Empowerment, Responsiveness and ‘Led by the women we support’ are all core values of Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL). As part of our commitment to these values it is vital that women who use our services are given ample, robust and frequent opportunities to have their say on what we do currently and how we shape SARSVL in the future.

SARSVL recognises that the women and girls who use our services have a wealth of expertise and experience and that we need to take on board this knowledge and expertise to ensure that we are providing high quality services.

The aims of this policy are to:

1. Make clear the methods SARSVL will use to involve service users in organisational decision making
2. Ensure that women and girls who use our services are made aware of the ways in which they can be involved and what the process will be for feeding back to them on their involvement
3. Demonstrate how we will monitor and evaluate service user involvement.
4. Uphold service user involvement as a key aspect of how SARSVL is run
5. Methods used to involve service users:

* Service User Evaluation –We have developed an anonymous service user survey which can be completed by anyone who has accessed any of our services. This is available both online via our website and in paper format within the centre.
* Suggestion Box – We provide a suggestion box in our reception area, along with complaint and feedback forms. Our website also includes a link for any service user who wishes to make a complaint or provide us with feedback on the service she has received. These are both checked regularly and a monthly report is made to steering group.
* Service user focus groups – SARSVL will give all service users the opportunity to participate in service user forums where they can provide input into decisions about the future direction of the organisation. We recognise that vulnerable people could face certain barriers to participation in such events. SARSVL would provide financial reimbursement for travel and childcare to the same level as we would provide a women coming to the centre to access services. In addition we would ensure that service users where provided with comprehensive information as to what the day would entail and with a personal contact from the staff team or steering group who they could approach to discuss the opportunity further prior to committing. SARSVL would also be open to providing additional assistance to women who required it, such as interpreters. Opportunities to participate in these forums will be publicised through our website and social networking media as well as within the centre via posters and information from volunteers and staff.
* Complaints Policy – SARSVL have a complaints policy in place and take any complaint we receive very seriously. All staff and volunteers working with service users are informed of the procedure to follow should they receive a complaint and ways in which service users can complain are shown on our website and in our reception area. The first stage of our Complaints procedure advises resolving issues verbally and informally. However, we maintain a ‘comments book’ within our helpline room where volunteers who have dealt with a complaint in such a way can record any feedback which we may want to take into account when further developing services, ie information around opening times or language provision.
* Women who use our Services as Volunteers – SARSVL acknowledges that due to the high prevalence of rape and sexual violence in our society there may well be women volunteering within SARSVL who are survivors of sexual violence and who may have used our services. It is up to each individual woman volunteer whether she chooses to disclose this to us, however SARSVL recognises the significant contribution survivors have made to the rape crisis movement and be open to women who had used our services becoming volunteers within SARSVL. Each case would be looked at individually and we would provide necessary support and training as we would to any volunteer.

1. Informing service users of how they can participate and providing them with feedback:

* SARSVL ensures that our website, social media and the notices we display within the centre provide up to date and clear information on how service users can be involved in both providing us with feedback and future service planning. In addition staff and volunteers are all made aware of these opportunities so they can share them with women who use our services as appropriate. When planning focus groups we would also use these methods to recruit participants but in addition give service users the opportunity to provide us with contact details should they be happy to be involve with an event like this. We would then use these to issue direct invitations to participants.
* Service use focus group participants are provided with a feedback report and our complaints policy includes guidance on how complaints should be responded to. If we receive service user feedback anonymously it will not be possible for us to directly feedback, however we will publicise any changes we implement due to feedback and make it clear that the suggestions came to us from service users.

1. Monitoring and evaluating service user involvement:

* Our complaints policy includes timescales for responding to and resolving complaints, we will monitor compliance with this.
* A monthly report will be delivered to steering group on feedback received from service users. This will be used to evaluate whether we feel we are receiving sufficient feedback, how we are responding to it and what actions we can take.
* All service user focus groups will have specific objectives in terms of what information they wish to gain from service users. In addition we will include a minimum number to hold each year within our development strategy.

1. Service user involvement in how SARSVL is run:

* All new staff and volunteers will be made aware of this policy and of the importance of involving service users.
* This policy will be reviewed and updated regularly
* In addition to the policy, we have an action plan for implementation. This will be reviewed quarterly to ensure that objectives are being carried out.

Policy Approved By SARSVL Board: 22/08/2013

Date for review: 22/08/2015