

MARAC as a mechanism to engage perpetrators of domestic violence in behaviour change programmes

Neil Blacklock with Thangam Debonaire, June 2011

Domestic violence prevention programmes (DVPPs) are interventions which seek to protect victims and reduce domestic violence by working with the source of the problem, the perpetrator, together with an integrated support service for their partners and ex-partnersⁱ. A growing body of evidence strongly suggests that when delivered appropriately, DVPPs help reduce domestic violence and protect victimsⁱⁱ. Fresh Start is a pilot service that set out to test and explore ideas and approaches for providing individual work with those using violence and abuse in relationships. One of the ideas tested was whether it was possible to engage the (ex)partners of those referred to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in addressing their behaviour through a community based Domestic Violence Prevention Programme (DVPP). Towards the end of the pilot year, the coordinator reviewed the use of MARAC as a referral method for the programme. This report reviews what was learnt and identifies some recommendations for future practice in MARACs and in engagement with individuals using domestic violence.

1. Background

Fresh Start was established in May 2010 after a successful bid for LAA Exemplar funding by Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire to Improvement & Efficiency South East. A steering group (Safer Milton Keynes, Safer Buckinghamshire and the Thames Valley Police) was formed to oversee the set up and delivery of the service. The service itself is delivered by a consortium, made up of: Respectⁱⁱⁱ, Milton Keynes Women's Aid (MK-Act) and Relate (Milton Keynes and Aylesbury).

Respect manages the delivery of the work with perpetrators and MK Act manages the partner support service. MK-Act and Respect jointly provide overall project management. The funding for the service was for one year with the service open to referrals from the 27th September 2010 through to 11th March 2011. Fresh Start is currently completing work with clients referred during this period.

2. MARACs as part of responses to domestic violence

MARACs were first established in various parts of the UK in the early 2000s as an attempt to ensure coordinated protection for victims of domestic violence and have been shown to be effective for reducing risk of ongoing domestic violence^{iv}. This is an initiative established across the country,

operating locally and supported nationally by Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA^v).

A MARAC is not a direct service in and of itself. It is a forum which meets regularly (every few weeks) bringing together professionals from police, probation, women's support services, child protection and other agencies as deemed relevant locally, in order to share information about victims at risk of domestic violence and to develop multi agency safety strategies to protect them.

It is a victim's case which is referred to a MARAC, not the victim her/himself. This happens when one of the member agencies has carried out a risk identification process using the CAADA tool known as the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) Risk Identification Tool (RIC)^{vi}. The DASH provides a framework for trained professionals in various generic and specialist agencies to identify whether a victim is at high risk of continued or escalating domestic violence. In general, high risk victims will be referred to the MARAC in order that agencies can share information and agree on a safety and risk management strategy to protect the victim.

The DASH was created and mostly remains a victim focussed tool. However, Respect, working in consultation with CAADA, in 2007, piloted an amended version of the DASH with Relate and Cafcass for more widespread use and including more consideration of evidence from the perpetrator^{vii}. Since that time Respect has continued to develop the use of the DASH with perpetrators and combining evidence from perpetrators and from victims separately in order to provide a comprehensive assessment of risk and a stronger risk management strategy which addresses the perpetrator's behaviour directly wherever safe and possible^{viii}.

3. Purposes and methodology of this evaluation

This report is the result of an internal evaluation carried out by the Respect Development Director, who was one of the coordinators of Fresh Start.

The purposes were:

1. To identify clear criteria by which perpetrators coming to the attention of a MARAC could be considered suitable for referral to a DVPP;
2. To investigate the proportions of men coming to the attention of a MARAC who fit these criteria;
3. To measure the difference between the numbers of men who could be referred and those who were successfully referred by an agency operating from within the MARAC structure and as a result of a MARAC decision;
4. To explore some of the reasons for the difference;
5. To identify suggestions for improving practice for making successful referrals from MARAC to a DVPP.

