

Co-Located Housing Advocacy Toolkit

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Advance, a specialist domestic abuse service based in London, has operated a co-located housing advocacy service in Hammersmith and Fulham Council's Housing Solutions service since 2007.

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 co-located advocacy service in a local authority housing service and for assessing the quality of existing services. This toolkit can also be used as a reference for co-locating in another housing service such as a housing association or supported accommodation setting.

What is co-located advocacy?

Co-located housing advocacy is another form of community-based specialist 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. It shares the same ethos as the mobile advocacy service where the work is undertaken with the victim/survivor around their individual needs and for a period dictated by need, not targets.

The role is employed by a local specialist domestic abuse service and co-located in a local authority, based in the homeless support service. The co-located housing advocate is independent from the local authority and offers direct support to victim/survivors who present to the local authority housing service as homeless due to domestic abuse. Advocacy support should be offered regardless of the victim/survivors' eligibility for making a homeless application.

The role includes listening to victim/survivors, gaining an understanding of their needs, providing information, offering emotional support and advocacy - including offering advice and information about the housing options available to them - and demystifying the process and complicated housing legislation and civil remedies. Housing options that may be explored, depending on the victim/survivor's wishes and their current housing situation, include management transfer or managed reciprocal scheme, temporary accommodation, dual housing benefit, Part VII homeless application, private rented accommodation, DVPOs, privately rented accommodation, injunctions, and refuge services. Consideration will be given to the tenancy type and the advocacy support that is offered to prevent the victim/survivor from losing a secure tenancy.

Co-located housing advocates may also support the local authority with fulfilling their duties and following procedures to conduct or contribute to homeless interviews in partnership with the housing service, offer support throughout the homelessness prevention, relief and main duty stages included in the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017. For more information on local authorities' duties in relation to homelessness, please see the Social Housing toolkit.

An important aspect of the role is to advocate on behalf of victim/survivors in relation to accessing accommodation, including the provision of temporary accommodation, private rented and social housing. This can also include advocating with landlords to resolve tenancy issues and working through financial issues and help with accessing employment and education. The length of support may be shorter than other advocacy roles in order to best support the volume of victim/survivors presenting to the service. In this instance, pathways into the main domestic abuse support service should be available for victim/survivors who want more long-term support.

The role also offers support to upskill housing staff and raise their awareness and skills about domestic abuse. Co-located housing advocates do this by offering training, sharing resources, and sharing expert knowledge to inform housing staff's case management. Advocates can also offer advice on housing assessments and decisions, influencing future practice and decisions made. This includes reinforcing guidance on providing homelessness services to people who have experienced or are at risk of domestic violence or abuse that is covered in a chapter of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

What does co-located housing advocacy seek to address?

The co-located role aims to improve access to specialist domestic abuse support for victim/survivors who approach the local authority for housing who otherwise may not know that the specialist domestic abuse service is there to support them.

Evidence base for co-located housing advocacy

It is now commonplace for domestic abuse co-location models to exist in housing and other settings including health and social services.

The model benefits the host service as staff working in these departments develop their understanding of, and practice around, domestic abuse by having a specialist based in their office who is available for formal and informal consultations.

Victim/survivors approaching the local authority as homeless due to fleeing domestic abuse will have reached a point of crisis and be in need of emergency accommodation, so it's vital that they receive high quality and effective domestic abuse support, or find out where to access support, the first time that they approach a professional and are not placed in a position where they have no option to return to the perpetrator. **A SafeLives report found that 85% of victim/survivors sought help on average five times from professionals in the year before they got effective support to become safe.**ⁱ

By situating a domestic abuse expert in the housing department, this builds the capacity of the department to respond effectively to domestic abuse and make referrals to the local domestic abuse service. **Being referred to a specialist domestic abuse service is often experienced by victim/survivors as a 'turning point' in their experiences of trying to get effective support:** 88% of victim/survivors surveyed about their experiences of seeking support in Hammersmith and Fulham identified a domestic abuse service as instrumental in improving their situation.ⁱⁱ Facilitating quicker and smoother referral processes ensures that victim/survivors reach these turning points – and safety – sooner and without having to repeat their story to multiple professionals and agencies.

