

Behavioural change independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) programme

Multi-agency behaviour change service supporting participants identified as having problematic or unhealthy attitudes and behaviour towards family members.

First published

8 June 2023

Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Crime prevention Offender management Violence against women and girls Violence (other) Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Devon and Cornwall Police
Contact	Andy Smith
Email address	andrew.smith2@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2018
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Adults Families Offenders

Aim

The behaviour change (BC) IDVA pilot programme was offered by FearLess (formally known as Splitz Support Services) alongside support from the Turnaround Integrated Offender Management Team (IOM) within Exeter in 2018.

Since implementation the programme has grown. It is commissioned by various providers around Devon and Cornwall, including Barnardo's and Ahimsa.

The overall aim of the programme is to support those who display unhealthy attitudes and behaviour – which if escalated or they become established as a pattern could constitute a domestic abuse-related offence – to change their behaviours.

This is through:

- recognising their unhealthy behaviour patterns and understanding ways to address them
- understanding the impact abuse has on others, in particular children and other family members
- taking responsibility for wanting to change their behaviour

Intended outcome

The BC IDVA programme is guided by a trauma-informed approach. It includes crisis management and building trusting relationships. Once these factors are stable, the recovery work then begins.

Description

These aims are achieved primarily through working one-on-one with a BC IDVA. The BC IDVA works with an IDVA who is allocated to work with the abuser's victim(s). A children's resilience worker is also available in case there are children five years of age or older in the family.

The commissioned IDVAs also work in partnership with the police, probation, social services, and other agencies to share information that may contribute towards reducing domestic abuse and offending behaviour.

Regular meetings between Devon and Cornwall forces and agencies take place, varying between weekly and monthly. These meetings provide key updates and discuss the progress of perpetrators currently part of the programme.

The programme follows six specific mechanisms, based around Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987).

Mechanism one – stability and security

As part of the programme, the BC IDVA attempts to help the participant engage with support services that may be of assistance. (For example, housing, employment, mental health, drugs and alcohol support services.)

The participant is usually moved away from their home and family for a period. However, not all participants and partners like this technique. From a staff perspective this approach is an effective tool for crisis management.

Mechanism two – receptive to alternative viewpoints

The BC IDVA helps to create stability and security for the participant (refer to mechanism one) – both physiological and emotional. Once these are met, the participant can focus on higher order emotional needs, such as optimism and trust. For many of the participants in this sample, this was the first time they felt they had someone objective who could provide them with emotional support, while also advocating for them.

Participants receiving emotional support is key to creating an environment where they feel comfortable hearing alternative viewpoints. This builds confidence (refer to mechanism four) to be receptive to the material that the BC IDVA goes through with them.

Mechanism three – empathy

Increased receptivity to alternative perspectives is directly linked to a participant's ability to empathise. Empathy is a necessary step to motivating them to change their behaviour (refer to mechanism six).

Mechanism four – self-efficacy

Participants gain confidence that they can succeed in the programme (improved self-efficacy) through:

- receiving consistent, non-judgemental support from the BC IDVA
- working through personal improvements to gain stability and security

Many of the participants that were interviewed spoke about the positive reinforcement they received from their BC IDVA.

Mechanism five – honesty and trust

This involves building a trusting relationship and creating a safe space for the participant to disclose personal information and is important to the behaviour change process.

It is important for trust to be earned by the BC IDVA, as participants may enter the programme with varying levels of distrust.

Mechanism six – motivation to change

Motivation to change and motivation to participate within the programme often overlaps. Once a person makes the decision to participate in the programme, they must be motivated to change and achieve results.

One of the most important elements of the programme involves selecting the right individuals with the right skills for the programme. The abilities and temperament of the BC IDVA is critical to

achieving the necessary relationship between the BC IDVA and the participant).

The ability of the BC IDVA to work effectively one-on-one with the participants is due to training and experience (professional judgement). But it also relies on how comfortable they are working with the participants as well as the personal characteristics they bring to the role.

Evaluation

A qualitative evaluation of the BC IDVA programme was undertaken by the University of Exeter.

Data collection for the evaluation consisted of semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of police and programme staff associated with the BC IDVA programme. Interviews were conducted by telephone (with participants and partners/survivors) or using a web conferencing platform (with professionals) for a total of 20 interviews with 19 individuals.

Additional contextual information came from analysis meetings with key programme staff. The evaluation takes a realist approach, which was chosen to develop an explanatory model of how the BC IDVA programme works for perpetrators.

Overall impact

Overall, it is difficult to prove whether the programme works. Most of the programme feedback and evaluation is via word of mouth during conversations between staff and IDVAs and this is supported by the evaluation.

The [evaluation report](#) (Fleischer and Melendez-Torres, 2022), stated that the contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes identified in the analysis are not intended to be an exhaustive list. Instead the analysis provides a comprehensive identification of the causal mechanisms and conditions under which key outcomes are achieved for this programme.

Key points from the evaluation report

The following points are of note.

- The one-on-one format is not only preferred by participants but is also the vehicle for the behaviour change process. The one-on-one format provides the time, continuity, and personalisation that is required to establish a trusted relationship between the participant and BC

IDVA. Without that relationship, the mechanisms will fail to trigger.

