

COVID-19- GUIDANCE NOTES FOR CALEDONIAN SYSTEM MANAGERS

Issue 2.0 - 27 March 2020

Background

Evidence on the impact of the virus and official responses to it on domestic abuse remains at an early stage. There is limited evidence from most affected countries because social distancing and lockdown measures have only recently begun. However in affected provinces of China police reports show domestic abuse tripled during the epidemic. Australian colleagues have noted an increase in calls to the men's referral service from men worried about their behaviour (and this added to the spike they had already experienced as a result of the bush fires)

<https://www.ntv.org.au/responding-to-community-trauma-and-family-violence-after-natural-disasters/>

From our contact with Caledonian managers we have not yet noted a significant increase in abuse related to Covid or lockdown in Scotland, although there have been some incidents such as a man warning his partner she can't expect the police to respond quickly anymore. We are also aware that a number of women who had been classified as passive cases have renewed contact with women's services because they feel they are more at risk and because their opportunity to access support from family and friends is so reduced. It is reasonable to assume this will increase and it is important we monitor this.

Everything is moving so fast and we know that some of what we suggested last week has been overtaken by events or changes in government advice and local responses. This updated guidance is written after receiving lots of information from Caledonian managers around the country both about issues they are facing and solutions they are working with. We include some of these practice tips – thank you to all. We have also accessed tips and guidance from SafeLives and the Safe and Together Institute. One thing that has clearly changed in a week is that the distinction between those self-isolating because of underlying health conditions or contact with an affected person and those working “normally” has largely disappeared as so many of us – despite our key worker status - are working from home. However we have decided to leave last week's guidance available, as much of it remains relevant.

As with the first issue this guidance is intended to assist Caledonian operational and system managers to reach decisions on how to prioritise cases and workload with due regard to risk and vulnerability.

This situation is constantly evolving and the Central Caledonian Team will continue to update all Caledonian managers by occasional phone calls, email and ongoing versions of these guidance notes. Gill McKinna and I are available to discuss any

concerns as they arise. Astrid Shearer remains available to discuss data issues. You can phone us and we are also available via Skype or Zoom for face to face contact.

Summary of different staffing situations in Caledonian areas

Almost all women's and children's workers are working from home and having only phone contact with women. All groupwork is cancelled. Case managers are mostly combining work from home with some office based days. Some areas have pulled Caledonian workers into a duty rota within the CJ team, not necessarily working on Caledonian or domestic abuse cases. Programmed 1:1 work is also almost entirely stopped but a couple of areas are doing some activities over the phone which could be seen to be reducing men's risk. Some areas are still doing some very limited office appointments with men they have identified as being particularly high risk. One area is doing so explicitly to ensure that there is a time when the women's service can contact the woman safely.

Most areas have developed their own system of auditing and reviewing whole caseloads to ensure that those cases where there is the highest risk to women and their children are prioritised. One area is using Skype for group supervision.

Managing Impacts on Capacity and Accessibility

In considering how to respond to increasing demand, reduced staffing capacity, lockdown and social distancing you may wish to consider the following points in relation to the Caledonian Programme.

New referrals for reports/assessments

Much of the guidance in last week's document remains relevant, particularly the emphasis on prioritising high risk / high vulnerability cases. However the decision by the Scottish Courts and tribunals service to close some courts, cancel jury trials, prioritise solemn courts and prioritise high risk domestic abuse cases means that most of this prioritising work is being done for us. As the number of report requests you receive reduces they are proportionately more likely to be very high risk and therefore must be completed.

Guidance on how to use SARAv3 and undertake and structure contact with women remains the same as in last week's document. However it is important to note that with the need to reduce pressure on prisons and reduce the numbers of men on remand, more men are being released on undertaking pending reports. This has implications for our initial consultation with women and initial safety planning. We may also not get adequate notification of release, so please review your contact with the advocacy service if such a service exists in your area or with Victim Information and Advice (VIA) if not.

Helpful feedback from Caledonian areas

- One area has agreed with their court that domestic abuse reports need an eight week deferment.

- One area has developed a practice of suggesting structured deferred sentences with weekly phone contact with the man with a view to completing a full assessment in time. If doing this it is vital that you offer the women the same level of support as she would have had if he were on the programme.
- One court has started to say that they do not expect any new CPOs to start till the 1st July at the earliest.

Points to consider when undertaking men's assessment interviews:

- It is assumed that during the period of lockdown the normal practice will be to conduct assessment interviews by phone
- When explaining the assessment process to a man it is particularly important that you state that an attempt will be made to contact his partner. This will minimise risk to her if he is present in the house or monitoring her calls.
- If undertaking face to face assessments with men on remand check whether prisons able to provide interview arrangements that allow for social distancing.

Points to consider when undertaking partner consultation interviews:

- When doing the partner consultation, even if there are special bail conditions remember to ask questions in such a way as to minimise service generated risks to the woman. Don't assume the man is not there or that he has not got a way of listening in to her calls. Be aware of how what you say might be heard by the man. Explain why you are calling and ask if it is a good, safe time to talk. If she says no advise that you will call her again and tell her what time. If she is unable to talk at the second call ask her if she would like you to call again. If she says no provide her with the number of the women's aid helpline and follow this up with a text message after your call. If you have significant concerns about her safety, share this concerns with your local police hub.
- Check with your emergency out of hours social service so that you can advise what a woman could expect if she needs to contact them.

