

Organisation: IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Services)

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IDAS is the largest specialist organisation in Yorkshire, providing support for anyone who is, or has been, subject to domestic abuse or sexual violence.

IDAS takes a multi-agency, whole family approach to support and we have developed a number of strength-based, trauma informed services that both empower individuals and support families to build on their unique assets.

Our recently developed DAWFA (Domestic Abuse Whole Family Approach) project uses this model by directly supporting children and young people impacted by domestic abuse, whilst working with the non-abusive parent and wider family members or support networks to help families recover from the trauma of abuse, develop resilience, and re-build their lives.

Abused parents have often been undermined by their abuser and this can affect their ability to parent effectively. Our practitioners encourage parents to see what they are doing right, rather than what they may have been told that they have “failed” to do.

Specialist Children’s Workers and Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors (IDVAs) work together to address the inter-connecting issues faced by children, young people, and their parent or carer. The Specialist Children’s Worker also acts as “Lead Professional” to ensure that there is a co-ordinated, multi-agency response to support planning. The project also has a research element, which considers local, national, and international models of multi-agency working to support all family members, alongside listening to the voices of children and adults who have used IDAS and other support services locally. Our findings will be shared with partners and commissioners in a report due to be published in Autumn 2022 and used to inform future commissioning decisions in North Yorkshire.

Our sexual violence service works with victims and survivors of sexual violence or abuse, regardless of the length of time ago the abuse occurred, or whether the person wishes to report it to the Police. Our Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) work with clients of all ages. When supporting younger children, the ISVA works in partnership with parents or carers to help them support their child. ISVAs advocate on behalf of clients, making sure their voice is heard and they are involved with making any decision that affects their life. They also walk alongside clients through the criminal justice process, ensuring that they understand exactly what and why things are happening at every stage.

Sexual violence has a devastating impact on individuals and families, affecting many areas of a victim’s life, so we take a holistic approach to support, considering the wider determinants of healing, including previous trauma, poverty, gender identity issues, isolation, and mental and physical ill health. ISVAs encourage clients to self- assess where they feel they are in 10 areas of potential need, and a support plan is agreed based on this. Our aim is to empower people to set and achieve their goals. Many clients feel let down by others; they often feel judged and not believed. The ISVA works from a position of believing the client. They demonstrate compassion and understanding and encourage clients to disclose as little or as much information as they feel comfortable doing. The ISVA never asks “Why didn’t you” or say “You should have”, rather they educate around “Why you did”, dispelling

myths and stereotypes about who and why people are sexually assaulted and helping them to understand the often confusing responses to fear.

ISVAs emphasise to their clients that they did not choose what happened to them. This can be difficult for some people, like S. She was systematically groomed by her PE teacher for 3 years before he sexually assaulted her at the age of 15. S reported the abuse as an adult about the time she had a daughter coming up to her 15th birthday. Her daughter reaching the same age as S when she had been assaulted triggered S's re-traumatisation, and she began to struggle in many aspects of her life. She had previously used her work and keeping busy as a means to cope, but suddenly struggled with work and with relationships, including with those she loved most. She told the ISVA that she had enjoyed the attention from her teacher so, although her head told her that she had been a victim, she felt guilty about her body betraying her and feeling pleasure from the experience. The ISVA worked with S to understand and forgive her 15-year-old self. S began to write a journal from the perspective of that child which really helped her to recognise that she had done nothing wrong. There were many barriers to overcome for S. The grooming and assaults had taken place prior to the 2003 Sexual Offences Act when having sex with someone under the age of 16 was not considered to be a crime. Together with her enjoyment of the attention, this confirmed S's assumption that she was to blame. The grooming and assaults had also taken place in another county, so the ISVA liaised with 2 Police forces to coordinate the communication prior to the trial. She also arranged for a pre-trial visit with a local ISVA working in the county where the trial took place, still maintaining contact every day throughout the trial. The outcome of the trial was not what S had hoped for, and she continued to receive support afterwards to help her deal with this. The ISVA is currently supporting S with a Victim's Right to Review. Despite this, S has become an active champion and advocate of the work IDAS does and we are incredibly proud of her strength and determination. The following are S's words:

"For the majority of the 3.5 years Sam was my IDAS support. What I valued most was the inclusive, safe, non-judgemental space she consistently provided. Whatever state I arrived in, I left in a far better place. Sam listened and she would sit with me in silence as my emotion came out. She offered differing perspectives, asked supportive questions and as the relationship developed, she was able to hold a mirror up to me and highlight beliefs or persistent patterns that were holding me back. We would discuss possible things I could do that may help combat these. When I questioned why I was sticking with it when everything felt so hard, she gently reminded me of what I said I wanted and what was important to me and checked to see whether that had changed. This skilful ability to ground me back to the purpose of 'finding my voice' was so empowering.

She calmly talked me through the process, system or procedure, not to excuse the behaviour or response of other services, but to help me understand why they did what they did. This really helped. She also suggested things that enabled me to understand the importance of self-care and self-compassion that have now become part of my regular routine. Sam regularly reminded me of just how far I had come

In a process that leaves you feeling completely vulnerable and out of control, Sam really was my guardian angel. I am not sure whether I would have continued searching for justice without her walking beside me every step of the way."

In 2020 an independent audit was carried out in the Diocese of York on past cases of faith abuse, and over the following 18 months IDAS were part of a small multi-agency panel, dip

sampling cases to ensure that the audit had been thoroughly carried out and all appropriate actions taken. In early 2022 the findings within the York Dioceses were published and we were involved with developing an action plan alongside Clergy and Diocesan Safeguarding Officers (DSOs). This has included IDAS providing training events for officers of the church to recognize and respond appropriately to disclosures of domestic and sexual abuse and violence, providing inputs for the Diocese Safeguarding Week, and our Lead ISVA attending the Survivor Voice Working Group to support and advocate on behalf of survivors of abuse. As a result of this work, we have been commissioned by the York Diocese to provide independent support to victims and survivors of faith abuse. So that our ISVAs are fully equipped, they have already attended training with the DSO on the Practice Guidance to Responding to Serious Safeguarding Situations Related to Church Officers and we are proud to have launched the new service in August 2022.