

Young People's Violence Advisor Case Study

Local authority area 3

Job title: Young people's violence advisor

Role: Full-time champion with a small caseload

Location: Local authority

YPVA post started: April 2014

Previous role: Independent domestic violence advisor



The YPVA is based in a local authority domestic abuse service and previously worked as an Idva in the team. The YPVA works primarily as a champion and has set up a champions network. The YPVA also has a small caseload of around six young people, as the YPVA recognised that holding a small caseload was important to ensure the strategic work was in line with what young people needed locally. Holding a caseload has also enabled the YPVA to stay in touch with the support and services available for young people. The YPVA has also established a Young People's Community Action Group, a peer support network of young people who have experienced teenage relationship abuse. Feedback from the group is around the effectiveness of services for young people, and helps to ensure that the voice of the young person is present in all of the work that is done.

Since April 2014, the YPVA has supported 25 young people. All but one of the young people were female, and 92% were white British or Irish. The young people were between 13 and 18 years old, with the majority aged 17. The majority of young people were experiencing current emotional abuse, jealous and controlling behaviour, physical abuse or harassment and stalking. Many had additional vulnerabilities, including depression or anxiety and self-harm.

Awareness raising and training

The YPVA spent the first three months in post establishing links with other agencies that support young people. This included attending team meetings at children's social care, health services and other locality teams to raise awareness of the YPVA role and deliver training on teenage relationship abuse.

The YPVA has offered professionals in West Sussex five training courses related to teenage relationship abuse. Training is run monthly, and over 100 professionals in West Sussex have attended since April 2014. Training includes how to risk assess and safety plan with young people, child sexual exploitation, the impact of social media and how to engage with young people. 28% of the young people supported by the YPVA were experiencing or at risk of experiencing online intimate partner abuse, and 16% were at risk of CSE.

The champions received extensive training in responding to teenage relationship abuse. These training sessions included the foundations of the power and control model, Maracs, the impact of abuse on children and working with young people experiencing intimate partner violence. The courses attended were:

- Understanding domestic abuse
- Reducing the risk
- Growing up with domestic abuse
- Abuse in young people's intimate relationships
- Reducing the risk in young people's intimate relationships

Risk assessment

The Young People's version of the SafeLives Dash risk checklist is used by the YPVA and other local agencies. The identifying agency is responsible for carrying out a risk assessment and referring on to the appropriate service using the referral pathway established by the YPVA. In addition to the training provided, the YPVA offers support over the phone to complete the assessment, which has improved the confidence of practitioners in using the tool and their professional judgement. Whether a young person is assessed as high risk is heavily based on professional judgement. Important risk factors include their age, substance misuse, pregnancy or parenthood and willingness to engage.

The Young People's SafeLives Dash risk checklist was completed for just over a quarter of the YPVA's cases, but the adult's version was more commonly used and was completed for 52% of young people supported. This reflects the age of those supported by the YPVA, with 72% aged 17 or 18.

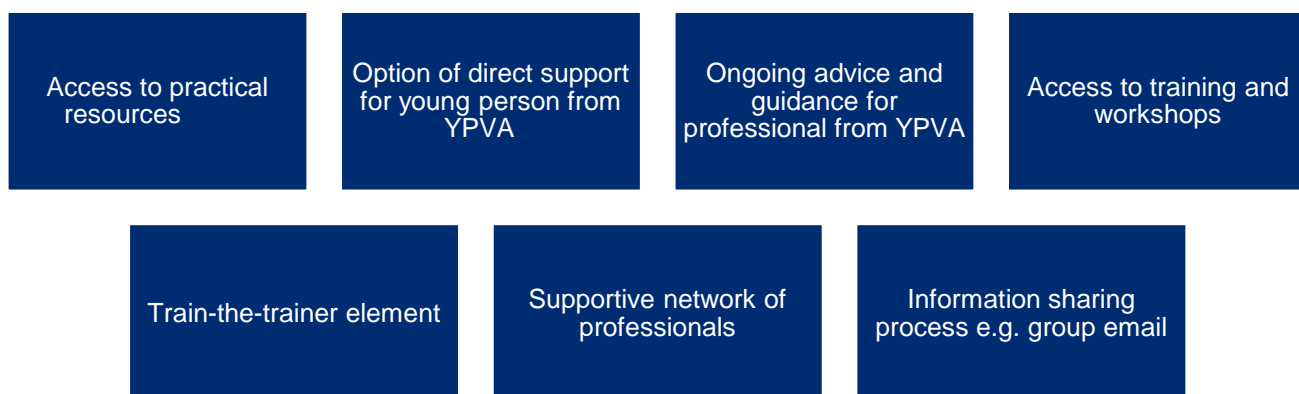
Working effectively within a champion's network

