**Introduction**

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. **Communicating with service users**

When creating the format of questionnaires or the provision of written information, consideration should be given to any communications needs of potential recipients and their ability to access and make use of the content:

1. Information should be clear and concise and avoid the use of jargon.
2. Written information should avoid using more words than are needed and use short and simple sentences where possible.
3. Lengthy amounts of text can benefit from headings and sub heading to break up content and be more reader friendly.
4. Consideration should be given as to how the requirements of key populations can be met for example, availability of text in a variety of languages, easy read formats, BSL, etc, or pictorial / video formats, in accordance with the Accessible Information Standard.
5. **Methods used to involve service users**
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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 woman coming to the centre to access services. In addition we would ensure that service users were 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.
9. 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.
10. **Informing service users of how they can participate and providing them with feedback**
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. **Monitoring and evaluating service user involvement**
14. Our complaints policy includes timescales for responding to and resolving complaints, we will monitor compliance with this.
15. A quarterly 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.
16. 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.
17. **Working or Volunteering for SARSVL outside Service User Involvement**

SARSVL recognises the significant contribution survivors have made to the rape crisis movement and acknowledges that due to the high prevalence of rape and sexual violence in our society there may well be women volunteering or working within SARSVL who are survivors of sexual violence and who may have used our anonymous services in the past. It is up to each individual woman whether she chooses to disclose this to us when applying to volunteer or work with us.

Women who are currently receiving support from SARSVL’s Advocacy or Counselling services cannot apply for a volunteer or paid role whilst they are still receiving a service from SARSVL.

Women who have used SARSVL’s Advocacy and/or Counselling Service have, by the nature of these services, built relationships with SARSVL volunteers and staff. Therefore, if a woman has used SARSVL’s services in the past and wishes to apply for a volunteer or paid role, SARSVL suggests the candidate takes the following into consideration:

1. The nature of the role they are undertaking, and its potential emotional impact. Frontline work supporting survivors of sexual violence, whether in a volunteer or paid role, and whether in the Advocacy, Helpline or Counselling service, is likely to have a greater impact than a role in business support. A business support role refers to any position within SARSVL which does not involve service delivery to survivors. However, this will depend upon the individual, and a business support role, whether it be as a volunteer or a paid member of staff, may still have a significant emotional impact.
2. Their own mental health and wellbeing in relation to the specific duties outlined in the role being apply for.
3. Whether the position applied for is within the SARSVL service the woman previously received support from.
4. The impact of the change in relationship from service user to volunteer or paid member of staff. In the case of a former counselling client applying for a position with the counselling team, the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy’s Ethical Framework’s commitments to clients will be considered during this process.

For women who have received support from SARSVL’s Advocacy or Counselling Services in the past all current application and eligibility criteria still apply when applying to work or volunteer with SARSVL.

NOTE: Please check the SARSVL Professional Boundaries Policy for further confirmation.

1. **Service user involvement in how SARSVL is run**
2. All new staff and volunteers will be made aware of this policy and of the importance of involving service users.
3. This policy will be reviewed and updated regularly
4. 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.

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| Date of Last Review: | 27/01/2021 | Date of Next Review:  | January 2023 |