initially, it was planned by West Lothian CSP that police staff would contact the DAS (on a 24hr call out rota) and partners immediately when the perpetrator was removed for a maximum 6 hour period or arrested and provide support to women experiencing domestic abuse during this crisis period. The referral would form the basis of an opt-out scheme rather than an opt-in one.

The initial plan for women to be contacted during the important 6 hr period did not however come to fruition for two reasons. First, the police were unable to maintain this contact from an operational point of view and second, if the process had worked as planned, there would have been a shortage of resources to meet demand. Instead a more pragmatic approach was taken, with a high percentage of women were contacted within 24hrs of the incident occurring. This was resource managed adequately.

Moreover, a sustainable support process through enhanced advocacy was made available for individual women to assist them through their chosen course of action, including those who chose to progress through the court process.

The Safer Streets – Domestic Abuse Pilot ran in conjunction with **Operation Fade**, a police initiative covering domestic abuse '*for better outcomes for women and children*'. Operation Fade employed a multi-agency task force to target high risk offenders of domestic abuse. Both Operation Fade and the Domestic Abuse Pilot delivered services in line with National Outcome 8 - 'We have improved the life chances of people at risk'. Operation Fade

Impact

Evidence suggests that the joint interventions' proactive approach had been successful in dealing with the most persistent offenders of domestic violence. Operation Fade resulted in 14 custody reports, with 11 crimes of domestic abuse, 13 breaches of bail, 2 of vandalism, 3 breach of the peace (BOP), 1 theft, 13 arrests on warrant and 1 child taken into care. Also, Operation Fade identified 12 top perpetrators of domestic abuse at the greatest risk of engaging in serious harm. This was drawn from data produced by the Domestic Abuse Pilot, which had identified 12 addresses on 247 occasions over the preceding 12 months.

Information sharing protocols were put in place at the outset; the Operation Fade team met with the DAS and DALO daily to share information, including the Safer Streets Domestic Abuse initiative. This meant that both interventions benefitted from good communication practice. In addition the interventions ran at the same time as a national domestic abuse awareness campaign.

Several positives came out of the links between Operation Fade and Safer Streets – Domestic Abuse Pilot. First, feedback from the managers of PPU and West Lothian

Victim Support emphasised good partnership working on (and between) both interventions. Second, whilst the Safer Streets – Domestic Abuse Pilot and Operation Fade had complimentary objectives, there were also specific, clearly defined roles which eliminated duplication of tasks amongst partner agencies. For example PF had a dedicated single point of contact (SPOC). The service provided was rapid and effective; police investigating incidents could pass information to the DAS and have support for women within 24hrs. Table 1 contains data collected from referrals from the Domestic Abuse Pilot and Operation Fade. It should be noted that forty per cent of cases involved abuse of alcohol.

The interventions put in place mechanisms that enabled the quicker and more effective support for victims and reduced the risk of further domestic violence within those identified households. Contact with victims was made as soon as possible from receipt of referral from police i.e. within 24hours, and follow up was attempted on at least 2 other occasions if not achievable within the 24 hour timeframe. As a result, a high number of victims were contacted. Safety planning was offered to all victims contacted and liaison with police enabled safe contact with some victims whilst their partner was in custody /detention. In addition, an out-of-hours contact was provided so that a greater number of victims could be contacted (i.e. those who worked).

As a result, there was a significant increase in women accepting support and advice from Victim Support due to them calling women to offer support in a timely fashion, rather than police asking women at the time of the incident if they wished to be contacted. There was also an increase in the number of women who reported the abuse (and historical events) to the police.

Table 1: Referrals Data from Domestic Abuse Pilot (Dec 2009 to March 2010)

Total Number of Referrals	334
Number of Referrals Involving Women	275
Number of Referrals Involving Children	201
Number of Referrals Involving Men	25
Number of Referrals from Black and Minority Ethnic Group	15 ¹

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

Some women were more willing to give statements to the police as a direct result of early support received from partner agencies and the high take-up rate by victims, supports the need for such a responsive initiative.

Regular communication between agencies resulted in better sharing of information and prevented duplication of work and enabled limited resources to be targeted more effectively and more quickly to support victims of domestic abuse. Close co-ordination between partner agencies impacted on the success of Operation Fade enabling the police to target repeat perpetrators of domestic violence effectively over December / January.

¹ These included Polish, Asian, Portuguese and West African households.

The top 12 perpetrators identified by the analysts as repeat offenders, and thought to have been 'at the greatest risk of engaging in serious harm ' may have had the most calls to their home dwellings but in essence, they were not necessarily the highest tariff offenders. Other offenders, known to other service providers, were potentially posing more of a risk to women, and they were not targeted. These women (potential victims) had no interventions in their situation (sometimes having only been identified once or twice previously, and as a result, were at high risk of becoming a repeat victim of serious violence.

The children who experience domestic violence are all discussed at the *children's screening group*. Those who already have a dedicated social worker have their cases updated and their social workers informed. The children, who did not have social workers, are discussed in a multi-agency meeting and an approach/intervention is decided upon. Due to the high numbers of children involved, once a decision has been allocated and actioned, it is never reviewed in order to ensure the action has been fulfilled or to see what the outcome is. It is a resource task to do this checking but one may argue its necessity.

There were no links initially between the Domestic Abuse Pilot and the Accident and Emergency Department at St Johns Hospital in Livingstone. This changed over the course of the interventions however.

As a key recognition of its success, the Domestic Abuse Pilot has been supported for continuation funding for 2010/2011. Operation Fade was extended for a further two months due to its impact.

Summary

The Safer Streets Domestic Abuse initiative contacted the majority of women within 24hrs. This made a difference to the safety of women and children by providing them with support and advice soon after a time of crisis. Referrals to partner organisations were made to meet the various needs of the women at this time. This enabled them to be aware of choices and support available to them and empowering several women to take control of the situation. In many cases, repeat victimisation was prevented.

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