

Survivor Voice Ambassadors: Embedding Lived Experience in Domestic Abuse Policy, Training and Public Communication

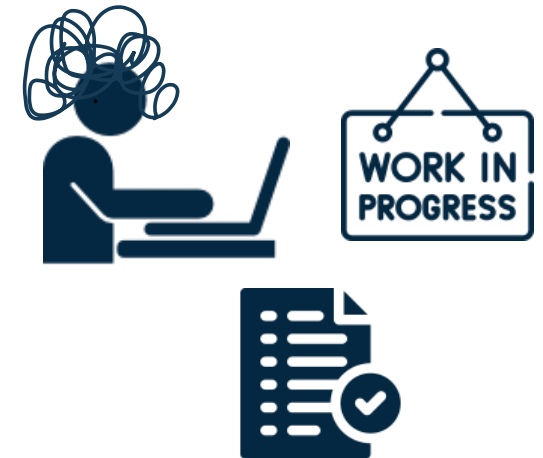
LARIA Summer Webinars
15th July 2026

Produced by:

Sarah Collins – Analyst Manager (Domestic Abuse Research Programme)

Domestic Abuse Research Programme

- Started post in June 2022
 - DA Act 2021 – Statutory Duty for Tier 1 Authorities to complete local Needs Assessments and ensure the voice of victims/survivors represented at Local Partnership Boards
 - Paid for through New Burdens Funding from the central Government (support in safe accommodation)
 - Work for the multi-agency Partnership – closely with DA Projects & Partnership team and Integrated DA Commissioning team (PH)
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- ✓ Kent & Medway DA Strategy Activity Indicator Power BI dashboard
 - ✓ Housing DA victims/survivors – perspectives of professionals
 - ✓ MARAC Hub 3-month review – formative process evaluation
 - ✓ Recommissioning – Facilitation/analysis specification working groups x4 / Contract Lot development analysis / Partner funding formula
 - ✓ Ad-hoc work – DASH vs DARA / PLT learning events / OSS Annual Report / Under-16 abusive relationships / Stalking and Perpetrators bid
-
- 2026 Full DA Needs Assessment
 - 12-month MARAC review



Survivor Voice Ambassadors



Why might they want to be involved? As part of their recovery journey - having their voice heard, wanting to help others, and make changes to services and support for victims and survivors.

How did we engage with victims/survivors? Contacted our DA service partners and DA champions. Captured detailed stories through the DA Research Programme, securely and confidentiality recorded and saved, anonymity preserved.

Who has engaged? 19 survivors are signed up. They are people with a range of intersectionality and protected characteristics including - different ethnicities, gender, ages, health experiences and mobility.

What impact are their voices having – Their voices are embedded throughout our work ensuring it is trauma informed and shaped by lived experiences.

“I think now I've had the help and support to come out the other side. If I just can help save other people from going through it or could signpost them and know that I've done my bit...If I can just help someone else out, then I feel like I'm sort of, you know, it's worthwhile and supporting people.” Ethan

Process steps

Process steps

- **Recruitment:** Through our local DA services / DA Champions network
- **Participant information sheet**
 - About the project
 - Who can take part
 - What is involved
 - Confidentiality
 - How the info will be used
 - Benefits of taking part



Process steps

- **Introductory meeting:** Informal online session to build familiarity, outline previous Ambassador involvement and the process, provide an opportunity for questions, and identify any potential safeguarding or wellbeing considerations.
- Consent statements and presentation shared with them via email.
- **Semi-structured interview:** Conducted in a private, secure space (in-person or online) where Ambassador shares their story, with verbal consent obtained and participant engagement and demographic details recorded.



Process steps

- **Anonymisation and write-up:** Story is anonymised and drafted, then shared back for review to ensure accuracy and approval, with amendments made as needed.
- **Sharing and logging:** Finalised story shared with the DA Projects & Partnerships Team and recorded within the thematic tracking spreadsheet.
- **Participation opportunities:** Relevant opportunities shared with Ambassadors in line with their stated preferences and consent.



Opportunities for involvement



GET HELP

In danger right now?
Call the police: 999

Looking to speak to someone?
Call the helpline: 0808 168 9276

No one should live in fear

Get the right support quickly with the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership

Cover your tracks
EXIT X

I need help

I am worried about someone

I am a practitioner

Not sure if it is abuse?

Is this abuse?
Understand the different signs and behaviours a victim experiences

Is this sexual abuse?
Understand more about what is sexual abuse

GET HELP

In danger right now?
Call the police: 999

Looking to speak to someone?
Call the helpline: 0808 168 9276

Am I being abused?

