

# **INFORMATION PACK**

## What advocacy service users say about SARSVL:

**“thanks so much for taking all this seriously and for a lot of help”**

**“This has been a huge impact thank you, it also brings a huge relief. I felt like I had some stand up for”**

**“for all the problems I had and all the places I have been seen, here was the place where I was treated the best. The level of support is excellent. I have benefited enormously and I am still benefiting”**

**SARSVL have given the support I desperately needed throughout a difficult time. Most days I have felt completely alone but my advocate has given me reassurance, understanding and even reference materials that I continue to use on a daily basis. For me personally I felt very let down by various organisations and SARSVL made me feel believed in a world full of doubt, and like I am worth something. They offered face to face support which has been invaluable. I am not judged and I am slowly learning not to blame myself for others' actions . I have come to realise that not many people have a true grasp of how rape and sexual violence can affect a person, nor grasp the traumatic aftermath; but being able to speak in confidence with an advocate they have shown me that there is people out there with awareness, knowledge and compassion. I will be forever grateful.**



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## INTRODUCTION

This pack is for you to take away, if it is safe for you do so, and to read at your own pace. We understand that there is a lot of information to take in at the initial appointment which is the purpose of this pack.

Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL) is the Rape Crisis service for Leeds. We are a women only organisation offering our services to women and girls. We offer an independent confidential emotional support listening helpline service (which includes freephone, email and text and face to face sessions) and advocacy service. From 2016, we will also offer a counselling service.

## ABOUT US

We are a feminist organisation that exists to support all women and girls who have been affected by sexual violence of any kind at any time in their lives. We promote their needs and rights and work towards the elimination of sexual violence.

The following values and principles underpin all of our work and activities:

**accessibility** **empathy**  
**belief** **responsiveness**  
**respect** **confidentiality**  
**non-judgemental**  
**empowerment**  
**inclusion**  
**trust**

We recognise that rape and sexual assault are not only perpetrated by strangers, but more commonly by a man/men already known to the woman. This can be a family member or a boyfriend, partner or husband, a neighbour, friend, work colleague, school friend, teacher or someone else in a position of

authority or trust. We also recognise that this may make it more difficult for women to speak out about their experiences.

We are aware of how difficult it can be to speak about the abuse you have experienced and we know that you may make an appointment and then feel unable to keep it. If this is the case, just let us know and you can either make another appointment for a different day, or come back to us when you feel the time is right. There will never be any pressure on you to attend if you feel the time is not right for you.

## OUR ADVOCACY SERVICE

### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is about helping people to access information and services, to be involved in decisions about their lives, and to explore their views and wishes. It assists people in exploring choices and options, defending their rights and speaking out about issues that matter to them, to regain or maintain power and control over their own lives.

SARSVL's Advocacy Service is a new and innovative service for Leeds. The service is constantly developing, led by what survivors tell us is helpful, and responsive to changing need. We therefore welcome your feedback about our service.

Our Advocacy Service is an independent service working with women over the age 18 who have been affected by rape or sexual violence at any time in their lives. We help you to regain control of your life, make informed choices about issues affecting you, and access the support that you may need.

The service is free and confidential, and you do not need to have reported anything to the police\* to access it. Our ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advocate) can also offer specialist information and advocacy to women around reporting to the police and support throughout that process.

- **We can help you to:**
  - Be heard
  - Take back control
  - Know your rights
  - Understand the choices and decisions in your life
- **We will:**
  - Put you first
  - Help you to be in control
  - Explain issues and how they may affect you
  - Assist you to work with other agencies
  - Support you at meetings

We aim to offer advocacy support in a number of key areas that our work with survivor tells us are often areas of need after experience of sexual violence.

Advocacy is not limited to these areas, and we will work with survivors to identify where and how advocacy could best support them.

**Emotional** - the advocacy service offers emotional support but is not a counselling service. We will help you understand the impacts of sexual violence and explore myths and stereotypes about rape and sexual abuse. We understand that whatever happened to you is not fault and the only person to blame for sexual violence is the perpetrator.

We can help service users find the support they need from other services in Leeds, whether counselling or other services if they think that is what they need.

**Legal** - we can offer support by talking through reporting an incident of sexual violence and explaining what may happen and what to expect in the legal process, including accompanying a service user to court and supporting her through the criminal justice process. We can also provide information about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.

