

Mobile Advocacy Toolkit

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Cambridgeshire domestic abuse services have been operating a model similar to mobile advocacy prior to the start of the project, which includes meeting victim/survivors in locations of their choice.

Refuge meet clients at their homes and have a number of workers co located at Children's Centres which is easily accessible for clients. **Cambridge Women's Aid** provides home visits only for women who are well known to the service but meets women in community spaces or the Cambridge Women's Aid office at initial meetings.

Purpose of the toolkit

This toolkit is a guide for commissioners, operational managers, domestic abuse practitioners and/or coordinators and any other stakeholders involved in funding local domestic service provision. It offers practical guidance and resources to set up a mobile advocacy service and assess the quality of existing services.

Introduction

What is Mobile Advocacy?

Mobile advocacy is similar to floating support, which Women's Aid defines as 'tied to accommodation, but the accommodation is not offered as part of the service. The service is about supporting victim/survivors including children to maintain their accommodation.'¹ It is a form of community-based domestic abuse advocacy support that focuses on victim/survivors' self-identified needs, rather than needs defined by the service and any pre-defined actions the agency thinks victim/survivors should take. The ethos of the support is client-led and empowering, working with the victim/survivor around their individual needs and for a period dictated by need, not targets. This approach helps to restore decision making powers and increase space for action.

Advocates offer direct support by listening to victim/survivors, gaining an understanding of their needs, providing information, offering emotional support and advocacy and including practical support with housing. It involves meeting victim/survivors in locations of their choice, including

1 The Whole Housing Approach

at their home, accompanying them to appointments and advocating with other agencies. Intensive weekly support is provided to help victim/survivors with securing housing, which may include the following activities:

- Helping to find and accompanying victim/survivors to refuge services,
- Exploring and pursuing housing options for remaining in an existing property or relocating on a temporary or permanent basis for safety reasons,
- Advocating with landlords to resolve tenancy issues, including financial issues,
- Offering information and support on civil remedies to prevent the behaviours of a perpetrator, including accessing or residing in the victim/survivor's home,
- Help with accessing employment and education,
- Any other support to help improve a victim/survivor's current situation.

The service may be delivered from a domestic abuse service or from a range of community settings to increase access points into the service and reach victim/survivors who may otherwise not be aware of the service. This can be particularly helpful in increasing access for marginalised people. The uptake of the service is flexible and gives victim/survivors' the choice for when, where and how long the support is accessed.

What does mobile advocacy seek to address?

Mobile advocacy seeks to lower the barriers that prevent victim/survivors from accessing specialist domestic abuse support by offering a flexible outreach service. It may be difficult for victim/survivors to safely access a domestic abuse services office, especially when they are still living with their abuser, or when their abuser is able to monitor their movements. They may live in a rural area that is miles away from the premises of a specialist domestic abuse service. Offering their services from another local community organisation and offering to meet at a venue of the victim/survivor's choosing enables them to meet discreetly and safely and therefore increases access to this support.

Additionally, some mobile advocacy services fund taxis or other transport costs. This is particularly valuable to victim/survivors who may find accessing meetings difficult either due to limited knowledge of the area or financial issues, for example.

Accessing safe and stable housing is complex and challenging. The advocacy and practical support provided helps to overcome barriers and increase space for action. For some victim/survivors, without this specialist support they may be unable to chart routes to safe and secure housing on their own due to not being aware of the options available to them.

Evidence base for mobile advocacy

Access to community-based support for victim/survivors of domestic abuse has been identified as best practice by the United Nations, World Health Organisation, and European Union, and victim/survivor-led provision is identified as best practice by the Home Office in its National Statement of Expectations for local areas to tackle VAWG.ⁱⁱ

Outreach services began in the early 1990s as an unfunded add on to the work of refuge services, provided in response to victim/survivor need. One of the first specific outreach service was the River House drop-in service in Hammersmith, which provided community-based support for victim/survivors who were not accessing refuge services. In the late 1990s, Ellen Pence's Duluth model was introduced to the UK in Hammersmith and Fulham and, as part of this, an advocacy service was established that focused on improving conviction rates for domestic abuse by supporting victim/survivors in court. Since then, latest figures from Women's Aid show that 191 DA services now offer outreach and services, which may include floating support and community-based services.ⁱⁱⁱ

Outreach services provide needs-led support for victim/survivors. This approach has been shown to measurably decrease risk to victim/survivors. An evaluation of a needs-led approach to MARAC found that at 9 months from the beginning of the intervention there was a reduction of 69% in police incidents (26 pre-intervention compared with 8 post-intervention).^{iv} Supporting victim/survivors to 'pick their own pathways' helps ensure that they feel able to engage with the support that is offered, and work together to identify, prioritise, and address risk.^v