Find out about the signs of domestic abuse. A healthy relationship shouldn't leave you feeling scared, controlled, put down, or lonely.

Learn more

2.5 years

is the average people in unsafe situations live with abuse before getting help (Safe Lives, 2022)

1 in 5

adults experience domestic abuse in their lifetime (ONS, 2024)

“

There is help out there.

You're not alone. You are not alone. There are massive amounts of support out there, but if you don't know, that's the hardest thing. I've learnt so much from professionals that I never even knew... I highly recommend domestic abuse support services as a starting point and for long-term support too. But there is help out there.

Lilly

What are the victim/survivors expectations?

BASIC

ACCESSIBLE

NOT
INTIMIDATING

SIMPLE

NOT TOO
MUCH TEXT

DIFFICULT TO
TAKE TOO
MUCH INFO

SHORT
SECTIONS,
NOT TOO
WORDY

POSITIVE AND
SUPPORTIVE
CONTENT

Survivor Voice Ambassador - feedback post development

The tone is supportive and easy to understand which is key when your mind is not quite making sense.

I really like:

- the multiple-choice questions on worried about someone page
- the quotes from survivors.
- the clearly spaced-out page and different font sizes and colours. that run through the pages in the same format.



Domestic abuse is not two people who don't get on.

There is a power imbalance in there where one person is at risk from the other person and people use language like the "couple argue". It's not a fight, it's a one sided attack. And people don't get that.

Katrina



Survivor Voice Testimonies



"There is a power imbalance where one person is at risk from the other person. I don't retaliate. It's not a fight, it's a one sided attack."

Katrina is a 45-year-old white British female with one child. She was in a relationship with her now ex-partner for around two years. The abuse started and gradually escalated when she became pregnant and began co-habiting with her ex-partner. He became increasingly controlling and aggressive and was also physically abusive.

Katrina continued to face abuse from her ex-partner after they separated, which included stalking and threats to kill. Despite attempts to get help from the police and social services, Katrina felt they were often dismissive or ineffective in their response. The court system failed to recognise the abuse, and she was ordered to attend mediation multiple times.

While the domestic abuse support services were in some ways helpful to Katrina, she feels they were limited in their ability to provide practical assistance, such as help with legal proceedings.

Katrina



Cover your tracks

EXIT X

Survivor Voices – Social media content



We have created an [easy-to-use calendar](#) with pre-prepared social media content

//

He said there's a good guy and a bad guy - when the bad guy takes over, he can't control the bad guy.



Maeve Rae, Domestic abuse survivor

**There is NO
excuse for abuse**



//

You think 'it's love because he's buying me a kitten'. But every time he got jealous, he'd kick and smack the kitten, or shout at it.



Peace
Domestic abuse survivor

**Domestic abuse
support is available**



//

I just wanted the pain to stop.

I just wanted this constant feeling like a complete failure to **stop**.



Maeve Rae
Domestic abuse survivor

**Domestic abuse
support is available**



Follow us:

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Instagram [@kentmedwaydomesticabuse](#)

LinkedIn [@kentmedwaydomesticabuse](#)

Voices of survivors in the media coverage



- Love Bombing Valentine's Day –
- Coverage: [Valentines 2025 - Google Drive](#)
 - BBC Radio Kent and BBC SE Kent



Kent and Medway's Domestic Abuse services warn of toxic 'love bombing' this Valentine's Day

11 February 2025 | Social Care



Specialist Domestic Abuse Services across Kent are urging people to be aware of toxic behaviour in relationships this Valentine's Day. The signs of domestic abuse are not always visible and seemingly loving gestures can in fact be tactics of coercive and controlling behaviour.

'Love bombing' is a manipulation tactic used by abusers to overwhelm a partner with affection, charm, attention, compliments, and declarations of love to gain power and control over them. The behaviour is intense, excessive, and obsessive – they bombard their partner with messages, gifts, and promises, and seek commitment early in the relationship.

The abuser uses constant communication to create a sense of dependency and trust. Once they've gained their partner's trust, they use emotional manipulation such as gaslighting, humiliation and insults to control what they do, who they see and how they act. This is followed by more gushes of affection, compliments, and gifts. The victim-survivor is left feeling confused, guilty, isolated, and powerless.