**Health** – we can, for example, help service users access health services, including sexual and mental health services as well as help them to get their needs met from existing services.

**Housing** – we can talk through and help our service users to find out about their housing options, if as a result of the sexual violence you have experienced means that you feel unsafe and wish to move.

**Safety** - we will work with service users to help them to assess if they are safe and support them to put relevant orders e.g. restraining orders, in place, if necessary.

**Finances** - if service users are struggling financially, we'll inform them of where to seek the appropriate help from, for example the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

**Support network** - we'll help service users to identify what support they already have in place and anything that their family and/or friends can do to help support them.

**Children** – if service users have any concerns about their children, we'll offer help to explore these and discuss their options.

We are not specialists in any of these areas. We refer and signpost to other agencies where necessary and facilitate contact.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

You can speak to us in confidence in a safe space. We may need to share information within the team providing the service, to make sure you get the best support possible, but we will not provide information about you to other agencies without your explicit consent, unless you give us information that you, a child or adult is at risk from serious harm, or that you intended to harm yourself or others. We would discuss this with you beforehand. You are always in control of how much information you provide to us.

If you would like us to share information with another agency, for example the police or health services, we will ask for your written consent to do so by signing our Advocacy Information Sharing Agreement.

These policies will be explained to you at your initial appointment and we will ask you to sign the Advocacy Service Support Agreement.

You can see access any of our policies at any time by asking the ISVA.

When we contact you by phone our number comes up as 'private' so it will not show on your phone.

## **SESSIONS**

Sessions are held at our centre in Leeds City centre.

Meetings are scheduled in for one hour. We ask that you try to keep your appointment times although we do understand that sometimes it is unavoidable to arrive late. However, if you are late, the appointment will not run for the full 60 minutes and will end at the time it was scheduled to as this would affect other service users' appointment times as well as our appointments with external agencies. You do not have to stay for the full hour if you feel that you have talked about everything you wish to before the appointment is due to finish.

If you do not attend two consecutive agreed appointments without cancelling in advance, we assume that the Advocacy Service is not right for you at this time. You are welcome to resume support when you feel that it is a better time to.

## **Initial Assessment**

We carry out an assessment of your needs by phone, prior to your first appointment, which will help shape your individual support plan. We will gather some information on our assessment form. This information will help to guide us in establishing what services might be helpful to you, and if there are any risks to you, for example if there is any ongoing risk from the perpetrator. If so, we will discuss managing risks with you and agree what role we could have in helping you to be safe.

Whether you have asked for telephone support or for face to face support, you will be offered an initial appointment with us, face-face where this is practical. This will give you the opportunity to talk to an Advocate and find out more about our service and decide whether you think our service is the right one for you at this time.

At your first face to face appointment, you will also be given an appointment card which does not identify our service, to make a note of your next appointment time.

## **Unannounced appointments**

If you come to our offices without an agreed appointment, we will not be able to see you and another appointment will be arranged or we will agree to see you at your next booked in appointment if one has been arranged.

## **NOTE TAKING AND RECORD KEEPING**

This information is stored on our encrypted secure database. This helps us for internal monitoring and evaluation of our service. This information is also anonymised and collated and passed onto our funders. At no time do we share any identifiable information with our funders. We will ask for your written consent to do this and this forms part of the Advocacy Service Support Agreement that you are asked to sign.

Your Advocate may make some brief notes during your appointments with her. These notes are factual and are there to make a record of what was discussed and what actions your Advocate needs to take. Minimal information about you is kept on paper, and what is kept in a secure file is

anonymised. You can have access to any of the information we have about you at any time. This can be requested from your Advocate.

If you are engaged with the Criminal Justice System (CJS), it is likely that your records will be requested by the police and/or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This will be discussed with you before records and notes are released and you do not have to consent to us sharing them. However, they can be requested by a court order.

At the end of your support your file is archived and we will keep it for seven years in case you need information for a court case or for a criminal injuries compensation claim. After this period your records will be confidentially destroyed.

## **EVIDENTIAL PURITY**

If you are currently engaged with the criminal justice system or are considering reporting to the police, it is important to be aware that your account of what has happened to you is considered to be key evidence.