To carry out these purposes, the Development Director carried out the following activities:

1. A review of the client records of Fresh Start for the period of operation (September 2010 – April 2011);
2. Reading and analysing the minutes for all three of the Buckinghamshire MARAC structures for this period;
3. Observation of meetings of two of the three MARAC structures;
4. Reflection on his experience with other agencies during this pilot.

This report was written up jointly by Respect's Development Director and Research Manager.

4. Content of Fresh Start

The core of the service is an individual programme for perpetrators of domestic violence and a partner support service. This programme was developed by Respect, National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Scottish Government^{ix}. It aims to provide a flexible model of work, responsive to the spectrum of needs presented by men referred to the service. The model is therefore better able to engage referrals with multiple problems than a more rigid model.

Fresh Start is currently available across Buckinghamshire with three delivery sites in High Wycombe, Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. The Partner Support Service was delivered in all three areas by the three Women's Aid groups operating across the county, who also provide the IDVA services.

The key client group for Fresh Start was high risk perpetrators identified through MARAC. After some initial discussions and concerns about getting enough numbers into the service, the criteria for referral to the service was broadened to include perpetrators from other referral routes, although still focussed on high risk.

Fresh Start received 45 referrals in total during this pilot period (September 2010 – April 2011).

5. MARACs as a referral route to DVPPs

The Fresh Start consortium of agencies, based on their prior experience, anticipated that the use of the MARAC as referral route to DVPPs was unlikely to produce large numbers of men wanting to change their behaviour. In the majority of cases coming to MARAC the perpetrator is trying to avoid accountability. Trying to engage abusive adults in addressing their behaviour was therefore predicted to present difficulties. However, these individuals cause serious, significant harm and are likely to continue to be a danger to

their partner, children and others. Even modest success could give rise to substantial benefits. This was and remains the justification for pursuing this route for referrals.

6. MARAC cases suitable for referral to a DVPP

In the period Fresh Start was taking referrals there were 190 referrals to the three Buckinghamshire MARACs.

Using the criteria identified in the Respect Accreditation Standard (national service standards for DVPPs), the following factors usually mean that a perpetrator is not suitable for referral to a DVPP:

1. Perpetrator is currently involved in a criminal justice process;
2. Perpetrator has a mental health or substance misuse problem such that they cannot participate effectively in the intervention;
3. Perpetrator is already involved in a criminal justice intervention carried out by probation, or is already in prison or about to be imprisoned;
4. Perpetrator cannot travel to the venue where the intervention is delivered and there is no possibility that the DVPP practitioners can change this;
5. Participation in the DVPP is identified as very likely to decrease the safety of the victim;
6. The violence is not intimate partner violence (as this is the subject of the content of most DVPPs).

On reviewing the minutes and other evidence from the MARACs, the Development Director identified as unsuitable for referral to Fresh Start any perpetrators to whom any of the above would appear to apply, as they will usually not be suitable for any intervention work, other than specifically and solely for a specialist risk assessment for the court. He was thus able to identify that during the pilot period, the following proportions of the 190 perpetrators considered by the MARAC were unsuitable for Fresh Start referral for the following reasons:

- 23% were subject to probation supervision with conditions to attend a DVPP;
- 11% were in custody;
- 21% were subject to bail conditions and possible prosecution (Respect service standard does not permit DVPP attendance while an offender is subject to a possible prosecution).
- In 13% of referrals the perpetrator was either out of the geographical area or their whereabouts were unknown

A further 22% were unsuitable for other reasons:

- The violence was not intimate partner violence (the content of the Fresh Start programme was about intimate partner violence and not applicable to other forms of domestic violence such as violence from another adult relative);
- The perpetrator had considerable substance misuse or mental health problems such that he would be unable to participate in the programme effectively;
- An attempt to engage with the perpetrator did not seem to be in the interests of victim/s. Most frequently this was because the victim had moved away from the perpetrator and their resolve around this was fragile.

In reviews of the minutes of the MARAC meetings and from observation of these, it therefore appears that of the 190 MARAC cases, 21 (11%) could be possible referrals to the DVPP. This forms just under half of all the referrals received by Fresh Start during the pilot period.