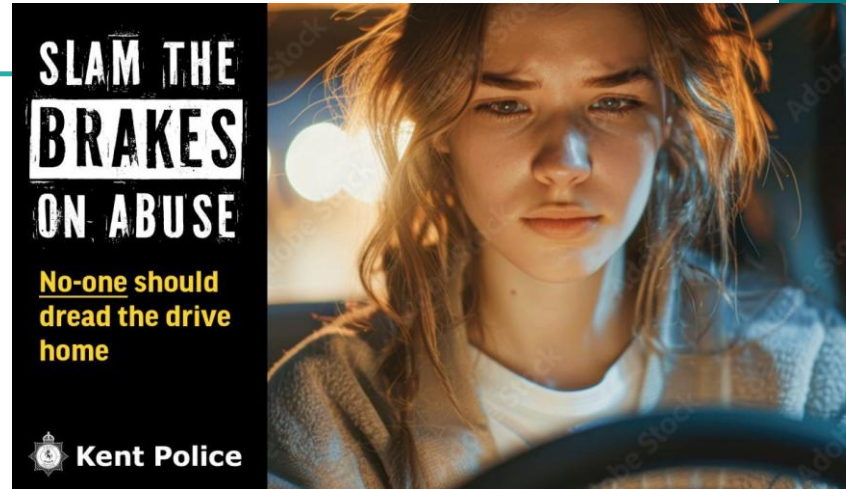
Laura* thought she'd met her perfect partner, until the mask slipped...

Laura thought she'd met her perfect partner, until the mask slipped...

“The beginning of my relationship was amazing I was taken on dates, meals, flowers, talks of future planning, confidence boosting comments, messages. I felt like I had found the perfect man! I could not find fault in his emotional support, his attention, I was blown away by his enthusiasm and passion.”

Influenced work in Kent

- Operation Argus - “Slam on the Brakes” – detailed feedback from survivors
- Housing stories - A focus for Kent Local partnership board



Lilly, Karla and Jane

Lilly
Left abuser in 2017
In abusive relationship for 10 years



Joint council tenancy
Abuser refused to leave
Continued to co-habit after relationship ended

- Alternative housing (refuge) suggested by council **✗**
- Refused reasons**
- Away from support network
- Mental health
- Supported by DA services

Her and child moved in with friend

Karla
Left abuser in 2010
In abusive relationship for 3 years



Joint tenancy
Abuser refused to leave
Continued to co-habit after relationship ended

- Found alternative housing (then landlord sold property)
- Unable to access housing through council
- Offered B&B in another town (refused)
- Moved in with parents
- Moved into temporary accommodation (hostel)

- Alternative housing (refuge) suggested by council **✗**
- Refused reasons**
- Away from support network
- Health issues
- Young child / pregnant

Housed by council (?)

Jane
Left abuser in 2018
In abusive relationship approx. 20 years



Homeowner
Abuser refused to leave
Continued to co-habit after relationship ended

- Did not access DA support services / other housing options

Her and 3 children moved in with her parents

- | SCHEDULE 2 - SPECIFICATION TEMPLATE SERVICES | |
|--|--|
| Kent Integrated Family Domestic Abuse Service SN270275 | |
| <h1>SERVICE SPECIFICATION</h1> | |
| Kent Integrated Family Domestic Abuse Service (KIFDAS) | |
| Contract Number: SN270275 | |

From harm to healing:
rebuilding trust in Britain's
publicly funded institutions

30 June 2025

THE
WayFinders
GROUP

Independent Sexual Violence Adviser & Therapy Feedback

To help shape delivery of services. Please only complete those questions that you feel able to. If you need to access support please contact Victim Support on 0808 168 9276

[Start now](#)

Counter allegations learnings

Domestic abuse – counter allegations The picture in Kent & Medway

DHR / DARDR Webinar – Counter Allegations: Sharing the learnings with
Kent and Medway's frontline practitioners
29th April 2025

Produced by:
Sarah Collins – Analyst Manager (Domestic Abuse Research Programme)
Iona Hunter-Whitehouse – DA Projects & Partnerships lead



Experiences of victims/survivors

Peace

Police
Social services

*"Until I left all of a sudden and then [social services] were involved. He called them. So, when I left, he wrote a letter...a horrific letter 3 pages long **accusing me of everything he'd ever done to me** but switching it that I've been abusing him."*

Lilly

Social services
Courts

*"I think [my child was away for] about three months in the end. I took [my ex-partner] back to court. It's not a quick process. And you **have to have evidence**, which is why **they wrongfully took him**, because **they went on his words**, that I was a **drug addict and things like that**, whereas he had been found by police with drugs in his house whilst he had custody of my child. And nothing of that had been seen. They overlooked that and just went on his word for it. That was tough."*

Ethan

Social services
Courts

*"She was **accusing me of domestic abuse**. She was saying that I was violent. I was aggressive. My barrister turned around and said we've got all the evidence here and he **actually lifted up all the paperwork that I collated**...But the judge then ruled no, this has gone on long enough. [The judge] said, I've seen all the evidence."*

