



The *DACA* Accreditation Project Year 2 Report

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01. Introduction

The *DACA* Accreditation Project

In 2022, **SafeLives** and **ASSIST** were funded by **the Scottish Government's Victim-Centred Approach Fund** to undertake the **Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy (DACA) Accreditation Project**.

SafeLives is the UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone, for good. SafeLives works with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. SafeLives adopts an approach that listens to survivors, putting their perspective at the centre of all work; uses robust evidence to make decisions; and learns from the expertise of people working frontline.

ASSIST is a specialist independent domestic abuse court advocacy and support service with a focus on reducing risk and improving safety. With services for adults, children and young people, ASSIST was set up as part of Glasgow's Domestic Abuse Court in 2004. Since then, ASSIST has continued to expand and now provides domestic abuse court advocacy in 13 local authority areas across the west and south of Scotland.

SafeLives partnered with ASSIST for this project due to their expert knowledge and frontline expertise and understanding of the role of a specialist court advocacy provider.

The project team is comprised of:

- Gemma Gall, Programme Lead (SafeLives)
- Louise Docherty, Subject Matter Expert (ASSIST)
- Lan Pham, Research Analyst (SafeLives)
- Maddy Austin, Project Administrator (SafeLives)

And has previously comprised of:

- Kirsty Campbell, Programme Lead (SafeLives)
- Stephanie Lammers-Rice, Project Administrator (SafeLives)

Research was also supported by Dr Clare McKeown, Stirling University and SafeLives' Authentic Voice Panel members.⁽¹⁾



⁽¹⁾ SafeLives' Authentic Voice Panel is made up of 10 women from all over Scotland who are survivors of domestic abuse. The panel consult on multiple areas of SafeLives' work and co-create resources

Project Aims and Activities

The strategic aims of the **DACA Accreditation Project** are that:

- All individuals throughout Scotland have the opportunity to access accredited domestic abuse criminal court advocacy services when required
- Clients feel safer, heard and more empowered in the criminal court process in Scotland
- Professionals feel more confident in how to best support victims and survivors of domestic abuse to navigate a complex justice system
- The effectiveness, validity, visibility and consistency of the domestic abuse court advocacy role is increased across Scotland

To work towards meeting these strategic aims, over the course of the funding period the **DACA Accreditation Project** will:

- Create a 'map' of current domestic abuse court advocacy provision in Scotland
- Create national standards for domestic abuse court advocacy in Scotland
- Create an accreditation framework for domestic abuse court advocacy services
- Create and deliver an SQA-accredited training unit on specialist domestic abuse court advocacy
- Mentor new and emerging domestic abuse court advocacy services

Terminology

Clients, complainers, victims and survivors of domestic abuse

How people with lived experience of domestic abuse refer to themselves is deeply personal. In the Scottish legal system, the term 'complainer' is used to refer to "the alleged victim in the charge".⁽²⁾ The use of the word alleged does not signify that the victim/survivor is not believed, but that the case has not at that stage been proven. We recognise that use of legal terminology has been identified as a barrier to engagement by people with lived experience of domestic abuse and these criminal justice processes. We have chosen the term 'client' to create space for people accessing domestic abuse court advocacy services who may not at this stage refer to themselves as victims or survivors of domestic abuse.

Parameters

Early in the project, a number of people with lived experience of domestic abuse and professional stakeholders highlighted the interconnection between domestic abuse, criminal court and civil/family court proceedings. The impact of domestic abuse on children and the lack of specialist court support were also regularly raised. Similarly, the intersection of sexual abuse as a tactic of coercive control was identified as a prevalent factor in specialist court advocacy.

Due to the tight timeline, resourcing and the need to maintain a focus on domestic abuse court advocacy standards for criminal proceedings, the decision was made to set parameters for this work, limiting the focus to domestic abuse and criminal court considerations only, with a primary focus on adult clients – with the possibility of building on this work to incorporate interconnected factors in the future. Rape Crisis Scotland's court advocacy service is well established and it was agreed referrals where the primary charge labelled was sexual in nature, Rape Crisis would – generally – be the most appropriate court advocacy provider.

⁽²⁾ <https://www.scottishsentencingcouncil.org.uk/about-sentencing/jargon-buster?c=C>

02. Standards



Purpose

The Standards have three primary purposes; they are:

- A way to explain domestic abuse court advocacy to the general public, including victims and survivors and professionals
- A way for everyone to know what to expect, at a minimum, from domestic abuse court advocacy services
- The basis for accrediting services

Methodology

The Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Standards have been created by collating evidence gathered from people with lived experience of domestic abuse, engagement with professionals via workshops and individual interviews, and an academic literature review. Guidance and advice was also sought from accrediting bodies in the VAWG sector, including **Respect UK**, **SafeLives** and the Working with Perpetrator programme, as well as accrediting bodies outside the sector, such as Health and Social Care.

