

Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services

February 2013

Who are we?

The Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services (DAVSS) is a community based charity created in April 2011, and registered as a Charity (No 1143001) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (No 07660698) in July 2011, following a successfully evaluated pilot project. Our Trustees are drawn from the community and represent legal, financial, community safety and voluntary sector expertise, with specialist Police, Domestic Abuse and Housing advisers.

DAVSS provides vital support services for anyone (men as well as women) experiencing domestic abuse, through a highly innovative and cost effective volunteering model involving the community in meeting its own needs.

We work across the West Kent area, running the Domestic Abuse helpline from our Offices in the Tunbridge Wells Police Station in Crescent Road. Face to face meetings are arranged individually at convenient and safe venues across area.

What do we do?

We receive referrals from the Police, other agencies, voluntary organisations and self referrals and provide practical tailored support to our clients including:

- An easily accessible helpline 24/7 messaging, weekday mornings giving immediate safety advice.
- Face to face support services at venues across the area offering options for action and client choice.
- Risk assessments to national police standards.
- Personal/family safety planning and personal risk awareness.
- Referring and representing clients at the West Kent Risk Assessment Conference chaired by the Police.
- Sign posting to other agencies or voluntary groups eg Police, Social Services, CAB, Benefits and Housing, Counselling, legal representation, which many traumatised clients may not be aware of because of their isolation.
- Attending meetings or court alongside clients who often find this very daunting and frightening
- Assisting with paperwork for people with language or literacy difficulties.
- Raising public awareness and providing training about domestic abuse by arranging presentations, workshops and attending faith organisations, schools and community events.

What are the benefits of this approach?

- Early intervention helps to reduce repeat victimisation – a real risk for domestic abuse victims.
- We deliver practical cost effective services for very vulnerable people just when needed most.
- Survivors of domestic abuse are empowered to take control of their lives, make their own choices and start living independent and fulfilling lives again.
- The life chances of children witnessing domestic abuse at home are improved by helping our clients to obtain protective injunctions.
- Clients tell us that they benefit from being assisted in a sympathetic and non judgemental way and appreciate that the DAVSS Advisors are doing this voluntarily.
- The community is enabled to meet its own needs through volunteering opportunities and can get involved by supporting DAVSS in other ways, such as publicity, fundraising, administration etc.
- Some of our Volunteers are survivors of domestic abuse and can make positive use of their own previous experiences by helping to prevent and reduce the impact of domestic abuse on others.
- Volunteers also benefit for themselves by developing new skills, and community links.

Why do we do it?

Domestic abuse is a hidden crosscutting issue irrespective of social status, educational achievement or geographical location. It affects affluent areas as well as areas which are perceived to be less advantaged. Research shows that at some point in their lives, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse, with long term and often profound adverse effects on individuals and their children. Many victims endure abusive and even life threatening difficulties for many years before seeking help. We believe it is important to raise community awareness of this serious issue to try to ensure earlier reporting, prevention and reduction where ever possible.

The Volunteers

Our team of 34 trained volunteer Domestic Abuse Advisors is managed by two professionals, who between them share over 30 years of experience in supporting people experiencing domestic abuse. Each volunteer has committed to intensive training (16 days over 8 weeks, plus sessions with the County Court Judge), to subsequent personal development and a minimum input of 8 hours per week to service provision. Most work considerably longer hours to meet the needs of their clients.

Volunteers also receive clinical supervision to address their own needs as they experience very traumatic situations whilst working with high risk or complex cases.

Feedback from clients and agencies

User feedback and independent evaluation has confirmed that this is a much needed service for West Kent and clients have commented on the difference it has made to their lives:

Client *"The Volunteer spent all day in court with me. She met me, arranged to have my locks changed, and made me feel much safer. Without this support, I would have been in trouble"*

Solicitor: *"I do not know how my client would have managed without the volunteer's unflagging support and insight into her difficulties during a very difficult case. "*

Housing: *"Without DAVSS, victims would be left to fend for themselves and deal with agencies, courts, solicitors etc by themselves at what is already a traumatic time for them."*

Tracking our progress

Our regular monitoring statistics show that in the year April 2011 to March 2012 we assisted 170 clients, both men and women, involving 212 children, and received many more calls to our helpline. However, in the three quarters from April to December 2012, calls to the Helpline have already doubled and we have supported a further 175 cases, plus children and families (a 50% increase on the same stage last year.)

Fundraising

Our challenge is to raise sufficient funds to continue to maintain this much needed service. Our budget for 2013/14 is around £75,000. To achieve this we are working with Local Authorities, Community Safety Partnerships, Grant making Trusts, Kent Peoples Trust, AXA PPP, local businesses, schools, the local and faith communities and private individuals.

This is a key opportunity to help make a real difference in the lives of people who desperately need our support right now.

For more information visit our website: www.davss.org.uk
or call our helpline 01892 570538