

Safe at Home – partnership with local libraries

Providing information and resources in a safe environment to help and support victims of domestic abuse.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2021
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Children and young people Families General public Victims
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Aim

The safe at home initiative aims to:

- create a supportive and safe environment within libraries where individuals affected by domestic abuse can find help and resources without fear of surveillance or judgement
- ensure that victims, and survivors can discreetly and safely access vital information and support services on library computers, without the risk of detection by perpetrators.
- equip library staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognise signs of domestic abuse, to provide appropriate support and information to the those affected
- enrich the library's collection of domestic abuse support materials, ensuring users have access to a diverse and easily accessible range of resources

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- increase victims' feelings of safety
- improve the confidential access to information
- increase the use of library resources
- improve staff competency

- enhance the support for those affected by domestic abuse
- increase the range of library resources
- increase awareness and education for staff

Description

Hampshire Constabulary, in partnership with Hampshire Libraries, and the charity [Stop Domestic Abuse](#) have launched a Safe at Home campaign. The campaign intends to provide a secure and discreet set of resources for people who have experienced domestic abuse, and their friends and family.

The campaign includes the following strategies to empower those affected by domestic abuse.

- Recognising that many perpetrators of domestic abuse monitor the online activity of domestic abuse victims, Hampshire Libraries actively promote the use of library computers as a safe and confidential way for people who experience domestic abuse to seek help. A desktop icon featuring the safe at home logo has been placed on all computers within the library. This icon serves as a gateway to the Hampshire Domestic Abuse Partnership websites, with resources and support services for domestic abuse. By accessing these computers, survivors can discretely explore information, connect with support networks, and access vital resources without fear of surveillance.
- Training of library staff is a crucial part of the campaign. Hampshire Libraries collaborated with Stop Domestic Abuse to create and deliver a free and bespoke training package to library staff. The training was conducted over two sessions which lasted two hours each on Microsoft Teams, with 20 attendees per session.

Training

The training covered:

- understanding domestic abuse
- recognising the signs of domestic abuse
- initiating and handling conversations safely
- managing disclosures

- making referrals
- safeguarding, and providing additional support and aftercare.

Alongside the training, a Microsoft Teams channel was also created for trained staff to share experiences.

- The library stock was reviewed and expanded with a £1000 investment to include more domestic abuse support material, such as memoirs and poetry. Memoirs and poetry were recognised as important for the validation of domestic abuse survivors and victims, of not feeling alone. In addition, these narratives help foster awareness and understanding about the realities of domestic abuse for friends and families. The popularity of this stock led to the purchase of additional materials for teens and children.
- Supportive materials were produced, including bookmarks for teenagers, children and adults, mouse mats, posters, bookshelf markers and a book stamp. Posters were placed in key locations such as toilets and lifts. Mouse mats, shelf markers, and QR code graphics were created to subtly raise awareness and support the initiative. This includes contact information for a national domestic abuse helpline number.

Balancing accessibility and confidentiality

A key theme across the initiative has been how to provide access to domestic abuse resources, library stock and other support materials in a way that balances accessibility with confidentiality. In terms of providing information on support materials in a way that is both confidential and accessible, this has included providing a broader set of resources for support, such as mental and physical health resources under a slogan of 'self-care' which is seen as more discreet.

Similarly, shelving labels emphasising self-care rather than domestic violence have been used to guide users to the domestic abuse related stock. Book stamps with the 'Hampshire Domestic Abuse Advice Line for Victims' have also been applied to the inside front and back of all domestic abuse related stock.

Library sites were visited by police officers who offered advice on:

- repositioning computers to enable discreet browsing
- updating lone working procedures to support library staff members for domestic abuse disclosures
- updating information for when library staff should ring the police.

Neighbourhood officers are also encouraged to attend their local libraries on a regular basis as part of their engagement strategy.

Funding and support

Funding for the initiative was secured from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, enabling the purchase of additional domestic abuse resources, including book stamps, mouse mats, shelf markers, as well as the printing of posters, bookmarks, reading lists, and graphic designs for marketing materials.

