

Dates Supported /Service Accessed/Source of referral/Background

(Key information about the service user/dates supported and service accessed/dependants/previous support/nature of VAWDASV/referral pathway)

Support started 28/02/2024

Support ended 11/07/2024



Following a HR PPN received on 26/02/2024, contact was made with ZT to discuss support, marking the first time she was known to us. An appointment was arranged and ZT came into our service face 2 face for an IC on the 27/2/24. Not previously known to our service as this was the first referral ever received.

Needs of the Service User

Key support needs of service users and/or CYP/barriers to support?

- 1.Domestic Abuse Stalking and harassment
- 2.Mental Health – Not receiving support from GP, had a long history of self-harm and suicidal ideation and attempts.
- 3.Housing support – Not being safe in the property and fearful to also leave, isolating herself due to this.
- 4.Safety Measures – Security measures to be added on to the property.
- 5.Safety Planning – Support to remain safe and keep children safe.
- 6.Court/police reporting support (Barriers were that ZT had previously been involved in a court case many years previously and did not have a positive experience, so was reluctant to go through that process again).

Support Provided

What support was provided? Support provided to engage with other agencies. Referrals made? How did support process?

Initial Contact and Actions: Upon receiving the PPN, I reached out to ZT, and she came in to seek support. We completed a DASH RIC assessment in person and began working together. While ZT was not originally from Barry, she had lived in the area for many years. I first arranged permission from her landlord and applied for CCTV installation and target hardening on her property, which gave her immediate reassurance. However, despite these measures, her ex-partner's behaviour did not improve, and she began planning to relocate to Bristol, where her family resides.

Challenges with Housing Support: ZT presented in person to Bristol housing, seeking domestic violence (DV) housing support, but they refused to help, claiming they did not offer such services. She was advised to return to Barry, the area where she felt unsafe, to apply for housing assistance. This marked the start of a challenging process to secure safe accommodation for ZT in South Gloucestershire Council, as she wished to live near her family. I contacted South Gloucestershire housing, explained the situation, and completed an application to the local bidding system. However, ZT's housing application was still not accepted. Despite this, I escalated the matter to the housing manager, who initially refused to accept the duty of care, despite the law of accepting victims fleeing domestic abuse. To strengthen ZT's case, I completed a MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) referral, requesting support from other agencies to help secure safe accommodation. The police provided a letter supporting her need to move, and the housing manager from South Gloucestershire attended our local MARAC.

Life can be different

Outcome: Despite receiving the police referral and attending the MARAC, South Gloucestershire still declined the duty to house ZT. I requested a panel meeting, during which it was finally decided that ZT would be accepted, and she was given the highest banding. Within three months, ZT successfully bid on a new build property, and by the fifth month of our involvement, she was relocated out of the area to a safe location unknown to her ex-partner. She was given keys to her property and moved in on the 11/07/2024.

To assist ZT with her move, I applied for a £500 grant from the Vicar's Relief Fund, which was successful. This grant helped cover the costs of removal vans, easing the financial burden of moving such a significant distance. Throughout the entire process, I maintained regular weekly contact with ZT. Despite the many hurdles, including housing delays, she remained engaged and trusted in the support provided. During moments when she felt disheartened and wanted to give up, I provided emotional reassurance, reminding her that we were working towards the best possible outcome.

As ZT was relocating, her ex-partner pleaded guilty to the harassment and stalking offences. This spared her from having to attend court, an experience she had been dreading due to a previous negative encounter. At several points, ZT considered withdrawing her statement, but with consistent encouragement, she persevered and pressed charges. This outcome was a relief for both her and her 14-year-old son, who were now able to move forward feeling much safer.

Overview of Multi-Agency Working

What collaborative multi-agency work was undertaken? What barriers were there to collaborative working? What individual and/or institutional advocacy was undertaken?

The case involved significant multi-agency collaboration to secure the safety and well-being of ZT. Key agencies involved were:

South Gloucestershire Council: Initially, South Gloucestershire Council was reluctant to accept their duty to provide housing under domestic abuse legislation. However, through multiple communications and escalations, they eventually played a crucial role by attending the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and accepting the duty after a panel review.

Police: The police were actively involved, providing a supporting letter for ZT's relocation application to South Gloucestershire. Their input added weight to ZT's need for safe accommodation, strengthening the case when the housing manager was reluctant to accept the responsibility.

MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference): The MARAC was instrumental in facilitating collaboration between agencies. It brought together key stakeholders to discuss ZT's case and develop a coordinated safety plan, especially regarding her need for secure housing.

Vicar's Relief Fund: The Vicar's Relief Fund provided financial support in the form of a £500 grant, which allowed ZT to cover the moving costs. This was a significant factor in enabling her to relocate safely.