New or existing orders - working with women

- It is assumed that ongoing contact for support and safety planning will be by phone. Video contact (using Whatsapp, Facetime, Skype) can be very supportive for women who are isolated in their homes with much reduced contact with family and friends and can be considered for workers who are still working from an office base However our strong advice is that you should not use video calling if working from your own home. The impact on workers of blurring the lines between their own homes and families could increase the risk of vicarious trauma.
- When calling don't assume the man is not there. If you know the woman, you are likely already to have some system for checking out if it is safe. In any case it is best to start every call with the question "is this a safe time to call?" Use the opportunity in any call when you are confident that he is not present or able to listen in to establish realistic code words for future safe contact.

- Remember that if the perpetrator is checking her phone, a woman may be abused if she erases her call logs, text messages, or browser history.
- Suggest that she saves your phone number under a pseudonym e.g. as the health visitor, their manager, a friend.
- Ensure that you maintain very regular client liaison meetings by phone or Skype. Record them as usual using your normal headings but include a separate heading related to Covid-19 or lockdown related risks.
- Review safety plans with each woman.
- Contact the named person if this role exists in your area and in all child protection cases contact the lead professional to update them on your assessment of risk and vulnerability risk and relevant details of her safety plan. Be transparent with the woman that you are doing this.
- If you notice decreased contact from a woman, do not assume that it is by their own choice.

Helpful feedback from Caledonian areas

- One area has developed a practice whereby if there are significant concerns about a woman's safety, the man will be instructed to come into the office to meet with management as part of 'routine' order management. This gives the women's worker the space to speak with the woman freely on the phone..
- Keep a word document of contact details in case access to your social work system is unavailable.
- One area has agreed to very limited face to face contact with women in high vulnerability cases, cleared through seniors
- One area has issued the standard "passive" women letters to all women, even if they were not due to receive on at this point, with an insertion to say it is because of Covid-19 and possible uncertainties over staffing. If a man sees it he is more likely to see it as routine enquiry.
- One area is blurring the lines between women who are Caledonian cases and clients of the their linked domestic abuse team. They are receiving and responding to a list of high risk women from the police.

Guidance on a helpful approach from Safe and Together

"Partnering with a survivor in these circumstances means understanding her evolving hopes and fears in this fast-moving situation. She may be wanting to have more contact with a current or former abusive partner because he is the father of her children, and she doesn't want to deny him contact during this emotionally difficult time. Her partner may also be able to provide more practical support during this time of crisis. As always, do not project your priorities and values on to survivors. Just as you, as a practitioner, have been making new choices and adapting quickly, understand that survivors are doing the same thing. Use the same process of partnering as before:

- Validate the perpetrator's responsibility for his choices;
- Ask about his pattern of behaviour;
- Assess her protective efforts using a holistic lens;
- Validate her concerns and strengths;

- Collaboratively plan with her; and
- Safely document those interactions.”

New and existing cases - working with men

- It is assumed that, except in some very limited circumstances with high risk men, contact will be by phone.
- Consider the use of video calling, but as with contact with women described above, only if working from an office base, not from home.
- As we said in the first issue of guidance, programmed work is less important than risk management and safety planning with women. However there are some aspects of the work which do relate directly to reducing the man’s risk and which could very usefully be undertaken during the crisis. We are working on a Covid-19 version of the 1:1 manual which will specify sessions which can be undertaken over the phone and which can be seen to relate directly to reducing the man’s risk. These include work on self calming, self care, positive self talk, alcohol and positive fathering in the context of the crisis. The manual will be available next week.
- Be particularly aware that the stress men may be experiencing in the current crisis heightens the risk of suicidal thoughts as well as raise the risk they present to women and children.
- Be aware that where the man is homeless, he may use coercion to re-establish the relationship or request temporary housing with woman. Discuss with housing colleagues what options are available for alternative accommodation.

Helpful feedback from Caledonian areas

- One area is continuing with face to face contact in the office with some high risk men so that woman can safely be contacted
- In one area the programme delivery team workers are taking over the bulk of the 1:1 phone work with men

Guidance on a helpful approach from Safe and Together

As a thought experiment, to help you think critically and clearly, ask yourself how a domestic abuse perpetrator, who was owning or claiming responsibility for his behaviour, would act in this context. For example, you want him to continue to remember that COVID-19 doesn’t wipe the slate clean or require his partner to suddenly trust him. We would want a perpetrator who is changing his behaviour to act differently than he would’ve in the past, be understanding of his partner’s needs, and to continue to work to build trust back (where that’s possible). It’s reasonable to expect all this even now..

Work around children

- Be particularly aware of cases in which there are formal or informal child contact arrangements. Be aware that the man may use the lockdown to increase control or punish his partner, by refusing to return the child or insisting he picks them up especially if access centres are not available. He may state that the children must self-isolate with him for 2 weeks, as a means of controlling his (ex) partner. Address this in both work with the man and in safety planning with the woman. Advise the woman that in any circumstance where she is concerned about child contact arrangements that she should seek legal advice.

Central Caledonian Team Contact Details

Rory.Macrae@communityjustice.scot

Gill.Mckinna@communityjustice.scot

Astrid.Shearer@falkirk.gov.uk (for data questions)

Rory Macrae and Gill McKinna

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