The funding also covered backfill for library staff while they attended training sessions, ensuring the initiative was implemented smoothly without disrupting the day-to-day operations of the libraries.

Evaluation

Feedback from library staff regarding the training provided by Stop Domestic Abuse was collected through pre- and post-training surveys conducted via Microsoft Forms.

Additionally, several key performance metrics are used to assess the effectiveness of the initiative and the usage of domestic abuse resources. There were different metrics gathered.

- A record of which libraries currently hold domestic abuse-related materials.
- The number of visitors per month to libraries that offer domestic abuse stock.
- Monthly statistics on the number of people using library computers in each library, specifically in those holding domestic stock.
- The number of domestic abuse-related books available in each Domestic Abuse Hub library, listed by title.
- A list of domestic abuse books available online, categorised by title.
- Monthly in-person domestic abuse book borrowing.
- The number of domestic abuse books borrowed in person each month, including details on the specific library and title.

- The number of people on waiting lists for domestic abuse materials each month, organised by title.
- The total number of library staff trained, along with their specific library location.
- Feedback on the training program gathered from staff, including pre- and post-training evaluations.
- Details of refresher training sessions, including dates, the number of staff trained, and the locations of the training.
- Collection of case studies that highlight successes and learning points from the initiative, providing valuable insights into its impact.
- Data on the number of domestic abuse disclosures or requests for help made in the libraries, including any information that can be shared such as the date, library location, method of disclosure, and demographic details of the individuals seeking help.

Overall impact

Between February 2021 and January 2022, 84 library staff were trained to handle disclosures of domestic abuse as part of the safe at home campaign. The programme has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff, with 100% of attendees reporting increased confidence in engaging with individuals who disclose domestic abuse.

The training has also enabled staff to recognise signs of abusive relationships, not only within their professional roles but among friends and family.

Informal feedback

Library users have provided informal feedback, including heartfelt notes of thanks left inside books, highlighting the meaningful impact of the initiative. Due to its perceived success, the campaign has expanded to more libraries across Hampshire, beyond the initial two pilot sites.

Borrowing records for domestic abuse-related materials from February to December 2021 show:

- 119 physical stock loans

- 472 eBook loans
- 369 eAudiobook loans

Learning

- Hampshire Constabulary's collaboration with Hampshire Libraries and Stop Domestic Abuse highlights the importance of partnership working with local domestic abuse services, law enforcement, and community groups. These partnerships offer expertise and access to established support networks. Identifying key stakeholders early ensures a broad range of resources (legal, healthcare, and emotional support) are available. Partnerships can also aid in staff training and provide up to date materials for victims and their supporters.
- Creating safe, confidential spaces is essential for supporting individuals affected by domestic abuse. Organisations should ensure private areas are available where victims can seek help without fear of being monitored. Offering untraceable access to online resources is a key component; for instance, using a desktop icon linking to domestic abuse support. Organisations can similarly provide anonymous digital access to help. Additionally, positioning computers for privacy and designing discreet consultation areas for in-person support can enhance victims' sense of security.
- Comprehensive training for staff is essential. The Safe at Home campaign provides a strong example, offering library staff a bespoke training package covering how to recognise signs of abuse, manage disclosures, and provide aftercare. Organisations should consider creating a similar structured training programme, tailored to their staff's needs with input from domestic abuse professionals. Additionally, training should focus on how to handle conversations with victims sensitively and how to direct individuals to appropriate resources. Regular refresher sessions should also be part of the plan to ensure staff remain confident and knowledgeable in this sensitive area.
- Planning and delivering Safe at Home requires careful consideration of funding. The Hampshire Libraries programme received financial support from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, which allowed for the expansion of stock, production of promotional materials, and training for staff. Organisations should explore diverse funding sources. Particular diligence should be paid to ongoing backfill of staff during training, to ensure regular operations are not disrupted.

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Tags

Domestic abuse Domestic violence Community engagement