Co-location has other benefits too: a SafeLives report on domestic abuse services in hospitals, found that support by **co-located hospital IDVAs reduced health costs by £2,050 per patient per year.**ⁱⁱⁱ

Outline of the model

Co-located 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 to improve their safety and independence by helping them achieve safe housing.

Co-located advocacy should be delivered by a specialist domestic abuse service, with a history of providing outreach support to victim/survivors. They are ideally accredited by one of the six organisations that are part of the 'Sector Sustainability Shared Standards'.

The principles of co-located advocacy build on these standards to include, in addition to Shared Standards:

- **Community-based working:** Barriers to accessing services are lowered as much as possible – for example, by co-located in a service where victim/survivors are known to be attending and by offering support to access other, relevant service provision such as mental 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 section of this toolkit.
- Advocates are **led by the needs of the victim/survivor**
- Co-located advocates **offer support to victim/survivors regardless of their risk level**

Ideally, co-located housing 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, and mental health services, specialist BME, disability, LGBT+ services.

Key components of the mobile advocacy approach

Establishing a co-located advocacy model in housing requires planning and preparation time to embed the role effectively. For example, a working agreement will need to be written that considers the role of each partner, how the role will operate within the housing department's existing processes and how referral pathways will operate. As the role also involves capacity building of staff in the housing service, the average caseload will be lower than other advocacy roles that do not include this responsibility.

The following checklist is to be used when establishing a co-located housing advocate to ensure the main basic principles are being met. The intention is that the following will be used to inform planning and implementation of an advocacy role between domestic abuse services and housing services and providers.

Organisation – domestic abuse service

The organisation's ethos, which is reflected in the mission statement and policies and procedures, is about **promoting the rights of women and children, 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 provides flexible tailored support to each survivor. **Uptake of services is voluntary** and the choice of victim/survivors.

The organisation **works in partnership with housing providers** as part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse, and works collaboratively to establish and operate the co-location advocacy role

A partnership agreement is written that considers the housing service's policies and procedures in regard to data protection, information sharing, confidentiality, and safeguarding

The line manager offers an **induction** that includes a **joint visit to the housing department** to introduce the advocate to key housing staff, review housing policies and procedures and how data will be collected and stored.

The organisation supports co-located advocates through **regular monthly supervision** and acknowledges and takes steps to mitigate the impact of frontline work

The organisation offers **support to co-located advocates** so that they do not become isolated. They can do this by including and encouraging co-located advocates to attend team meetings, holding regular weekly check ins, including visiting the advocate at the housing department and setting up a buddy system with other colleagues in the general or main service.

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

The organisation will endeavour to **minimise the number of advocates/workers** that they are allocated in recognition that a trusting relationship is an essential component to the advocacy support delivered.

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

Staff

Co-located advocates are based at housing office and offer **direct support to victim/survivors** who present on the day to the homeless service. The advice, safety planning and advocacy support they offer **is independent from the housing service**. They may also **support the housing service** with conducting interviews with housing staff, gathering information to inform a homeless assessment and Personalised Housing Plan and making recommendations for placement in temporary accommodation.

Advocates offer **training, guidance and expert advice to housing professionals**, understanding that domestic abuse is not the housing professionals' area of expertise

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 with the victim/survivor to create a safety and action plan** based on these discussions

Advocates have the **skills to deliver specialist safety planning, risk assessment (using evidence-based tools like the DASH) and management and offer advocacy with housing** in all tenure types and range of housing options and initiatives available.

Advocates will **promote the rights of victim/survivors** to housing professionals and support services and professionals to understand these rights when required

Advocates **share information with housing with the victim/survivors' consent** unless there are safeguarding concerns. Where a safeguarding concern arises, they will refer to safeguarding children or adults or MARAC as required.

