

# Being a domestic abuse innovations officer

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## Shift in the life of... a domestic abuse innovations officer in Durham Constabulary's Safeguarding Team

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Arriving at Darlington Police Station, I check the arrest list to see if there have been any incidents overnight concerning my clients. I'm not a police officer – I'm employed within Durham Constabulary's Safeguarding Team to support medium-risk victims of domestic abuse. Other team members focus on the perpetrators. One of my clients has been arrested, so I have a quick chat with her to find out what's happened and how we can help her when she gets out of custody.

I head back to the office, where an investigating officer asks me to support a victim who is coming in to make a statement for a new investigation. The victim is distressed and needs a cup of tea, so I calm her down and try to reassure her. I sit with her as she makes her statement, then I take her home. On the way, we discuss some support she can access.

Next, I return to the office to review the latest medium-risk safeguarding reports and look for opportunities to make follow-up calls or visits. I move on to review a case that has been referred to our Multi Agency Tasking & Coordination Scheme (MATAC) and I phone our domestic abuse navigator to discuss how we can support the victim and perpetrator, who want to stay together. We agree to do a joint visit to try to reduce the amount of callouts, by identifying triggers for any key issues to signpost both parties to support service. This will be dependent on their agreement and engagement.

I also visit the victim of a medium-risk stalking case, which seems to be escalating. The perpetrator has recently moved house to be close to her and I am concerned that he is able to watch and monitor her from his address. We decide on several options, including a referral to counselling and target hardening. I also encourage her to go to the housing office to discuss relocation. I help her find a solicitor for obtaining a non-molestation order and I offer to help with the paperwork if she can't afford legal advice. I then write to the housing provider with a letter of support for a house move to protect her from further harassment.

My next appointment is a home visit with a client to deliver a SmartWater spray that she can keep in her pocket or handbag. SmartWater has a unique DNA reference and doesn't wash off skin or clothing. When a perpetrator is brought into custody, they can be scanned under a UV light to prove their presence near the victim. In this case, the perpetrator has tried to breach a non-molestation order by coming to the victim's house. I put some SmartWater grease around the fencing and I place notices in the windows as a deterrent. She has been feeling anxious since reporting the breach but this helps her to feel a bit safer.

After lunch, I go to deliver a Claire's Law disclosure with an officer, as I'm not sure about the situation I'll be walking into. We deliver the disclosure and I offer support and advice. The woman we're visiting says that she knows most of the information already and that he hasn't been like that with her. I reassure her that we are there to help and tell her about red flags to look out for. She takes my details in case she wants to contact me later, when she's had the chance to digest what we've told her.

My last visit of the day is with a woman who has been the victim of a nasty assault. She lets me in and we talk about keeping herself safe, as the perpetrator had been released on bail conditions. We discuss changing her routines and the routes she takes, either to work or the supermarket, to avoid chance meetings that might put her at risk. She doesn't have any money left, as the perpetrator has cleared the bank account, so I visit the food bank to fetch her some basic supplies.

I'm always part of any conversation about incidents and ongoing cases, and I often overhear things that will be coming my way. I really enjoy my job – sometimes I get so involved in these discussions that I have to remind myself to go home!

- This article was peer reviewed by Police Community Support Officer Stacey Croxton, Hampshire Constabulary

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