It was vital that the standards were robust, justifiable, applicable and accessible to many audiences, including victims and survivors, current and prospective Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy services, and Criminal Justice Partners.

In Year 1 the literature review carried out by Dr Clare McKeown identified broad themes of good practice, and established that there are no analogous Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Standards in the English-speaking world for us to learn what has and has not worked previously.

Through our mapping and scoping exercises in Year 1 we established an understanding of best practice and challenges, and what practitioners in Scotland felt should be the principles that guide the standards. We also identified an existing peer space for managers of Court Advocacy Services, where best practice and challenges were shared.

The expertise of people with lived experience has been a key element of the DACA project from the bid-writing stage and has been especially important in developing the Standards. The team worked with four lived experience groups and interviewed 12 individuals; the experience and expertise shared runs throughout the standards.



Process

Where possible, the project team have triangulated evidence from lived experience, professional experience and from the literature review. As the process continued, it became clear that the team would need to balance inputs from different sources. Throughout the drafting process, the team centred the expertise of people with lived experience, balancing this with the input of professionals as to what was legal and practical. To do this, the team returned several times for more engagement with lived experience groups and managers of domestic abuse court advocacy services.

Towards the finalising of the Standards, the team shared the final draft with 360 people who had been involved at some stage(s) of developing the Standards to gather any final thoughts or comments. In addition, recipients were asked to give 3 words to describe the standards.

Responses included:



<i>Welcomed</i>	<i>Person-centred</i>	<i>Partnership</i>
<i>Accessible</i>	<i>Thorough</i>	<i>Advocacy</i>
<i>Understandable</i>	<i>Calm</i>	<i>Safe</i>
<i>Enabling</i>	<i>Practical</i>	<i>Client-focused</i>
<i>Inclusive</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Succinct</i>
<i>Empowering</i>	<i>Achievable</i>	<i>Comprehensive</i>
<i>Clear</i>	<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Just</i>
<i>Bespoke</i>	<i>Evolving</i>	<i>Detailed</i>
<i>Trauma-Informed</i>	<i>Necessary</i>	<i>Inspirational</i>
<i>Authentic</i>		<i>(Potentially) life-saving</i>



Standards



The Standards are grouped under **7 Principles**:

- Client-worker relationship is a partnership and central to this service
- Client safety is the priority
- The right information is provided at the right time
- Domestic abuse can only be addressed in partnership
- Incorporating clients' expertise is essential to this service
- This service strives to improve the systems that affect clients
- This service understands the impact that domestic abuse and the criminal court can have on parenting

Throughout the Principles, and each of the Standards that are grouped beneath them, we can see the expertise of people with lived experience and professionals. For example, the choice to use 'this service' rather than 'the service' as we may commonly see in other accreditation frameworks and standards, came from a survivor who noted that it isn't always clear which service is being referred to. Other changes came from concerns about practicality or legality, for example 'preparing the client for trial' was challenged as potentially being perceived as interfering with the judicial process or tarnishing evidence.

Launch

On 8th March 2024, International Women's Day, the project team launched the Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Standards. Over 200 people attended the launch, hearing about the development of the Standards and what they will mean to different groups, including victims/survivors, criminal justice agencies and domestic abuse court advocacy services. The event was recorded and is publicly available [here](#).

Co-chaired by **Jessica Denniff (Head of SafeLives Scotland)** and **Lilian Liesveld (Operations Manager, ASSIST)**, attendees heard from the following speakers:

- **Siobhian Brown, Minister for Victims and Community Safety** gave a keynote speech
- **Helen**, a member of the **SafeLives Authentic Voice Panel**, shared her lived experience of the criminal justice system
- **Kirsty Campbell, DACA Lead Year 1** spoke about the process of developing the Standards
- **Louise Docherty, Subject Matter Expert** celebrated the thoughtfulness, time and energy of the many contributors to the DACA work
- **Gemma Gall, DACA Lead Year 2** asked participants to think about what the Standards mean for them
- **Emma Forbes, Lead Procurator Fiscal for domestic abuse**, shared her hopes for how the Standards will improve both individual and institutional advocacy

When asked *"What do the standards mean to you?"* in the launch, responses included:

- Consolidation of best practice across the sector
- Better support for victims/survivors going through the court process. More robust safety planning
- One step towards eradicating the postcode lottery faced by victims across Scotland
- That my survivors feel safe, confident, aware and in control of the process as much as possible. Anyone could be a survivor, this is everyone's issue

The standards have been directly shared with 549 people who had signed up to attend the launch, or who had previously asked to be kept updated. They are now publicly available [here](#).