The Advocate will need to take some basic factual details from you about what has happened (as much as you're comfortable sharing in your own words) during the initial meeting. After this, there may be some limits on the discussions you can have with your Advocate about what has happened as these can be seen to compromise your evidence. Your Advocate will let you know if she has any concerns about this. We will work hard to ensure that this doesn't affect our ability to offer you support and advocacy, however we may need to ask you not to share details with us, which may form part of evidence you give in criminal proceedings.

## **FIRST DISCLOSURE**

This means telling someone about what has happened to you for the first time. If your advocate is the first person you have ever told, you will be assigned to another advocate. The reason for this is because if you decide to report and the case goes to court, often the person the survivor first 'disclosed' to (ie told) will be called as a witness.

## **INTERPRETERS**

If you need an interpreter, your Advocate can arrange for a female interpreter to meet you at our Centre. We do not permit family members or friends to come to your appointment to act as an interpreter. Appointments with an official interpreter are scheduled for one and a half hours.

## **BEING ACCOMPANIED BY A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER TO OUR CENTRE**

If you wish to be accompanied by a female adult friend or family member to your appointment, they will be asked to wait in the Centre reception area whilst you have your appointment with your Advocate. Men are not allowed in our women only space.

## **TRAVEL COSTS**

We may be able to help you with travel costs for your appointments at SARSVL within the Leeds metropolitan boundary. We can pay for travel to and from the centre on public transport and may also be able to help with travel costs for anyone you have accompanying you on your visits here. Please speak to your Advocate about this.

## CHILDCARE

If you need to make paid childcare arrangements in order to attend a face to face appointment, we can reimburse you up to the sum of £15 per appointment. You will have to provide a receipt in order to do this.

If you attend court to give evidence and need childcare arrangements, we can arrange for this with Oxford Place Children's Centre which is opposite the Crown Court. Free childcare is provided Monday to Thursday from 9:30-13:00 and 13:40-16:00, from the ages of birth to 12 years old.

## YOUR SAFETY WHILE YOU ARE IN SARSVL

### Your Health and Wellbeing

If you have already visited SARSVL you will know that we are on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of the building. We ask that you consider your levels of personal health before you use the stairs. There is a lift. If you require assistance, please let us know in advance. We also recognise that not everyone is happy within an enclosed space so if you are feeling rather nervous about using the lift, please ask for an Advocate to accompany you if you think this would help.

If you are taking any medication and may need this to be administered to you if you become ill during a support session, please tell us about it and we will discuss a safety plan with you so that you feel as safe as possible when you are in our Centre.

We will be asking some questions during your initial support session which will help us respond to your needs during your time with us. We will ask you about your health and if you have any medical condition we need to know about.

If you become seriously ill while at SARSVL we will always call the emergency services. Whilst there are some first aiders in our organisation, we are not qualified to respond to serious medical emergencies and they may not be present at the time of your appointment.

### Self-harm and Suicide

SARSVL has a policy on responding to self-harm and suicide. This is available on request.

We understand the reasons why some women may self-harm/injure. However, we ask service users not to self-harm/injure during support calls or appointments. If the Advocate is of the view that you are self-harming, the Advocate will ask you to refrain from doing so. If you continue, then the support call or appointment will be brought to a close and if necessary, the emergency services will be called. Support at another time will be offered.

We also respect and understand the reasons why women may experience suicidal feelings. However, it is our policy to contact the emergency services if we believe that a service user is a threat to herself or others. If you tell us that you have overdosed or otherwise harmed yourself then we will respond in line with our suicide policy.

### Fire Safety

It is our duty under Health and Safety regulations to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all the women who work in or visit our centre.

Your Advocate will carry out a Personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEPS) with you at your initial appointment. This is to assess whether you would have any difficulty evacuating the building. If it is assessed that there may be difficulties, we would agree an alternative arrangement with you that you would have to consent to.

We have a fire alarm test every Monday morning at 08:00. If the fire alarm sounds (a loud continuous high pitched siren) at any other time, then we must evacuate the building. Staff will show you the way out. If there is any smoke in the stairwell, you should not use the main stairway and staff will lead you to an alternative stairway. In the event of a fire, you should never use the lift.

### Personal Safety

If you are concerned for your safety or feel threatened by another person, for example a current or ex-partner, please tell us about it if you can and we will do what we can to ensure your safety while you are at SARSVL.