7. MARAC referrals to Fresh Start during the pilot period

A referral was counted as successful if the Fresh Start staff received sufficient information from the referring agency, including consent from the man to the referral, such that they could follow this up for assessment.

Twenty one men were identified as suitable for referral to Fresh Start during the pilot period from the three MARACS as described above. Of these, eleven men only were successfully referred to Fresh Start as a direct result of a MARAC assessment, just over half of all those who appear to have been suitable for referral.

Milton Keynes

Eleven men under the attention of Milton Keynes MARAC were identified as suitable to be referred to Fresh Start. Of these, only one resulted in a completed referral. A further two men under the attention of MARAC were referred to Fresh Start, but from other routes not via the MARAC. Milton Keynes agencies outside MARAC made a further eighteen successful referrals to Fresh Start. The majority of these were from children's social care and from Health.

Wycombe

There were ten men identified as possible referrals to Fresh Start during the pilot period. **All** of these resulted in referral to the service. A further two men involved in MARAC were referred via other routes. Eight more men not involved in a MARAC were referred from Wycombe agencies.

Aylesbury

Aylesbury MARAC did not identify any men as suitable for referral. Referrals to Fresh Start from agencies outside of MARAC were also low throughout the pilot.

TABLE ONE: summary of referrals from the three areas to Fresh Start during the period September 2010 – April 2011

Area (total number of referrals from this area in the pilot period)	Total number of men identified as suitable for referral from MARAC	Total referrals from the MARAC	Total referrals of men involved in MARAC but from outside MARAC	Total referrals from this area NOT from the MARAC process
Milton Keynes (21)	11	1	2	18
Wycombe (20)	10	10	2	8
Aylesbury (7)	0	0	0	7

8. Agency involvement in referrals to Fresh Start

The Milton Keynes MARAC referrals were almost entirely dependent on the police making the referral. Despite strong support for the pilot from the police Chair of the MARAC, translating this into frontline officers discussing with the perpetrator a referral to Fresh Start was more difficult to achieve. In Wycombe the MARAC referrals to Fresh Start were facilitated by Children’s Social Care (CSC), Probation and the Police.

Milton Keynes is the highest volume MARAC in the county of Buckinghamshire. It has strong police and IVDA input. However, observation of this MARAC demonstrated significantly less participation from other agencies, when compared to the Wycombe MARAC.

Children’s services attend Milton Keynes MARAC and provide confirmation of whether or not there was a child known to them but frequently have little additional information. In comparison, children’s services in Wycombe MARAC contributed significant amounts of information about the children’s lives and the lives of their parents and carers.

The Wycombe Probation Office had decided to use Fresh Start as a response to criminally convicted offenders both for those without a condition to attend a probation programme and for those who were experiencing substantial waiting times before they could start a programme. Milton Keynes Probation remained disengaged from Fresh Start during the pilot however this has improved significantly since then.

Fresh Start received a significant number of referrals from other agencies in Milton Keynes that were high risk, as defined by the DASH but had not been referred to MARAC.

It appeared to Fresh Start staff that risk identification was not in consistent, regular use in many of the agencies signed up to MARAC protocols. This was despite a concerted effort by the Community Safety Partnership to train staff in the DASH across the county.

9. Analysis

From review of the minutes and observation of the meetings, it appears that a significant minority of the men whose abusive behaviour is brought to the attention of MARACs are suitable for a referral to a DVPP.

In one area, this happened consistently. In another, despite equally large numbers of potential referrals, it did not.

In order to make a referral to a DVPP, the perpetrator needs to consent. In order to gain consent from the perpetrator, someone has to talk to them about this. Ideally they should be engaging them and motivating them to consider this as a positive step.

The Fresh Start pilot across the three MARACs in Buckinghamshire showed significantly different rates of referral to Fresh Start. These appear to vary in line with the range of agencies and practitioners actively engaging with the MARAC. There is anecdotal evidence that frontline practitioners were not equipped with necessary skills to engage, motivate and work with perpetrators to facilitate their agreement and cooperation with a referral to Fresh Start. This indicates a skills gap which can be remedied, through closer working with the DVPP and through training.