Where this approach has been implemented as part of mobile advocacy, the results have been promising. The term Mobile Advocacy is taken from the US 'Housing First' model, which has been evaluated by Cris Sullivan. The evaluation highlighted the positive impact flexible and physically mobile advocacy support can have on victim/survivors' safety and the stability of their housing: of the 29 victim/survivors who provided feedback, 96% 'very much' agreed that they felt 'more hopeful about the future'; 93% were 'able to remain in my home or secure safe housing' and 93% reported feeling strongly that they had 'more ways to plan for my safety'.^{vi}

Outline of the model

Mobile advocacy is an extension of the outreach and community-based model of advocacy delivered by specialist domestic abuse services. It emphasises working collaboratively with victim/survivors in the community to improve their safety and independence by helping them achieve safe housing. This includes offering practical support on issues that help secure and sustain safe housing.

Mobile advocacy should be delivered by a specialist domestic abuse service, with a history of providing outreach support to victim/survivors. The service should ideally be accredited by one of the five organisations that developed the 'Sector Sustainability Shared Standards'.

The principles of mobile advocacy build on these standards to include, in addition to the above:

- **Community-based working:** barriers to accessing services are lowered as much as possible – for example, by allowing home visits or by offering support to access other, relevant service provision such as health services.
- **Trauma-informed approach:** services that take a trauma-informed approach to working with victim/survivors embed an understanding of trauma at all levels of service delivery, from the choice of service delivery environments to the maintenance of interpersonal boundaries between victim/survivor and the worker. Trauma-informed services take care to ensure that victim/survivors are not retraumatised and aim to ensure healing through collaboration. For more about adopting a trauma-informed approach, please see the Introduction to the WHA toolkit.
- **Advocates are led by the needs of the victim/survivor**
- Mobile advocacy offers support to victim/survivors **regardless of their risk level** and is **not just a crisis response**.

Ideally, mobile advocacy programmes have links to other forms of support and services that victim/survivors may want to access, such as drug and alcohol services, sexual health clinics, mental health services, and specialist led by and for BME, disability, and LGBT+ services.

Key components of the mobile advocacy approach

For some domestic abuse services, developing a mobile advocacy service represents a shift in how the organisation is currently commissioned to deliver services and therefore makes it a challenge to implement all aspects of the model immediately. For example, the model recommends that advocates hold a smaller caseload to enable them to effectively deliver outreach services and practical support. This can be a challenge as many services are currently struggling to meet existing demand and workers are holding high caseloads (for example, Refuge advocates currently work with 30-40 cases).

An intention is that the following is used to inform local needs assessments and commissioning processes. Funding needs to take into account the time it takes for victim/survivors to leave their abusive partner, recover from the abuse, and overcome post-separation abuse. A study by Solace Women’s Aid found that victim/survivors were still experiencing post separation abuse three years after separation and recommended that support be provided for a minimum of two years following separation.^{vii}

Organisation

The organisation's ethos, which is reflected in the mission statement and policies and procedures, is about **promoting the rights of women and children** and providing **person centred, non-judgemental, trauma informed support** to empower victim/survivors of domestic abuse and respecting their individual needs, strengths, circumstances and wishes

The organisation promotes **autonomy**, the right of victim/survivors to make their own choices and **flexible tailored support** to each victim/survivor

Agreements and policy are in place for how mobile advocacy is delivered so that **support is provided whenever and wherever it is safe and appropriate for the victim/survivor**. This includes agreements with community settings and organisations where the service can be provided from and a lone work policy where advocates visit women in their home or location of their choosing

The organisation ensures that **casework support provides enough time for advocates to leave the office** and meet clients in the community and to support victim/survivors to meet with other support services

Mobile advocacy is available to **support crisis response and ongoing, longer term needs**

The organisation supports workers through **regular monthly supervision** and **acknowledges the impact of frontline work**

Advocates are adequately supported when working in the community through **adapted supervision, technological support (e.g. a work laptop and WiFi dongle to enable remote working) and sharing space** with other workers performing similar roles, to provide real-time reflection and support.

Advocates have their **travel expenses reimbursed** in a timely manner.

Advocates have access to **ongoing training and support** to enable them to offer up to date information about housing across all tenure types and on the WHA

Advocates have **training on delivering a victim/survivor-centred approach** and can work within a trauma-informed framework. Advocates should have access to **specialist trauma-informed training**.