There were several barriers encountered during the collaborative process:

- **Reluctance from Housing Authorities:** Initially, South Gloucestershire Council was resistant to accepting their duty to provide housing for ZT. Despite clear evidence of domestic abuse and ZT's need to relocate, the housing authority tried to deny responsibility, forcing an escalation to the manager level and, later, to a panel meeting. Even after attending MARAC, the council was slow to act, prolonging the process.
- **Cross-Area Housing Challenges:** ZT's situation was complicated by her desire to relocate from Barry to Bristol. The Bristol housing authority refused to accept ZT's case, stating that they did not provide the services she needed and advising her to return to her unsafe area. This dismissal delayed the process and required persistent advocacy to secure support from South Gloucestershire Council instead.

Individual Advocacy:

- I acted as ZT's main advocate throughout the case, regularly providing emotional support and helping her stay engaged in the process, even when she felt disheartened or wanted to give up. This individual advocacy was crucial during moments where ZT was ready to withdraw from pressing charges due to her anxiety over attending court.
- Additionally, I advocated on ZT's behalf in securing financial assistance through the Vicar's Relief Fund, ensuring she had the resources to move to a safer area.
- **Institutional Advocacy:**
- **Housing Advocacy:** I had to advocate strongly with South Gloucestershire Council, not only to get them to accept the duty of care for ZT but also to ensure that she received the highest banding for housing priority. This involved escalating the case to management and requesting a panel review when the housing manager refused to acknowledge their legal obligation under domestic abuse housing laws.
- **MARAC Involvement:** I referred ZT's case to MARAC, which allowed for institutional collaboration, bringing in the police and the housing manager to attend and discuss ZT's needs. This multi-agency setting provided an essential platform for advocacy, helping apply pressure on South Gloucestershire Council to accept the case.

Outcomes of Support

What were the outcomes of support? How has the service user's situation changed? What has not changed and what intervention and/or support is still required?

Increased Safety: ZT is now living in a secure, undisclosed location far from her ex-partner. The physical distance and the new accommodation have drastically reduced the immediate risk of harassment or harm.

Improved Mental Well-being: Since relocating, ZT's mental health has shown improvement. She no longer lives in fear of her ex-partner's unexpected appearances, and the guilty plea has provided her with closure on the legal side of things. Her son also benefits from the reduced stress and increased safety.

Stability in Housing: ZT now has a stable home in South Gloucestershire. With the highest banding achieved through advocacy, she was able to secure a new build property in a timely manner, ensuring long-term stability for her and her son.

Reflections on Support Provided

What do you think worked well and what could have worked better? If anything, what would you do differently when supporting a service user with similar needs?

1. **Holistic and Persistent Advocacy:** A key strength of the support provided to ZT was the thorough and persistent advocacy. This was crucial in ensuring that South Gloucestershire Council eventually accepted their duty to house ZT, despite initial resistance. The escalation to management and persistence in pushing for a panel meeting were essential in achieving the desired housing outcome.
2. **Emotional Support and Trust:** The consistent emotional support provided throughout the process was another major success. Building a relationship of trust with ZT was pivotal in keeping her engaged and preventing her from giving up during difficult moments. This personal support was integral to ZT's resilience, especially when faced with setbacks.
3. **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Engaging the police, MARAC, and South Gloucestershire Council through a coordinated approach significantly strengthened ZT's case. Involving multiple agencies ensured that all aspects of ZT's situation were addressed, from legal protection to securing housing.
4. **Financial Support:** Securing the Vicar's Relief Fund grant was highly effective in easing ZT's transition to her new location. This practical assistance meant that ZT could focus on her safety and well-being without the financial burden of moving.
5. **Encouraging Legal Action:** Providing consistent encouragement for ZT to press charges against her ex-partner worked well, particularly given her initial apprehension about the court process. This led to a positive legal outcome, with the ex-partner pleading guilty, which ultimately provided ZT with peace of mind.

Delays in Housing Support: The protracted battle with South Gloucestershire Council to accept housing responsibility was a major challenge. Although the outcome was positive, the process could have been quicker and less stressful for ZT if the housing authority had responded more promptly. Earlier involvement from senior decision-makers or exploring alternative housing routes sooner might have sped up the process.

Interagency Communication: Although the MARAC helped bring different agencies together, communication between agencies at the outset could have been more seamless. Early coordination between housing authorities, the police, and support services might have prevented some of the initial barriers, especially regarding housing in Bristol.

Therapeutic Support: While ZT received emotional support throughout, more formalized therapeutic intervention, such as mental health counselling, could have been introduced earlier in the process to help her deal with her anxiety and past trauma more effectively. This could have provided her with additional coping mechanisms during periods of heightened stress.

Local Housing Authorities' Response: The lack of support from Bristol's housing authority posed a major barrier and caused unnecessary delays. Exploring a broader range of housing options or involving legal advocates specializing in domestic abuse cases might have pushed the issue with Bristol more effectively, allowing ZT to relocate sooner.