10. Conclusions:

1. There are clear criteria open to MARACs, based on the criteria identified in the Respect Accreditation Standard for programme eligibility, for identifying perpetrators suitable for referral to a DVPP;
2. The identification at MARAC of a possible referral to a DVPP should rule out perpetrators who may face prosecution, those with significant mental health or substance misuse problems, those already subject to criminal sanctions, those geographically unavailable and those where the effect of referral may be to increase the risk to victim and/or children;
3. In around 11 % of the cases coming to the attention of a MARAC, it would appear that the perpetrator fit the criteria for referral to DVPP;

4. Despite this, only half of the men suitable for referral from MARAC to DVPP were directly referred by the practitioner/agency identified by the MARAC to carry out this;
5. Referral to DVPP requires the consent of the perpetrator. This consent can most consistently be obtained where agencies engage with perpetrators constructively and the MARAC action to refer is given to the most appropriate frontline worker;
6. There appears to be wide variation in the skill of individual workers and the practices of specific agencies which are the likely causes of the gap between suitable and successful referrals.

11. Recommendations:

1. MARACs should be encouraged to consider referral to a DVPP as part of the strategy for increasing safety;
2. MARACs should be provided with clear information about the criteria for referral, to include the details above and any other specific to their local DVPP;
3. Training for MARAC coordinators and in use of the CAADA RIC needs to include consideration of how information from and about perpetrators can usefully be included in any risk assessment and management strategy;
4. Training for MARAC coordinators should also include consideration of the role of DVPPs in responding to domestic violence and the range of ways they can increase victim safety;
5. MARAC agencies need to be equipped with training for frontline staff to help them to engage perpetrators and motivate them to agree to referral to DVPP;
6. MARAC referrals should be included in the plan for development of a DVPP but cannot be considered as the sole source of referrals for a local DVPP; DVPPs should continue to seek and receive referrals from a range of sources, including children's services, health, police, Relate and probation.

ⁱ **Respect** (2010) *Domestic Violence Perpetrators: Working with the source of the problem* London: Respect.

http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/lobbying/lobbying_tool_with_refs_30.11.10.pdf

ⁱⁱ **Respect** (2010) *Respect briefing paper: Evidence of effects of domestic violence perpetrator programmes on women's safety*. London: Respect

http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/resources/13/respect_briefing_paper_on_the_evidence_of_effects_of_perpetrator_programmes_on_women_revised_18th_march_10.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ **Respect** is the national coordinating and accrediting organisation for domestic violence perpetrator programmes www.respect.uk.net

^{iv} **Robinson, A** (2004) *Domestic violence MARACS (Multi-Agency risk Assessment Conferences) for very high-risk victims in Cardiff, Wales: A process and outcome evaluation*. Cardiff: Cardiff University

^v **Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse** www.caada.org

^{vi} **CAADA** resources for MARACs and for Risk Identification

http://www.caada.org.uk/practitioner_resources/resources.html

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- ^{vii} **Debonnaire, T** (2008) *The pilot of the Respect/Relate/CAFCASS domestic violence risk identification tool* London: Respect, Relate and Cafcass
http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/PDF/7195_Review%20of%20the%20risk%20id%20tool%20pilot%2018th%20August%2008%20FOR%20PUBLICATION.pdf
- ^{viii} **Respect** (2010) *Respect adaptation of the CAADA Risk Identification Checklist (RIC) for gathering and analysing information from and about perpetrators: guidance for work with survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse in domestic violence perpetrator programmes*
http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/respect_ric_version_and_guidance_for_dvpps_jan_2011.pdf
- ^{ix} **Andrew, M. Macrae, R. Wilson, M. Newman, C Iwi, K. Blacklock, N and Rickman, P.** (2008) *Integrated Individual Sessions for Domestic Abuse*. Not published. For further information contact Neil.Blacklock@respect.uk.net