



# **WOMEN WITH COMPLEX NEEDS**

---

Good Practice Guidelines and Pathways for  
**SUBSTANCE MISUSE AGENCIES** working with  
domestic violence

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

## PURPOSE OF GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

This guidance seeks to increase the safety of women and children experiencing domestic violence through:

- Promoting a shared understanding of the effect of domestic violence upon women's mental health and problematic substance misuse.
- Supporting staff working in drug, alcohol, mental health and domestic violence services to understand the issues outside their own areas of expertise and work in partnership.
- Promoting collaborative and integrated approaches and clear pathways through our services for women and mothers with complex needs.
- Addressing inequalities in access to services.
- Improving health and social outcomes for women and their children.

## USING THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The following good practice guidance and flowcharts provide evidentially based support to practitioners in each of the sectors in an easy to follow do's and don'ts format. They are designed to sit alongside organisational policies and procedures which will undoubtedly offer more detailed instruction, particularly where safeguarding concerns arise.

# GOOD PRACTICE FOR DRUG & ALCOHOL PRACTITIONERS

## WORKING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling and abusive behaviour by one person over their partner/ family members. It will rarely be one isolated incident and the abuse usually increases in incidence and intensity over time.

Explaining what domestic violence is can help your client to acknowledge that this is what is happening to her: consider the particular forms it takes for her, how it affects the mental and physical health of the woman and her children, and how it may be related to her use of drugs and/ or alcohol.

## DO

---


### GENERAL

- Ensure that the environment has visual information about domestic violence, for instance posters, leaflets,
- Access training on domestic violence.

### AT ASSESSMENT

- Ensure that for at least part of the assessment women are seen on their own and given time to share.
- Ask all clients about their experiences of domestic violence at assessment – this must only be done if the woman is alone. Please refer to the definition above to ensure she knows what is meant by 'domestic violence'.
- Explain to women why we are asking the question, for instance "Evidence tells us many women using drugs and/ or alcohol will be or will have experienced domestic violence. The use of substances can be a coping mechanism or they can be part of the abuse."



- 
- Remember that women will have many reasons not to disclose the abuse when first asked, for instance they are worried about their children being removed (this may be what the perpetrator has told them); they are frightened that if the perpetrator finds out they have discussed the abuse their safety will be further compromised; they may feel shame and embarrassment.
  - Listen to her. She will give you information about the risk and remember: her substance use can reduce her ability to keep herself safe and her safety must be the immediate priority.
  - Even if the woman doesn't disclose at assessment, return to this at appropriate times when offering treatment, for instance at reviews or if any particular concerns are raised.
  - If domestic violence is disclosed, reinforce confidentiality, the limitations to this and where the information will be stored.
  - If domestic violence is disclosed always believe her.
  - If domestic violence is disclosed, discuss what the woman wants to do and ensure she is aware of her options.
  - Offer to support her in contacting a specialist domestic violence service if she would like to.
  - Reinforce that the abuse is not her fault and that the abuser is responsible for their actions and responses.
  - Remember that domestic violence is about power and control so ensure that any interventions/ treatment offered are about empowering and supporting her to make her own choices - ensure, as far as possible, that she is in control of what actions are taken.
  - Ensure it is agreed who gets a copy of the treatment plan, especially if the abuser is identified as the carer.
  - Document any disclosure clearly in her notes - this will validate what she has told you and may be useful if she pursues criminal or civil action.

