

Practice guide

Family Help & Children's Social Care

Help & protection - Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit, Cheshire East

Background, purpose and rationale

Domestic abuse services have grown rapidly within Cheshire East over the last 5 years, due to enhanced funding from local partners as well as through national funding streams. Over 2024/25, the Cheshire East DA Strategy was reviewed and a full Needs Assessment commissioned, which highlighted gaps in provision as well as the need to focus on early intervention. This development ran alongside the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2024 and the increased responsibility of Local Authorities to support victims of DA, as well as treating children as victims in their own right.

The Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit (DAFSU) team began as an Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA) at the 'Hub' (an identified referral route via phone and/or an online portal); as well as a small number of high risk IDVAs taking referrals directly from MARAC meetings. The Hub developed into a wider team, offering advice, information and education around DA, as well as risk assessment (using the DASH Risk Assessment Checklist) and onward referral where appropriate. The high-risk team also developed and became a dedicated resource for victims at the highest risk.

What we did to improve families' outcomes and experiences

DAFSU has now become a full support and intervention service, based within Children's Services, with dedicated teams relating to 'front door services', high-risk victims, high-risk/high-harm perpetrators (DRIVE), outreach/step-down IDVAs and specialist children's IDVAs. Group programmes are run in conjunction with Early help colleagues in Gateway and DART, as well as one to one support to help families to become group/intervention ready.

DRIVE – two high risk/high harm Case Managers (delivering under the national DRIVE Partnership principles), working with perpetrators causing the most harm. The majority of their work is around disrupting further offending and getting the service users ready to address their challenging behaviours. Their work supports the families through disruption of further offending and mitigating risk.

Whole Housing Approach – Multi agency approach to support victims and their families to either, remain safely in their own home, or to secure appropriate long term safe accommodation.

High Risk IDVAs - Risk mitigation for the those at the highest risk. Safety planning and supporting families through consideration of risk of all connected people within the family unit.

Outreach/Step Down IDVAs – Group readiness and one to one support through to recovery programmes and re-engagement within their community.

Domestic Abuse Navigators – Support, education and advice for all victims and those supporting them, including risk assessment. Work with social care to support them to view their engagements through a domestic abuse lens – considering DA when looking at contact arrangements, family dynamics and parental conflict.

What was the impact?

The service delivers high-quality provision, with measurable outcomes, giving families a smooth transition from crisis through to recovery. The focus is on mitigating risk and then supporting a family to move forwards, avoiding dependency on the service, and promoting empowerment.

Recent client feedback for the High Risk IDVA team:

"[DAFSU professional] contacted me at a particularly challenging point in my home circumstances and at our initial face to face meeting she listened, confirmed her understanding of my situation, explained why certain behaviours and patterns of DA, helped me to safety plan, advised me and provided resources for me. This has been ongoing through the last 6 months whilst I have separated and moved out of the family home. She has helped and signposted regarding my children and their worries."

Resources

[Domestic abuse and suicidality toolkit](#)

Find out more Contact

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