***The Counselling Service at Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds***

The Counselling Service at Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL) is currently in a position to offer assessments for counselling, as well as weekly individual and group counselling appointments. We offer appointments to women aged 18 and above who have experienced sexual violence at any point in their lives.

‘Sexual violence’ is any unwanted sexual act or activity. There are many different kinds of sexual violence, including but not restricted to: rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape within marriage/relationships, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and ritual abuse. Sexual violence can be perpetrated by a complete stranger, or by someone known and even trusted, such as a friend, colleague, family member, partner or ex-partner.

As sexual violence can affect anyone SARSVL is open to all kinds of women, and therefore welcomes *LGBTQIA\*, BME\*\**, *non-binary\*\*\**, refugee and asylum seeking women into its Counselling Service. The Service is also accessible to women with disabilities.

*\*lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual*

*\*\*black and minority ethnic*

*\*\*\*any gender identity that does not sit within the binary of ‘female’*

***How can a woman access the Counselling Service?***

Before an assessment takes place a referral form needs to be completed. This can be done over the telephone with the Counselling Service Co-Ordinator in around 20-30 minutes, or it can be sent to a woman via e-mail/post to complete and return. Completed forms can be sent electronically to counselling@sarsvl.org.uk or to the PO Box address on the form.

***What happens next?***

Once a referral form is completed and received, an assessment can take place and would be done at SARSVL (Eastgate, LS2). An assessment would be with the Counselling Service Co-Ordinator who is a Counsellor & Psychotherapist, and her name is Erene. Assessments take between 60 and 90 minutes and usually one assessment appointment is offered, although it may be the case that a woman is seen for two appointments overall to complete the assessment.

There is a team of Counsellors within the Service that are trained and experienced in supporting women who have experienced sexual violence, and as such we offer a specialist service. Once an assessment is completed a woman would be placed onto a waiting list to start weekly counselling appointments. Therefore there is a gap between being assessed and starting weekly appointments.

Please note that the Counselling Service experiences high demand for appointments, which are offered in line with your availability. Therefore **we will make three attempts to contact you over the period of a fortnight, upon receipt of your referral.** Should we be unable to do so and/or not hear from you in return, we will assume you do not wish to come for an assessment appointment at this time and will advise you of this in writing.

Additionally, should we schedule an assessment and you cancel at short notice/don’t attend without prior cancellation **twice**, we will assume that you are not yet ready or willing to access the Counselling Service.

We understand that starting the process of counselling can be difficult, but hope you can appreciate that we are limited in the number of appointments we can offer. Should this happen, we will try to discuss this with you wherever possible.

***What kind of Counselling is available?***

The Service offers individual (one-to-one) and group counselling. Whichever type a woman accesses is her preference, but she cannot do both. Each type is therapeutic work which is supported by a Counsellor. Due to the nature of the work involved, it is not possible to offer counselling whilst a woman is working with another professional offering them psychological treatment (e.g.- a Counsellor, Psychotherapist, Psychologist).

Working with a trained professional outside of a woman’s current situation can be beneficial in managing the challenges specific to a woman that she finds difficult. All Counsellors are trained and experienced in working with trauma as a consequence of sexual violence. Each Counsellor practices from a different theoretical perspective, and all Counsellors work from a collaborative stance that supports recovery and empowerment through relationship. Therefore we have a multi-disciplinary team within our specialist Service, and can allocate a woman to a Counsellor according to her preference (if she has one).

Group work is a unique opportunity to be with other women who have experienced sexual violence, and be supported by a Counsellor. Some women find it extremely helpful to be around others who have similar experiences and difficulties, and working alongside several other people means that a woman can gain lots of different perspectives and strategies on what is affecting her.

Sometimes a few appointments is suitable and preferred by a woman to help with what she immediately needs, and longer-term work for up to one year is also available. Longer term work is prioritised according to individual need.

Counselling is not simply a listening service, nor do we offer drop-in appointments for women wanting support outside of seeing their Counsellor. Counsellors can only provide therapeutic support for a woman’s mental health and general wellbeing, and cannot give you practical support/advice inside or outside of your appointments. Should you wish to access practical support SARSVL has an Advocacy Service which can help, and this can be discussed at appointments with the Counselling Service.

***What if a woman is going through the Criminal Justice System in relation to her experiences of sexual violence?***

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) impose limits on what can be discussed in counselling whilst a woman is involved in a trial, as the facts of what happened are considered as evidence. Due to these restrictions the Counselling Service at SARSVL is regrettably not currently able to offer counselling to women who have an upcoming trial or are currently undergoing a trial. However, we are able to offer counselling once a trial has been completed.

Should this apply to a woman you are referring, you can contact the Counselling Service Co-Ordinator for further information and guidance.

***How can I contact the Counselling Service at SARSVL?***

Professionals and woman are welcome to make enquiries by email: counselling@sarsvl.org.uk or by telephone: 0113 200 2936. It is can also possible to write to the Counselling Service via PO Box 827, Leeds, LS1 9PN.