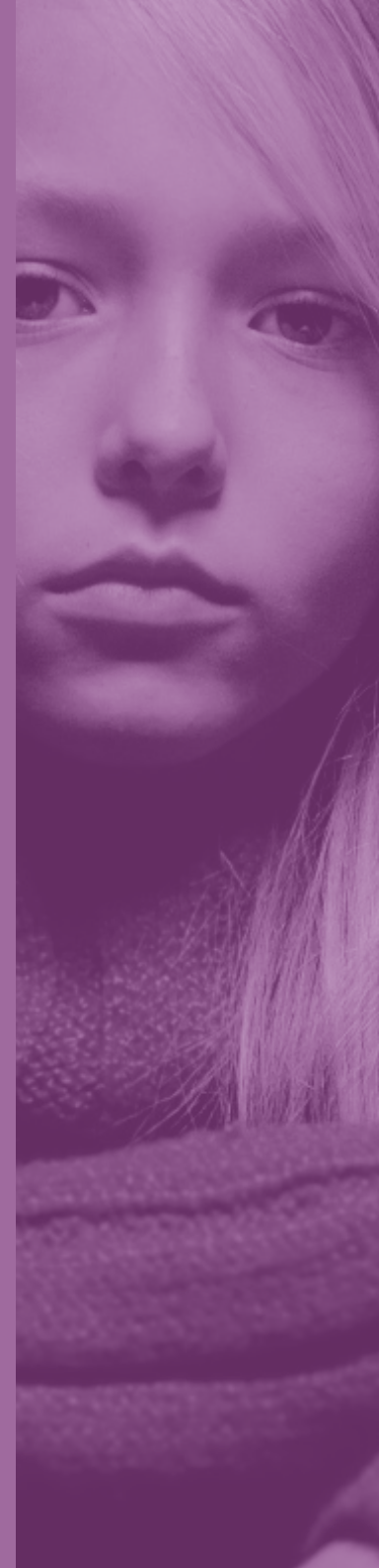
- Make contact with local specialist domestic violence services and discuss how you can work together and share expertise in supporting women accessing either service.


#### **CHILDREN**

- Always establish if children are involved in the family - If you identify that children are at risk from domestic violence, remember there is a clear link between domestic violence and child abuse and support the woman in ways she can protect her children.
- Always inform the woman if you need to make a child protection referral and explain your reasons, unless telling her will increase risk to the child.
- If the threat to the wellbeing of the children does not meet the threshold for child protection referral(s), consider other interventions that will support the family, such as CAF (Common Assessment Framework); discuss with safeguarding lead if you are unsure.

#### **RISK**

- If domestic violence is disclosed, carry out a specific risk assessment in conjunction with the woman: explore risk to her from her partner, herself, any other family members and any risk posed from engaging with any professional agency.
- Your risk assessment could include the following:
  - Is she afraid now? Is she afraid to go home after your consultation? Does she fear physical injury to herself, the children, other family members or pets?
  - Is she having suicidal thought, considering taking actions to end her life or harm herself in any way? Would her actions directly or indirectly harm the children?
  - Does she have concerns about contacting a specialist DV agency? Does she feel they will not treat her with respect, or is she afraid her abuser is more likely to find out?
  - Does she have concerns about contacting the police in an emergency? Does she feel they will not treat her with respect? Does she think they will remove her from the house?



- 
- Does she have concerns about contacting social services? Does she feel they will not treat her with respect? Does she think they will take her children into care?
  - Is she afraid that acknowledging either her mental health needs and/ or the abuse will bring 'shame' on her family? Does she fear family- or community-based violence?
  - Is she afraid her family will force her into marriage?
- Use your knowledge and information of other services to demonstrate how she (and any children) can be supported and reassure her that you will work alongside them to support her.
  - Remember, two women a week still die at the hands of a current or former partner.
  - Help her to develop a safety plan/ risk management plan.
  - Include this in her treatment plan.
  - You are not alone in making decisions around children or vulnerable adult safeguarding; seek support and consult the multi-agency guidelines.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

- Offer her, as a minimum, a follow up appointment to clarify risk, support and any actions agreed.
- Establish a safe way to make contact, and if it is safe for any correspondence to be sent to her address. Ensure this is clearly documented and communicated to admin.
- If a specialist domestic violence service is/ becomes involved, work in partnership: ensure appropriate communication and that they are identified on her treatment plan. Ensure discussion with the woman what and why you are sharing information, and to whom. The sharing of expertise will enhance the woman's success/ recovery.
- Recognise that no single worker or agency can manage issues arising from domestic violence and substance use alone - a multi-agency approach will improve women's safety.

- Be aware that occasionally a service user may present to you in need of a crisis intervention response. Ensure you are aware of how she can access emergency accommodation and be prepared to support her through the process, which may take some time.
- Understand that accessing safe refuge accommodation has added barriers for women with drugs and/ or alcohol use. If accommodation is located, be prepared to work in partnership with the staff there and support them to maintain the woman's safety.
- Be aware of other options available to women if refuge is not available or accessible, for instance housing, police.