### **OUR COMMITMENT TO SERVICE USERS**

We are fully committed to providing a respectful and accessible service to women who are survivors of sexual violence. In order to deliver this service we will:

- Respect your confidentiality in line with our policy
- Value you as a person and treat you with respect
- Not blame you for the sexual violence you have experienced nor judge you because of the behaviour of an abuser or as a result of abuse within your family
- Agree with you what support we can offer
- Be on time for arranged appointments
- Offer you uninterrupted time

We ask that all our service users will:

- Be respectful to staff and other visitors to our Centre or any place where the support may be taking place
- Keep to any agreement we have made with you
- Let us know if you cannot attend an appointment
- Be on time for arranged appointments
- Not come to appointments if under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Not self harm while using the telephone support line or attending an advocacy session

### **RESPECTING YOUR BOUNDARIES**

We know from research and from our experience of support work that physical touch can be an issue for some survivors of sexual violence. All our workers will maintain a clear and respectful and professional relationship with service users at all times. If at any time you feel that personal/professional boundaries are being overstepped, you can make a complaint. You can do this by emailing, in confidence [feedback@sarsvl.org.uk](mailto:feedback@sarsvl.org.uk) or write to us at PO BOX 827 Leeds LS19PN. Feedback forms are also available in the Centre reception area.

### **TRAINING AT SARSVL**

Part of the service we deliver here at SARSVL is delivered by volunteer Advocates who undertake an intensive training programme that includes shadowing experienced workers.

In order to ensure that volunteer Advocates are trained to meet the needs of our service users, they will shadow appointments as part of their induction when they have completed their training. We will

always ask for your permission for a new Advocate to shadow your Advocate and you have the right to decide whether or not you have a trainee shadowing your Advocate. You will never be put under any pressure to accept this and you can change your mind at any time

## **GIFTS**

From our experience of support work we know that women often wish to give small gifts to support workers as an appreciation of their support. We understand that this can be a way of saying 'thank you' for the service but our support workers are unable to accept any personal gifts or payments from service users.

## **CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR**

We understand the reasons why some survivors of violence and abuse may present with challenging behaviour. At the same time we have a responsibility to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and other service users, and to maintain appropriate boundaries within support work.

If your behaviour is unacceptable, we will tell you why, and also tell you what we feel you need to do to make your behaviour acceptable. Wherever possible we will respond to your needs and feelings, and will do what we reasonably can to be able to continue to offer you support.

If your behaviour continues to be unacceptable we may withdraw the advocacy service. Again we will tell you what you need to do to make your behaviour acceptable, and a further appointment for support will be offered as appropriate.

If your behaviour leads us to decide that we can no longer offer you a service, if you so wish we will work with you to do what we reasonably can to identify an alternative source of support.

## **WHAT IF I WANT TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER?**

We encourage our service users to become involved with SARSVL. Service users can apply to volunteer with us one year leaving our service.

## **YOUR FEEDBACK**

Your feedback, whether positive or negative, is very important to us as it helps us to develop and evaluate our services to ensure that we provide you and other service users with the best possible support. You can feedback to us one of the following ways:

- you can email us, confidence at [feedback@sarsvl.org.uk](mailto:feedback@sarsvl.org.uk)
- write to us at PO BOX 827 Leeds LS1 9PN
- complete a feedback form, these are available in the Centre reception area.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Is there a minimum or maximum time that I have to be a SARSVL service user?**

If you are going through the criminal justice system, you may be engaged with us for up to two years, depending on the length of time from making the initial report through to the trial date. We can also offer support after the trial and will work with you until you feel ready to leave the service.

If you are not engaged in the criminal justice system and do not wish to be, we will review your support plan with you every three months, with a view to bringing it to an end. Our aim is to empower you to regain control of life and to work with you to reach the stage where you no longer feel you need to access our service.

### **What do I do if I want to make a complaint?**

You can make a complaint one of the following ways:

- you can email us, confidence at [feedback@sarsvl.org.uk](mailto:feedback@sarsvl.org.uk)
- write to us at PO BOX 827 Leeds LS19PN
- complete a feedback forms, these are available in the Centre reception area.

### **Do I have to report to the police to access your service?**

No, it is entirely up you if you wish to report to the police and we can provide information about this process. We will respect whatever decision you make about whether to report or not.