Advocates understand **the impacts of trauma** and are aware of potential triggers for the victim/survivors that they work with. Advocates engage in trauma-informed practice.

Advocates **collaborate with existing services** to provide effective support, including parenting, substance use, 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.

The role of co-located housing advocates

The co-located housing advocate is distinctly different from and should not be conflated with the role of a housing officer. Although the advocate is based in a housing service, they are independent and at times may advocate on behalf of victim/survivors on matters in a way that conflicts with the housing service’s position or decision. Below is some guidance to help differentiate between the role of an advocate and housing officer.

Co-Located Housing Advocates do...	Co-Located Housing Advocates don't...
Offer advice and information on the full suite of housing options available	Present options in accordance with any housing agenda
Support housing staff with housing duties relating homelessness prevention, relief and other main duties.	Hold sole responsibility for completing the local authority’s homelessness prevention, relief and main duties.
Take referrals from the housing service and offer direct advice and support to as many victim/survivors as possible, within limits of an agreed caseload	Hold waiting lists. It may not be possible for the advocate to offer support to every victim/survivor who approaches the service (especially if there is only one advocate in post). Referral pathways should account for this.
Advocate on behalf of victim/survivors with housing staff for accommodation, including temporary accommodation, private rented and social housing	Make decisions relating to a homeless application or accommodation offers
Explore and search for a refuge space if suitable and if this is what the victim/survivors wants. This will be offered amongst the full suite of housing options available	Search for refuge if the victim/survivor doesn't want to pursue this option
Use risk assessment tools, such as the DASH risk indicator checklist to gather information about safety needs and risks to inform safety planning	Advise on risk level as a gateway into services or housing options.
Share information and make referrals where necessary (i.e. to MARAC if high risk) for victim/survivors they have spoken to.	Make referrals or share information with other services about victim/survivors they have not met and spoken to.
Share information with the housing service based on the level of detail that the victim/survivor is comfortable with and mindful of survivor’s right to privacy.	Share information with housing without the victim/survivor’s consent or making them aware of when they may have to share information.
Offer housing staff ad hoc advice and support on their cases	See every victim/survivor approaching the service. Housing staff should be trained on how to offer effective, safe and appropriate responses to domestic abuse

Operational considerations

The following actions are recommended as part of planning to embed the post and should be undertaken prior to the advocate being in post.

Implementation checklist	Consideration completed
Share the benefits of a co-located advocate with housing commissioners and senior housing management from the local authority	
Review how many people present to the service because of domestic abuse, identify the anticipated volume and agree caseload capacity. Include this in the partnership agreement. If the domestic abuse service is women only, consider how men will be supported and include this in a referral pathway	
Draft a partnership agreement, confirming responsibilities of the role, establishing the referral pathway and agreeing how case records will be kept (see resources for a template partnership agreement)	
Agree information sharing agreement (ISA) with housing while bearing in mind this process may take time for the local authority to sign off (see resources for a template ISA)	
Agree how case records will be kept and what monitoring will be collected. Develop a monitoring form collaboratively	
Agree logistics on access to the building, desk space, IT, how case management records will be kept, supervision and debriefing arrangements, induction plan including shadowing housing staff before meeting with victim/survivors	
Identify a confidential space for the advocate to meet with victim/survivors and any support available for children during interviews and meetings	
Nominate the lead key contact in the housing department that will support the domestic abuse service to implement the co-located advocate	
Arrange for ongoing meetings to review planning, implementation and how the role is performing and impacting on the housing service. This includes reviewing victim/survivor data and any upskilling activities offered to the housing department	
Share details of the referral pathway with housing staff	
The line manager identifies how best to support co-located post as there is a risk of isolation. They could go along with the advocate on their first day to help manage expectations, arrange for the advocate to attend team meetings and to base at the general domestic abuse service once a week.	