- The abilities and temperament of the BC IDVA is critical to achieving the necessary relationship between the BC IDVA and the participant. Participants praised having a BC IDVA who was calm and non-judgemental, but also honest and challenged their thinking and perspective. The positive relationship with the BC IDVA helps to keep participants engaged in the programme and facilitates motivation to change their behaviour. Decisions around job profile descriptions and training for the BC IDVA and related roles should be informed by the context and mechanisms identified in this model.
- Continued and adequate funding plays a critical part in being able to attract, train, and retain the right people to undertake the BC IDVA role. Securing longer-term funding for the behaviour change programme, which adequately supports the whole family approach (BC IDVA, IDVA, and children's resilience worker roles) is essential.
- The multi-agency approach is not just a programme feature, but an integral part of the behaviour change process. The BC IDVA programme overcomes issues relating to information sharing and confidentiality through their multi-agency approach, which includes timely information sharing between Splitz and Devon and Cornwall Police. Continuing to implement the programme in partnership with Devon and Cornwall Police is recommended.
- Participants' motivation, both to participate and change their behaviour, is an area where more research is needed. It would be useful to better understand the complexities around motivation and how it relates to the behaviour change process and intended outcomes. Increased motivation to change is linked to how well the participant can move from feeling that they are a bad person who cannot change to feeling that they can make positive changes to their behaviour (increased self-efficacy).
- Research has shown the importance of motivational strategies to the behaviour change process for participants. The current model highlights the importance of trust, self-efficacy, non-judgement, and taking responsibility and accountability for the behaviour change model. All of these are shown to be important features of motivational strategies. Identifying ways the current behaviour change programme uses motivational strategies can connect it more closely to evidence of efficacy, but also direct prioritisation of the specific techniques employed.
- Increased stability and security appear to be an antecedent to the other mechanisms. The mechanism can be divided into physical and emotional stability and security. Emotional stability and security are largely reached through the relationship building and recovery stage of the programme enacted through the one-on-one format. These features are within the control of the

programme. Meanwhile, physical security tends to rely more on external contexts that are outside of the control of the programme. For instance, the BC IDVA can try and connect participants to support services. But if those services are at capacity or the participant does not meet the threshold for the services, they cannot access the services. If one does not already exist, an easily updatable, written record of key organisations and relevant contacts for external agencies for their crisis management work should be developed. This helps to preserve institutional memory.

- The whole-family approach is not just a programme feature, but an integral part of the behaviour change process. From a safeguarding perspective, having eyes on the whole family is profound. From a participant management standpoint, getting the chance to hear from participants, partners/survivors and children through their individual case workers helps to inform and guide how the BC IDVA approaches and works with the participant.
- Offering direct child support through the children's resilience worker is important to the participant's behaviour change but also for helping end cycles of abuse. The importance of direct support services for children of participants taking part in behaviour change programmes.

Month-on-month across Devon and Cornwall, re-offending rates remain low. There is a cohort size of 55, as of February 2023. This scheme and cohort size is expected to grow further in 2023.

- [Evaluation report – Qualitative, realist evaluation of BC IDVA programme for non-statutory domestic abuse perpetrators](#)

Learning

One of the main strengths of this programme is that it does something that hasn't been done before. When dealing with domestic abuse and behaviour change there is usually a strong focus on the victims. Consequently, perpetrators are only viewed from a 'catch and convict' perspective.

This programme allows for participants whose behaviour is problematic or unhealthy, to engage before it escalates, becomes established as a pattern or constitutes a criminal offence.

Successes

A key success is that other policing areas have recognised the impact of the programme. Other IOMs are starting to implement the programme in their areas. This can only advance the

programme further.

Another success is the programme can be aimed at participants who may not have broken the law but have recognised proactively that some of their behaviours are unhealthy and gives them an avenue to seek support.

Additionally, the programme introduces new partners into IOM. This increases the spectrum of support that can be offered to individuals throughout the cohorts. The host subject is therefore broadened through bringing different teams and ideas together and developing new and effective approaches.

Weaknesses

One specific area of the programme that needs further research is participants' motivation to both take part and change their behaviour. It would be beneficial to develop a wider understanding around the complexities of motivation and how it relates to the behaviour change process and its intended outcomes.

A main weakness of this programme is its longevity, which links into challenges and barriers.

Challenges and barriers

Continued and adequate funding plays a critical role in attracting, training, and retaining the right people to undertake the BC IDVA role. Low pay is a challenge to attracting and retaining facilitators, but also in finding people who are comfortable and skilled at working with participants.

Programmes should expect and enable participants to communicate with their children about the steps they are taking to end their abusive behaviour.

Additionally, key learnings from the working relationships formed within the programme between forces and multiagency are highlighted due to their specific local approach. For example, the Cornwall force works with Cornwall's Bernardo's advocacy. The partnership formed between the local force and multiagency group works effectively, as both sides are aware of the most local and prevalent issues.

Decisions around job profile descriptions and training for the BC IDVA and related roles should be informed by the context and mechanisms identified by this model. BC IDVAs – especially new BC

IDVAs – would benefit from clear guidance on:

- what features of their work are most important to achieving intended outcomes
- how to best balance availability and boundaries to preserve their own wellbeing and to avoid becoming enmeshed with the participant

Best available evidence

Currently, the [crime reduction toolkit](#) does not include best-available evidence on BC IDVA programmes that focus on participants who have not broken the law. It does include evidence on [motivational interviewing](#) to support behaviour change with domestic abuse perpetrators.

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Tags

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