Experiences of victims/survivors

Maeve-Rae

Social services

Court

Police

*"...by the time he applied to court, he also went to social services to say that he **didn't think the children were safe with me because he had been a victim of domestic abuse**. And the social services were able to say, well, **actually we had an investigation back in October and the children are fine**. We've spoken to the children; they're fine in their mother's care. So, they open and shut the case right away. So that was a good thing."*

*"I think **he used the police as if I go there first and discredit her as a witness**, she can't accuse me of other things."*

"[He] went to mediation and family court. That's when he said that I've tried to abduct the children because I went abroad with them without his permission, despite me telling him that I'm going abroad with the children [...] He then contacted the immigration offices and the port authorities and police to say I have abducted the children. That I didn't have his consent."

3



END
DOMESTIC
ABUSE

Kent & Medway

Experiences of primary care

Domestic abuse victim/survivor experiences of primary care

Kent & Medway PLT Safeguarding June 2025

Produced by:
Sarah Collins – Analyst Manager (Domestic Abuse Research Programme)



Karla

- Disclosed abuse to GP after self-harming
- Was not directed to DA support services
- Feels healthcare professionals should be signposting to support

"I wasn't offered anything through the GP. They didn't help at all. The council didn't help, you know. Now, I'm hoping they will give people numbers for support groups and things, but there was nothing. So I went through it all on my own. I didn't have a lot of family and friends to support me. So yeah, I pretty much just dragged myself through it."

"If you go to your GP for help, they should be saying here's a leaflet. Go to these. But they don't [...] all the professionals should be pointing you in the right direction. They can't help you, but they should show you who can. And more people should know. I've mentioned the [DA support service] to a lot of people and they don't even know what it is."

Peace

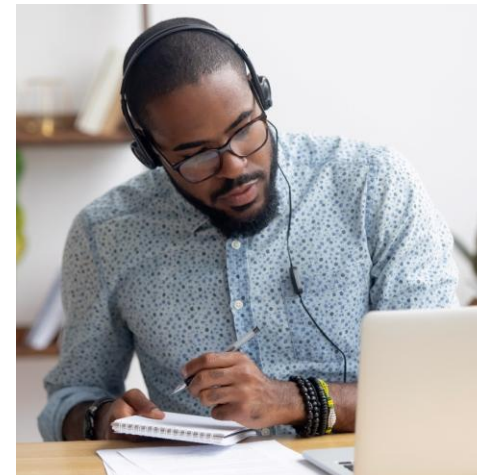
- Abuse escalated when she became pregnant (high risk pregnancy)
- Not allowed to go to medical appointments without her abuser
- Warnings about the dangers of sexual activity during pregnancy
- Repeatedly raped by her abuser leading to many hospitalisations
- First disclosure of abuse to her GP after hospital flagged her repeated attendance at hospital for bleeding
- GP supportive and compassionate



"I was admitted to the hospital lots of times from bleeding because he'd come home and rape me knowing I wasn't supposed to have sex."

"He controlled how I went to appointments. I could only book appointments if he was available so that he'd accompany me because in his head, he convinced himself that every time I'm going to these appointments, I'm going to sleep with this doctor."

"I had that really good GP, very supportive and she said what's going on? You know, you can talk to me. So that's the first time I told someone what was going on."



End Domestic Abuse – Partnership Learning Webinars



This “[End Domestic Abuse](#)” learning webinar series aims to raise DA awareness and help get people to safety as part of our [Know, See, Speak Out](#) campaign.

Economic Abuse

Why don't they just leave? The invisible chains



Training webinar
for practitioners

Tuesday 31 March 10am



Home Fire Safety Visits

In Domestic Abuse Contexts



Training webinar
for practitioners

Thursday 30th April 10am



Cyber Sanctuary

Understanding Technology Facilitated Risks in relation to Domestic Abuse



Training webinar
for practitioners

Tuesday 5th May 10am





Become a Kent Community Domestic Abuse Champion

Expert training to help you break the silence and signpost people to support.



The [Kent Domestic Abuse Champions Programme](#) is open to professionals and community members who want to support survivors, raise awareness, and promote safe, informed responses to domestic abuse.

Free training, expert guidance, and a powerful network.

- Monthly training sessions are available for registrations via Eventbrite.
- 300+ Community Domestic Abuse Champions currently in place.
- Domestic abuse resource packs shared with DA Champions.
- Regular Communities of practice sessions – **Survivor Voice Ambassador** contributions.



Participation review

- **Annual consent review:** 12-month check-in to reconfirm consent and ongoing participation
- A **summary of contributions** to date is shared, along with thanks for their ongoing involvement





Thank you for listening

Any questions?