#### **DON'T**

---

- Do not ask about domestic violence in the company of others.
- Do not tell her to leave or suggest that she is to blame for the abuse - remember, leaving domestic violence is a process, not an act and this is the time of highest risk.
- Do not see her only once, or tell her that this is not your remit - domestic violence is a crime and is everyone's business.
- Do not just give her phone numbers - this may be her only opportunity to disclose safely and explore options - taking information home may not be an option.
- Do not contact her outside the arrangements you have agreed with her- this could increase her risk if her abuser is alerted that she is discussing her situation.
- Do not offer family or couples work where there is domestic violence issues - this is dangerous - always see them separately.





### **SUPPORT FOR STAFF**

- Recognise that working around this issue can be emotionally difficult and that you need to get support for yourself.
- Make sure you access regular supervision, get support from your colleagues and use Birmingham's domestic violence helpline if you need to.
- Perpetrators of domestic violence can also be violent to staff, especially if they think you are supporting their partner, so ensure your colleagues know where you are and you have a way of contacting them if you are in a vulnerable situation.
- Try to avoid providing service in a woman's home as this may increase the risk to you and the service user.
- Be sensitive to the fact that domestic violence affects 1 in 4 women which means that many of your colleagues may also be affected by this issue.

### **PERPETRATORS**

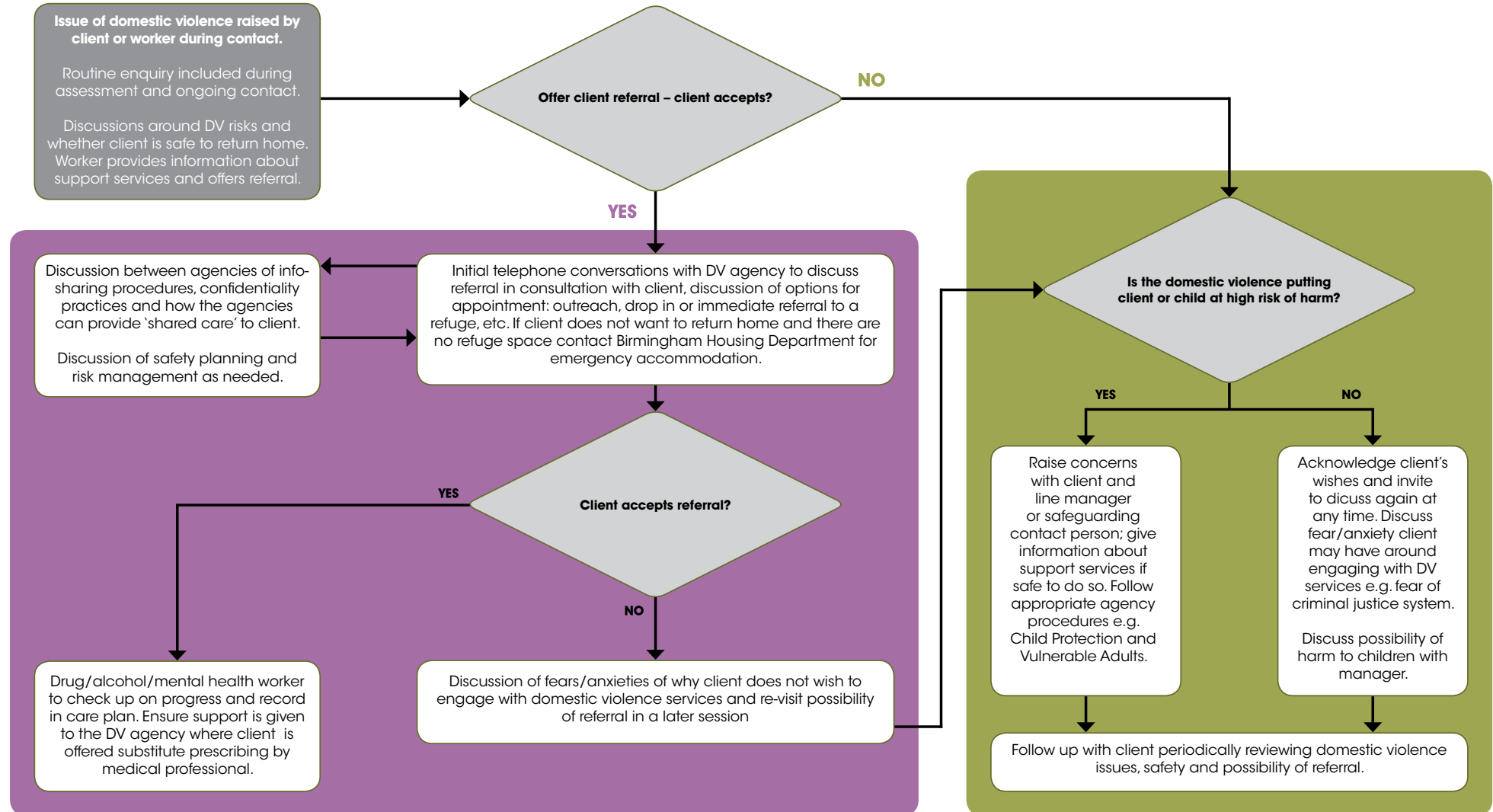
Remember domestic abuse is about a power and control issue not about anger, mental illness, drug or alcohol use.

