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

The Counselling Service at Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL) offers specialist individual and group counselling appointments to women aged 18 and above who have experienced sexual violence at any point in their lives. Counselling is provided in a women-only space, in a confidential environment.

‘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 I access the Counselling Service?***

Before an assessment takes place a referral form needs to be completed. You are welcome to complete this yourself if you are able to, with another professional you trust, or over the telephone with the Counselling Service at SARSVL.

If you are happy to complete the form yourself or want a copy to complete with a professional you are already working with, it can be sent via e-mail/post to complete and return. Completed forms can be sent electronically to [counselling@sarsvl.org.uk](mailto:counselling@sarsvl.org.uk) or to the PO Box address on the form.

If you need support from SARSVL to complete the form, please contact the Counselling Service to request a time to do so.

***What happens when you receive my referral form?***

Once a referral form is completed and received, we will keep your referral form safe, and note on our system that you are wanting an assessment appointment.

There is currently a four to five month wait for an assessment appointment. Rather than book an assessment appointment months in advance we will contact you when your name is near the top of the list, giving you 4-6 weeks’ notice to book this in for you. We hope that this means it will be easier to schedule an appointment at a time that suits you, and ensure that you are ready at shorter notice to prepare for this appointment.

If you do not respond to the offer of an assessment appointment when it is made to you, we will assume you no longer wish to use the Counselling Service and we will remove your name from our waiting list.

***What happens at the assessment appointment?***

Your assessment takes place at SARSVL (Eastgate, LS2), and will be with the Counselling Service Co-Ordinator or Specialist Counsellor, both of whom are qualified practitioners. 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 usually 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 several attempts to contact you to offer both appointments. 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 wherever possible.

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?***

*4 fortnightly sessions in the Wellbeing Programme (1:1 work)*

*8 weekly sessions in the Self-Care Sessions (1:1 work)*

The 4 and 8 session options are for women who want structured work that is focused on creating a sense of safety and stabilisation. These are for women who are not ready to talk about what has happened to them, but want to address its impact to improve their ability to function on a daily basis. These options are also available for women who are in the criminal justice system (have reported to the Police, and/or have a case underway).

*20 sessions of counselling (1:1 work)*

This longer work is for women who are ready and able to explore what has happened to them, as well as creating coping mechanisms to manage the impact of their experiences. This option is not available for women in the criminal justice system.

*Group counselling*

An opportunity to work with other women who have had similar experiences, with the support of a Group Therapist. This option is not available for women in the criminal justice system.

Whichever type of support you choose to access is your preference, but you cannot do more than one. Due to the nature of the work involved, it is not possible to offer counselling whilst you are due to, or are, working with another professional who is offering you psychological treatment (e.g.- a Counsellor, Psychotherapist, Psychologist). We can only offer counselling to women who do not currently have this need being met by other services.

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.

***How long will I have to wait to access the Counselling Service?***

At present women wait up to 5 months for their assessment appointment following receipt of their referral form. Once the assessment is completed, there is a shorter wait to start whatever type of weekly appointments you have decided is best for you.

We appreciate that this is a long process in your efforts to receive help for your psychological wellbeing/mental health following sexual violence. Please be assured that we take this extremely seriously, and hugely appreciate your patience. We politely request that you bear the above waiting times in mind, and let us know if any of your personal circumstances change during the time you are waiting, so that we know of anything that might affect your ability to see a Counsellor here at SARSVL.

Waiting times are due to the very high demand for specialist counselling for female survivors of sexual violence at SARSVL. We are the only service of its kind in Leeds, offering free counselling and self-care support for all types of sexual violence in a women-only space. We would like to assure you that SARSVL is doing all it can to meet the demand for our services, and to keep waiting times as short as possible.

***What if I am going through the criminal justice system (CJS) in relation to my experiences of sexual violence?***

The Counselling Service at SARSVL is able to offer either 20 sessions of one-to-one counselling or the shorter Self-Care Programme for women in the CJS. This includes a report being made, a case currently being investigated, an upcoming trial or a trial that is underway.

Please be aware that the provision of counselling to women in the criminal justice system is subject to additional factors you will need to be aware of, in order to adequately support you. This will be explained, should this apply to you.

***I need information and practical support around a report of sexual violence I have made, or am thinking of making.***

If you also require information and practical support about reporting any sexual offence to the Police, or are currently involved in reporting to the Police, our Advocacy Service may be appropriate.

The Advocacy Service is an independent service working with women 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.

If you would like to access SARSVL’s Advocacy Service, you can e-mail via: [advocacy@sarsvl.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@sarsvl.org.uk), or call: 0113 200 2930. If you are using the Counselling Service and would then like to access Advocacy too, simply let your Counsellor know and an internal referral can be made on your behalf.

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

Professionals and women are welcome to make enquiries by email: [counselling@sarsvl.org.uk](mailto: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.

*All information correct as of October 2017.*