Advocates have a **small caseload**, allowing them to offer victim/survivors the support they need for as long as they need (the US model of Mobile Advocacy support includes 5-7 hours a week for 12 weeks and with a caseload of 8-15).

Victim/survivor feedback is collected, and experiences are used to shape and inform service delivery and continuous improvements to provision

Staff

Advocates are **led by victim/survivors** and start the service by **asking 'what do you need'** instead of stating that 'these are the services we can offer you'. This includes gaining an understanding of housing needs and links to economic abuse and resources (see [SEA conversation guide for economic abuse](#)).

Advocates explore the victim/survivor's **needs, fears, hopes and expectations** and **work together to create a safety and action plan** based on these discussions.

Advocates have **the skills to deliver specialist safety planning, risk assessment and management and offer advocacy with housing** in all tenure types and range of housing options and initiatives available.

Advocates **understand the impacts of trauma** and are aware of potential triggers and engage in trauma-informed practice.

Advocates **collaborate with existing services** to provide effective support, including parenting, substance misuse, and mental and physical health services.

Advocates **build relationships** and help **connect victim/survivors to other agencies and professionals** (e.g. health services, housing providers) that can assist victim/survivors in meeting their self-defined needs and aims and achieving safe and sustainable housing. Where necessary, advocates advocate for the victim/survivor.

Advocates **emphasise victim/survivors' strengths and resilience** throughout the support process.

Advocates **check in** with victim/survivors at each session and **adapt their way of working** to meet any change in need.

Advocates work with victim/survivors to create **planned endings**.

Operational considerations

Developing relationships with key housing partners

In the WHA model, mobile advocacy plays a key role in helping victim/survivors achieve or maintain stable housing. As such, it is important that mobile advocates have a good knowledge of housing legislation, local services, and housing options and can navigate these systems and advocate for victim/survivors.

There is overlap with other strands of the WHA project, as mobile advocates will benefit from work raising awareness of domestic abuse with housing providers through DAHA accreditation, and awareness raising with the private rented and privately-owned sectors. Specialist domestic abuse services should refer to these toolkits and endeavour to link up with any local initiatives.

Induction and training staff

To enable mobile advocates to carry out their work effectively, they should have access to:

- **Trauma informed training**, to enable advocates to establish emotional safety, restore choice and control, facilitate victim/survivors' connections to community support, develop positive coping strategies, respond to identity and context, and build strengths,^{viii}
- **Housing training**, to enable advocates to understand the legislation, policy and guidance on domestic abuse. This is usually offered by the local authority or a national service like Shelter or Homeless Link,
- **Technology for keeping in touch with the head office** while working in the community (for instance, a work laptop and WiFi dongle),
- **Adapted supervision and debriefing, and safety planning with workers that accounts for working in the community**. For more information about what good supervision for mobile advocates looks like, see US model Domestic Violence Housing First's '[Meeting Victim/survivors in the Community: Tips and Tools for Mobile Advocacy](#)'.

Procedures and Policies

When establishing policies and procedures to support mobile advocacy, a review of existing policies and procedures should be undertaken so that they are aligned with the key components listed above. Associated policies and procedures include:

- Lone working,
- Home visits,
- Reporting safeguarding concerns.

Working in the community and home visits

Home visits can be difficult to introduce in services where home visits have not been incorporated into everyday practice and may be restricted or even banned by the organisation. This is usually due to capacity issues and concerns about safety, both the victim/survivor's safety and the safety of the worker. However, home visits may be requested. This offer may be particularly valuable for victim/survivors who are disabled or who do not have access to transportation. Home visits can be carried out safely only when the perpetrator is no longer resident at the address.

Supervision and debrief support can help to manage the risk to the worker, as can safety planning for the mobile advocate. This support may need to be provided more frequently to account for the complexity this adds to casework support.

Strategies to manage risk may include:

- Informing colleagues and supervisors about arrival and departure times at the address,
- Keeping work mobile telephone charged,
- Calling the victim/survivor before arriving at her address, in order to assess whether it is still safe for the visit to go ahead.
- Providing the advocate with a personal alarm or an app for lone workers

Practices on Home Visits and Working in the Community

Refuge mobile advocates are provided with Sky Guard alarms which have a GPS tracker so the worker's whereabouts is known in the event of an emergency. Advocates also apply their lone working policy and risk assess community visits.

Cambridge Women's Aid have several hubs across their area where victim/survivors can meet with workers. Mobile advocates will visit some victim/survivors at home where it is safe to do so but this is not the norm. Most victim/survivors are happy to come to a safe, private space that is accessible to them. Cambridge Women's Aid will help victim/survivors with travel if necessary. In the safe space they can access other services such as peer support which is highly valued. Alternatively, workers will meet them in the community in a place that suits them.