Any work with perpetrators designed to address their domestic violence should be in accordance with the following documents: 'Statement of Principles' and 'Minimum Standards of Practice' published by Respect.

Anger management to address domestic violence is not an appropriate intervention, and can be very dangerous. Therefore before undertaking such work clients should be screened for domestic violence.

Adapted from Women's Aid Principles of Good Practice  
[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

# Referral Pathway for Substance Misuse & Alcohol Agencies, to Domestic Violence Agencies



# RESOURCES

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

*Please refer to your own organisations' policies and procedures on Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.*

### **BIRMINGHAM REFUGE LINE** **0800 111 4223**

24 hour service to access domestic violence refuge and emergency accommodation in Birmingham

### **NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELPLINE**

**0808 2000 247**  
[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)  
[www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

### **ASHRAM REDUCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT** **0121 764 3817**

Email: [rdvp@ashramha.org.uk](mailto:rdvp@ashramha.org.uk)  
Domestic violence support service specialising in South Asian women

### **BIRMINGHAM & SOLIHULL WOMEN'S AID**

**0800 0732 606 / 0121 685 8519**  
(minicom)

[www.bswaid.org](http://www.bswaid.org)

Provides a holistic domestic violence service for women and children, including outreach service, family support, court support, civil orders, sanctuary and home security, and therapeutic counselling.  
Helpline Monday to Friday, 9.30am - 5.00pm.

### **BHAROSA** **0121 303 0368 / 0121 303 0369**

Domestic violence services for Asian women and new communities.

### **BIRMINGHAM ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UNIT**

**0121 303 1111**  
Email: [contact@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:contact@birmingham.gov.uk)

Supporting victims of anti-social behaviour and domestic violence through civil action.

### **BROKEN RAINBOW** **08452 60 44 60**

[www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)  
For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who are experiencing domestic violence (nationwide service).

### **FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT** **0207 008 0151**

[www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit)  
Central government unit providing advice and practical support in the UK and abroad.

### **FORWARD** **0208 960 4000**

[www.forwarduk.org](http://www.forwarduk.org)  
Advice and support for Female Genital Mutilation (London based).

### **HONOUR NETWORK** **0800 5999 247**

[www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)  
National helpline dedicated to forced marriage & honour based violence.

### **MABL TRUST** **0800 0326317** [www.mabltrust.org.uk](http://www.mabltrust.org.uk)

Offering support services to people suffering domestic violence in Solihull. Helpline Monday to Friday, 10.00am - 12.00pm.

### **MEN'S ADVICE LINE AND ENQUIRIES (MALE)**

**08450 646 800**  
[www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)  
National advice line for heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual men experiencing domestic abuse.

### **RESPECT** **0808 801 0327** [www.respect.org.uk](http://www.respect.org.uk)

National advice line for perpetrators of domestic violence and those working with them.

### **RSVP (RAPE & SEXUAL VIOLENCE PROJECT)** **0121 233 3818**

Services for male and female survivors of sexual and other violence and those who support them.

### **SHELTER DOMESTIC ABUSE PROJECT** **0800 111 4223**

Domestic violence advice and support.

### **STAR SUPPORT & COUNSELLING** **0121 378 4700**

[www.starsupport.org.uk](http://www.starsupport.org.uk)  
Domestic violence counselling and support groups.

### **TRIDENT REACH DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE** **0800 111 4223**

[www.starsupport.org.uk](http://www.starsupport.org.uk)  
Domestic violence advice and support.