Developing relationships with key housing partners

In the WHA model, co-located advocacy plays a key role in helping victim/survivors achieve or maintain stable housing. As such, it is important that co-located housing 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 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 co-located housing 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,^{iv}
- 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,
- The advocate's line manager attends the housing service with the advocate on their first day as part of an orientation and outlines the do's and don'ts of the role.

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 policy and procedures include:

- Lone working
- Reporting safeguarding concerns
- Case management policy to account for any record keeping on the housing service's case recording system.

Working in the community

While a main part of the co-located housing advocate's role is to co-locate and support victim/survivors who approach the housing service, the support goes beyond the initial representation at housing. This may include (subject to capacity issues) meeting victim/survivors in the community at a location they prefer and/or attending meetings such as child protection conferences, child in need meetings and court trials.

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 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 the role of the co-located advocate.

Case Studies

Co-Located Advocacy Support Delivered in London by Advance

Anna approached the Housing Options team for housing assistance after fleeing from her partner's home address due to violence from her partner. Anna met with the Co-Located Housing Advocate who advised her on the full suite of housing and civil options available to her.

Despite Anna having a Residence Permit there was uncertainty expressed by the Housing Officer about her eligibility for housing assistance and whether what Anna had experienced was domestic abuse. The Co-Located Housing Advocate clarified Anna's rights, explained that Anna had experienced domestic abuse, and raised Anna's risks and needs to the Housing Officer. As a result, Anna was provided with temporary accommodation.

The Co-Located Housing Advocate also supported Anna to obtain a non-molestation order; liaised with family and children's services as she had 3 children who were subject to a child in need plan; and provided emotional support so that Anna's confidence and self-esteem increased which resulted in her feeling able to return to focussing on her studies. Anna has informed the Co-Located Housing Advocate that she feels well supported by her and is now looking forward to finding part-time work.

Co-Located Advocacy Support Delivered in London by Advance

Sarah approached Housing Options with her 3 children after fleeing violence from her ex partner's address. Sarah met with the Co-Located Housing Advocate who advised her around her housing and civil options. The Housing Officer had initially advised that Sarah would need support in securing a refuge service space as Sarah had no recourse to public funds.

The Co-Located Housing Advocate advocated that Sarah and her 3 children needed somewhere safe to stay at least for the night, as the next day they could approach the children's social care no recourse to public funds team for financial support with housing, and that Sarah was isolated and had no one to turn to. The Housing Officer agreed to place Sarah and her children in emergency accommodation.

The Co-Located Housing Advocate immediately began supporting Sarah to apply for the DDVC. Sarah's application was accepted, and she was able to have access to public funds. Housing agreed that they had a duty to Sarah and placed her in long term temporary accommodation.

The Co-Located Housing Advocate made an application for flexible funding which was successful. Sarah received gift vouchers via flexible funding that enabled her to buy items for her children, basic furniture and a TV as her accommodation was unfurnished. The Co-Located Housing Advocate also provided support in helping Sarah to apply for a non-molestation order. Sarah reports no longer feeling powerless and is now looking forward to a better future for herself and her children.

Resources

- Template partnership agreement
- Template information sharing agreement
- Template monitoring form

References

ⁱ SafeLives (2015) *Getting it right the first time*. Retrieved from

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Getting%20it%20right%20first%20time%20-%20complete%20report.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (2013) *Turning Points: Exploring survivors' experiences of the coordinated community response to domestic violence in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham*. Retrieved from

http://www.standingtogether.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/16.01.2013_%202013_Turning%20Points_SurvivorsConsultationFinal.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ SafeLives (2016) *A Cry for Health: Why we must invest in domestic abuse services in hospitals*. Retrieved from

http://www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SAFJ4993_Themis_report_WEBcorrect.pdf

^{iv} Sullivan, C., Strom, J, and Fluegeman, S. (2017) *Establishing domestic violence housing first in California: A process evaluation*.

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