There may also be challenges working out of the office in close-knit or rural communities, where many people may know the victim/survivor and/or the perpetrator. The presence of someone who appears to be (or is known to be) a professional at someone's home may raise suspicion among the community and increase the risk to the victim/survivor. Strategies to minimise risk to victim/survivors from the community can include:

- The mobile advocate ensuring that they do not dress or present in a way that draws attention to their professional role,
- Not parking on a residential street, where the presence of a strange car will attract attention,
- Meeting at neutral locations, outside of the victim/survivor's immediate locale – for instance, at a coffee shop in the centre of town.

The mobile advocate may need to think creatively to counteract risks posed by the community. For example, a caseworker quoted in a report on domestic abuse in rural areas explains that:

'I have used my dog as cover many times – it is so much less obtrusive to casually meet on a walk with a client. It just appears that we have struck up a casual conversation. It stops the gossip which is so rife in village life'.^{ix}

Monitoring and evaluation

It is recommended that information about victim/survivors housing circumstances, needs and outcomes are recorded. The resources section includes a template monitoring form used in the WHA pilot.

Victim/survivor feedback should be gathered on case closure, or the end of a victim/survivor's active involvement with the service, and used to inform training, service management, and service development. In addition to asking about standard outcomes relating to safety, risk level, satisfaction with the service, and achieving goals, feedback should be sought on aspects of domestic abuse support that are specific to mobile advocates. This includes asking about how they experienced the support, checking that it was responsive to their needs and flexible in terms of time and location being at their preference, whether they were supported to connect and meet with other services to better meet their needs. An example feedback form is provided in the resources section of this toolkit.

Case Studies

Mobile Advocacy Support Delivered in Cambridgeshire

Mobile advocacy is designed to complement and make use of other aspects of the WHA. The below case study illustrates why mobile advocacy services should be funded alongside flexible funding and local sanctuary schemes:

The mobile advocacy team received a referral from a local authority for a woman with four children who had fled into the area and had been given temporary accommodation. The woman had experienced emotional and financial abuse from her partner and the mobile advocate who worked with her felt that there was a high risk of her returning to the perpetrator.

The mobile advocate met with the victim/survivor, attending the accommodation where she was staying and also the home of her friend where she was staying temporarily.

The woman needed to pay rent upfront for a new socially rented property. The mobile advocate applied for this through flexible funding and the woman was allocated the property once the funding had been approved. The mobile advocate applied for £1,500 worth of furniture through another fund and this was awarded.

The mobile advocate made a successful referral to Embrace, a charity that supports child victims of crime, as the children had been subject to racist abuse when walking to and from school.

The woman and her children moved into the new property, which was fitted with security measures by the local sanctuary scheme. Since then, the woman has remained living in the property and has not returned to the perpetrator. The woman has told her mobile advocate that she feels safer now.

The woman continues to receive support from the mobile advocacy service, particularly around parenting.

Resources

[Safety Planning and protocol](#)

[Cris Sullivan checklist](#)

[Home visits, advocacy safety protocol](#)

[Mobile advocate job description](#)

[Mobile advocacy monitoring form](#)

[Mobile advocacy feedback form](#)

References

ⁱ Women's Aid (2019) *Funding Specialist Support for Domestic Abuse Survivors*. Retrieved from <https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Funding-Specialist-Support-Full-Report.pdf>.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Women's Aid (2019) *The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Annual Audit*. Retrieved from <https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Annual-Audit-2019.pdf>

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^v Ibid.

^{vi} Sullivan, C., Strom, J and Fluegeman, S. (2017) *Establishing Domestic Violence Housing First in California: A Process Evaluation*. Retrieved from <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CA-DVHF-Evaluation-Report-FINAL.pdf>

^{vii} Kelly, L., Sharp, N. and Klein, R. (2014) *Finding the Costs of Freedom How women and children rebuild their lives after domestic violence*. Retrieved from https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Costs_of_Freedom_Report_-_SWA.pdf

^{viii} Sullivan, C., Strom, J, and Fluegeman, S. (2017) *Establishing domestic violence housing first in California: A process evaluation*. Retrieved from <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CA-DVHF-Evaluation-Report-FINAL.pdf>

^{ix} National Rural Crime Network (2019) *Captive & Controlled: Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas – isolated, unsupported and unprotected, victims failed by the system, services and those around them*. Retrieved from <https://www.ruralabuse.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Domestic-Abuse-in-Rural-Areas-National-Rural-Crime-Network.pdf>