03. Training

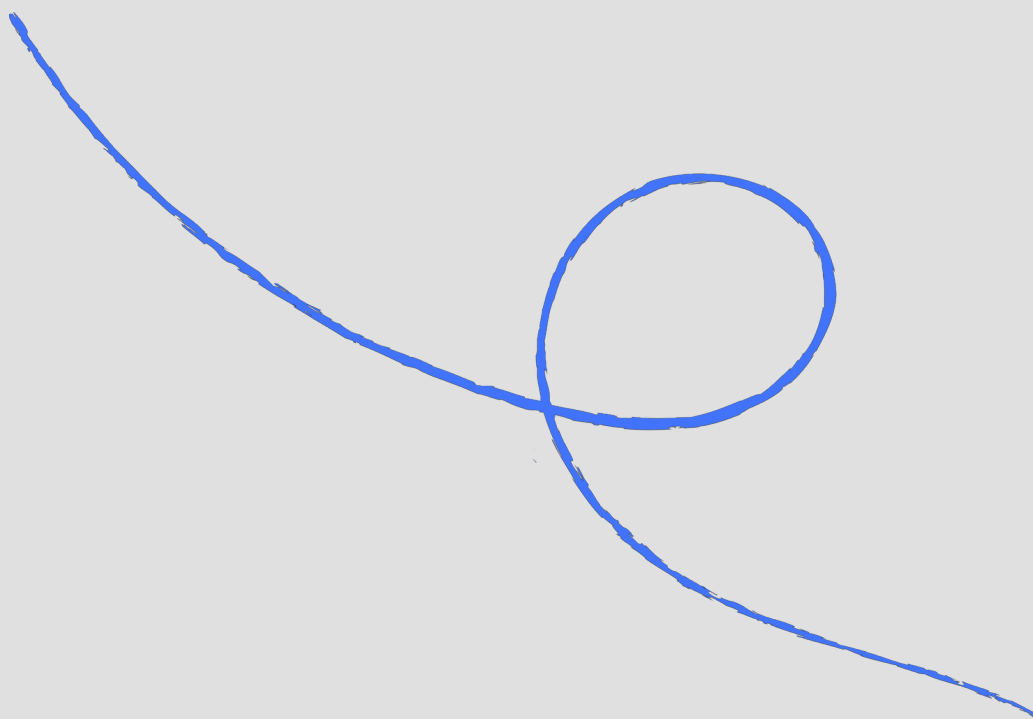
Since 2013, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has accredited Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDAA) training. This has been delivered by a partnership consisting of **ASSIST**, **SafeLives** and **Scottish Women's Aid**. IDAAs are specialist professionals who are involved in risk assessment, safety planning, signposting and referral, and provision of practical and emotional support.

Throughout year 2 the DACA project team have been collaborating with key agencies and individuals to develop an additional specialist module for domestic abuse court advocacy workers. At the end of this period the team had been working with the following agencies for relevant inputs:

- ➔ Police Scotland
- ➔ Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
- ➔ Defence agent
- ➔ Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service
- ➔ Judicial Institute for Scotland
- ➔ Journalist

Scheduled to start in Autumn 2024, the specialist module is suitable for those who have completed the existing 4 blocks of the IDAA Professional Development Award and are either:

- ➔ Working in an existing domestic abuse court advocacy service, or
- ➔ Working in a service which is setting up a domestic abuse court advocacy service



04. Accreditation



In Year 3, we will build on the foundations of the Standards to develop the Accreditation Framework. This will outline the evidence required from services to achieve accreditation. The Standards aim to be an accessible document, therefore the specific evidence points required to meet each Standard will be contained within the Accreditation Framework rather than in the Standards document.

Alongside this, the project team will be recruiting an audit panel who will assess evidence provided by services seeking accreditation.

The team has also met with a number of existing accrediting bodies, including **SafeLives' Leading Lights**, a quality assurance mark for domestic abuse services. This is in recognition that some services may be aiming for both accreditations. As such, the teams involved in both frameworks are committed to aligning these to ensure that services do not need to duplicate work.

05. Mentoring



The project team are keen to hear from areas interested in developing domestic abuse court advocacy and have had conversations with areas and services who have considered expanding their provision. As with developing any new service, there have been barriers, including access to funding.



06. Evaluation

In Year 2 the project's Research Analyst Lan Pham has developed an Evaluation Framework. This is split into four parts, which covers the areas of focus for the project.

Area of focus for the project

Outcome