### **Can I access the Advocacy Service if I am already engaged with another agency/other agencies?**

If you feel that we are the right service to offer you support you can access our Advocacy Service regardless of whether you are engaged in other services. If we are not the right service for you we will try to find one that is.

### **Do I have to come to your Centre?**

Advocates can accompany you to appointments, provided that your Advocate is available. All face to face appointments take place at our Centre and as rule, we do not make home visits. On some occasions, an Advocate can meet you at a Doctor's surgery, for example.

### **If my case is being handled by another police force, can SARSVL still help me?**

If a police force, other than West Yorkshire police is handling your case, provided that you live in the Leeds area and you feel that you need support, you can still access our service. We will, however, be unable to accompany you to court as the case will be tried in the area where the relevant police force is located. We can refer you to an ISVA service in that area, if there is one available and if they have capacity, for support at trial.



## OUR POLICIES

The work of SARSVL is underpinned by a range of policies that have been developed for the protection of our service users and the organisation.

These include:

- **SARSVL Child Protection Policy**

We are fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. We recognise our responsibility to take all reasonable steps to promote safe practice and to protect children from neglect, harm, abuse and exploitation. We acknowledge our duty to act appropriately when responding to reports or suspicions that cause concern for the protection, welfare or safety of a child or young person.

- **SARSVL Adults at Risk Policy**

We are fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of adults at risk and in need of safeguarding. We recognise our responsibility to take all reasonable steps to promote safe practice. We acknowledge our duty to act appropriately when responding to reports or suspicions that cause concern for the protection, welfare or safety of an adult at risk and in need of safeguarding.

- **SARSVL Complaints Policy\***

We are committed to providing the best possible service to the individuals we work with. We acknowledge, however, that there will be occasions when people might not be happy with some aspect of our provision. Our complaints policy is intended to make it easier for you to tell us when you are dissatisfied with the service you receive from us. All complaints will be taken seriously and we aim to treat you with respect and consideration throughout the complaints process.

- **SARSVL Service User Confidentiality Policy\***

We recognise that confidentiality is of fundamental importance to service users and also essential to the effective running of our whole service. Our Service User Confidentiality Policy is based on the principle that the service user's interests, wishes and rights are paramount.

- **SARSVL Data Protection Policy**

We collect and use information about the women with whom we work with and support. The policy statement sets out how SARSVL acquires, records, stores discloses and destroys data in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). We record details about the sexual offences committed against service users in the advocacy service, where we have a knowledge of them. This is for the purposes of internal monitoring and evaluation, providing a service and meeting service user needs as well as funders' requirements. SARSVL shares statistical information in an anonymised format for the purposes of applying for funding, monitoring how funds are spent and responding to request for information from Government offices, the Charity Commission and other reputable organisations. Such statistical and anonymised information may also be used for campaigning or publicity purposes.

- **SARSVL Equality & Diversity Policy\***

We are committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity, which are central to our work. Everyone at SARSVL is committed to ensuring that they abide by this policy. The purpose of the policy is to provide equality and fairness for all in our employment and service delivery. We

will not discriminate unlawfully or unfairly because of age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. Everyone who has contact with the Centre is entitled to experience an environment that promotes dignity and respect for all. We will not tolerate any form of intimidation, bullying or harassment.

- **SARSVL Professional Boundaries Policy**

Providing our staff and volunteers with guidance related to the setting and maintaining of professional boundaries with service users.

- **SARSVL Service User Involvement Policy\***

This policy makes clear the methods SARSVL will use to involve service users in organisational decision making, ensures 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, demonstrates how we will monitor and evaluate service user involvement. It also upholds service user involvement as a key aspect of how SARSVL is run

- **SARSVL Suicide & Self-Harm Policy**

The right to self-determination is a core value of SARSVL, this means that a woman or girl has the right to make decisions about her own life. Whilst a survivor is receiving support from SARSVL our aim is to empower her to do this without telling her what to do or giving her advice on how to behave. A woman or girl who has experienced rape or sexual violence has already been disempowered by her abuser and therefore she doesn't need us to further disempower her by taking away her right to make her own decisions. Instead, we will seek to understand, to be compassionate and to support, not criticise.

\* If you would like see a copy of any of these policies, please ask your Advocate.