The YPVA identified that young people were accessing a wide range of services, but domestic abuse was not being identified and no consistent response for young people had been established. To fill this gap, the YPVA identified and trained a network of professionals from a range of services that work with young people. The YPVA offers consultancy work to provide support, information and resources to professionals working with young people. This includes some direct work with young people, alongside the support provided by the lead professional.

The professionals in the network act as champions within their organisations, supporting their colleagues to deliver interventions around healthy relationships in cases where teenage relationship abuse is identified. The champions complete the five training courses available, attend a workshop on the Young People's risk checklist and safety planning, and a complete 'train-the-trainer' course enabling them to cascade the training to colleagues. This training, alongside ongoing support from the YPVA, has increased champions' confidence, especially those who were nervous about dealing with domestic abuse.

The champions network meets face-to-face once every three months, and have a group email system to share information about disclosures of relationship abuse, or changes in circumstances for either the young person or the perpetrator, ensuring that the young person is kept safe.

Key elements of a champions network



Keeping in regular contact with key agencies has helped the YPVA ensure provision continues for young people from services facing cuts. For example, the support available from the local youth service has reduced considerably from 1-2-1 support for 13-25 year olds of any risk level to 1-2-1 support for only 15-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (Neet). As the youth service is part of the champions network, the YPVA has been able to highlight that domestic abuse is still an issue for this group and ensure that the skills in supporting young people experiencing domestic abuse are not lost. 40% of the young people supported by the YPVA were Neet.

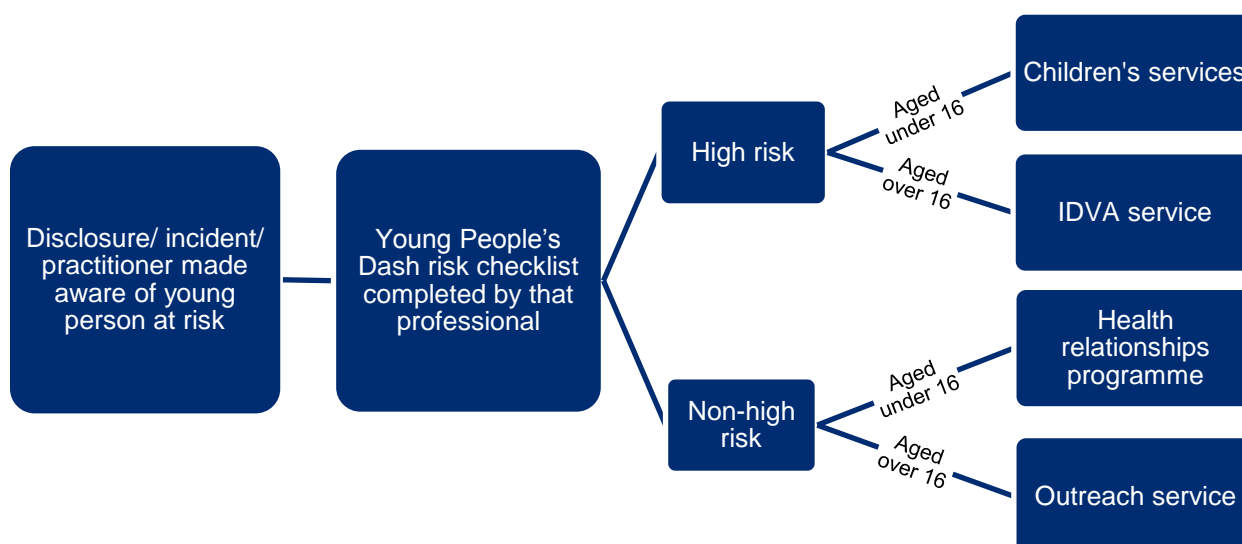
Supporting other professionals

A lead professional is identified in every case where there has been a disclosure of teenage relationship abuse. The lead professional should ideally be a caseworker who has an existing, positive relationship with the young person. This helps to minimise the number of professionals working directly with young person, which can be overwhelming.