### **Victim Support Men's Helpline** **0800 328 3623**

Helpline available Monday - Friday, 12.00pm - 2.00pm.

### **Women Acting in Today's Society (WAITS)**

**0121 440 1443 / 0121 446 5384 |**  
**Counselling**  
**0121 440 7000 | Chinese Support Worker**  
[www.waitsaction.org](http://www.waitsaction.org)

Support, advocacy & befriending and a domestic violence service for Chinese women.

### **WEST MIDLANDS POLICE** **0345 113 5000**

In an emergency always phone 999

There are also a number of domestic violence services working in local areas. Further information can be found at [www.bdvf.org.uk](http://www.bdvf.org.uk)

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

24 hour mental health services can be gained through the G.P.

### MIND IN BIRMINGHAM 0121 608 8001

<http://www.birminghammind.org>

Offering high quality recovery based services to adults and older adults in the Midlands.

### SOLIHULL MIND 0121 742 4941

[www.solihullmind.org.uk](http://www.solihullmind.org.uk)

The local voluntary sector group for mental health in the borough of Solihull.

## ALCOHOL SERVICES

### BIRMINGHAM DRUG & ALCOHOL TEAM (DAAT)

0121 465 4930

[www.bdaaf.co.uk](http://www.bdaaf.co.uk)

Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team commission a broad range of high quality treatment and support services throughout the city.

### SPOC (SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT)

0800 073 0817

For a full list of the Drug & Alcohol treatment agencies available in Birmingham.

### AQUARIUS (BIRMINGHAM)

0121 685 6350

<http://aquarius.org.uk/alcohol/find-aquarius-in-your-area/Birmingham>

There are a range of services

available for individuals and families who are concerned about their own, or others', alcohol use.

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S ALCOHOL SERVICE

07545 930 063

0121 622 8188

[youngpeople@aquarius.org.uk](mailto:youngpeople@aquarius.org.uk)

For 16-21 year olds, giving advice, information and support.

### AQUARIUS (SOLIHULL)

0121 711 3732

<http://aquarius.org.uk/alcohol/find-aquarius-in-your-area/solihull>

Provides advice, information and support to individuals and family members who are concerned about alcohol use.

### TALK TO FRANK

0800 77 66 00

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

Providing information and support around drug use.

### SIFA FIRESIDE

0121 666 7023

[www.sifafireside.co.uk](http://www.sifafireside.co.uk)

Works alongside those who are socially excluded or disadvantaged, addressing alcohol issues and homelessness and empowering and supporting people to meet their short and long term goals.

### ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

National helpline | 0845 769 7555

Birmingham | 0121 212 0111

Facilitating self-help groups for those wishing to give up alcohol.

### EMBRACE

020 7264 0510

<http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/servlets/doc/1359>

Alcohol Concern Children, Families & Domestic Violence Project.

## DRUG SERVICES

### BIRMINGHAM DRUG & ALCOHOL TEAM (DAAT)

0121 465 4930

[www.bdaaf.co.uk](http://www.bdaaf.co.uk)

Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team commission a broad range of high quality treatment and support services throughout the city.

### SPOC (SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT)

0800 073 0817

For a full list of the Drug & Alcohol treatment agencies available in Birmingham.

### DRUG CONCERN BIRMINGHAM

0845 120 3745

<http://servicesdirectory.alcoholconcern.org.uk/viewservice.jsp?id=939>

Support for anyone affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use.

### RELEASE

0845 4500 215

[www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk)

Provides free and confidential specialist advice to the public and professionals on drugs and drug law.

### STELLA PROJECT

020 7785 3862

[www.gldvp.org.uk/C2B/document\\_tree/ViewACategory.asp?CategoryID=73](http://www.gldvp.org.uk/C2B/document_tree/ViewACategory.asp?CategoryID=73)

Works across London addressing drug and alcohol related domestic violence and abuse.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to our partners:

- Aquarius
- Birmingham City Council Adults and Communities
- Birmingham Domestic Violence Forum
- Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
- Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust
- Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team
- Birmingham East and North Primary Care Trust
- Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust
- Safer Birmingham Partnership
- SIFA Fireside

With special thanks to Lynne Johnson for bringing the true spirit of collaboration into the management of this project.

**Safer Birmingham Partnership**  
Working together for a safer city