Once a lead professional has been identified, the YPVA or the champion works closely alongside them, discussing the young person's case and providing support and assistance with casework, risk assessing and safety planning. The YPVA also offers support through direct casework, meeting with the young person for one-off sessions around healthy relationships.

Referral and care pathway

Prior to the YPVA coming into post, there was no care pathway in place for young people experiencing domestic abuse. The YPVA is finalising a local care pathway for young people, which is already being followed by professionals within the champions network. All practitioners are asked to complete the Young People's Dash risk checklist, and non-high risk young people are referred to a local healthy relationships programme or to the local domestic abuse outreach service. The suggested care pathway for 13 to 17 year olds is:



The YPVA highlighted the need for all agencies with a key role in the care pathway to be on board and committed. The YPVA found that agencies were keen to be involved as teenage relationships are on many organisations' agenda currently.

The referral pathway helps to ensure that young people provide support from the appropriate service. The lead professional also provides support around healthy relationships and makes referrals to other relevant agencies, including sexual health, youth services, CAMHS and education welfare.

Engaging and supporting high risk young people

Similarly to the wider Idva service, the YPVA supports high risk clients: 92% of young people were experiencing current abuse and 60% of the young people supported reached the threshold to be heard at Marac. However, the YPVA support is more fluid than that provided by Idvas, with no set finish dates or number of times to meet and exploring what works for each young person. The YPVA will discuss with other professionals the best way to contact each young person, and keeps cases open for longer, even if initial contact isn't made for several weeks after the referral.

The level of engagement varies with each young person, and it can be influenced by a number of factors. Many of the young people supported do not recognise that they are in an abusive relationship. Using language about domestic abuse or labelling their relationship as abusive can put young people off, so the YPVA talks more generally about support with healthy relationships when describing the role.

Those with children are often nervous that working with a domestic abuse worker may lead to their children being taken away. However, meeting face-to-face, explaining the independence of the service, that the service is not mandatory and explaining confidentially procedures increases the likelihood of engagement. Engagement is also better amongst young people who have been aware of the referral to the YPVA, and where the professional has explained the service and why the referral has been made. The YPVA will often keep cases open after the young person has separated from a partner, to ensure there is ongoing support if risk escalates. The average case length was 126 days, or just over 4 months, and the YPVA had an average of 16 contacts with the young person where support was provided.

At case closure, the proportion of young people who knew how to keep safe had increased to 72%, from 17% at case engagement. Almost three-quarters (72%) of the young people whose cases had closed reported that they had not experienced any further abuse in the past month. Every young person knew how to get help in the future.

Coercive control in teenage relationships

The YPVA has found that many young people do not recognise physical violence in their relationship as abuse, but are more likely to acknowledge abuse if there is control and manipulation. Although there was current physical abuse in 76% of cases supported by the YPVA, often the young people minimised this form of violence.

88% of the young people supported reported current jealous and controlling behaviours, and the same proportion reported emotional abuse. It was tackling this element that was more important to the young people. Many of the young people supported related to the recent BBC documentary 'Murdered by my boyfriend', which explored the psychological impact of the abuse as well as the physical violence.

Two young people (11%) had experienced jealous and controlling behaviour and one (6%) reported emotional abuse at case closure.

Plans and hopes for the future

The YPVA is hopeful that quarterly champions meetings will continue, giving professionals a forum for sharing ideas and resources, acting as champions within their services and ensuring that teenage relationship abuse continues to be identified. By continuing to the training programme, more and more professionals will feel confident to identify and support young people who have experienced teenage relationship abuse. Additional work the YPVA would like to see develop in the area includes:

- **Prevention and early intervention:** raising awareness about healthy relationships as part of every young person's education. Going in to schools and doing some work with young people would help to identify concerns at an earlier stage.
- **Young people who harm:** there is a gap in support for young people who harm others. The YPVA has seen that there is a huge overlap, with many of those who harm others also having experienced abuse themselves. There is a danger that no service will support these young people until they reach 18 years old and enter the criminal justice system.
- **Young men:** at present, young men seem less likely to seek out help and advice. More male workers to focus on supporting young men may help to address this gap.

Funding has been secured to continue the work of the existing YPVA in her role as champion and to recruit an additional YPVA in a case holding role, to support young people at high risk of serious harm.