



The *DACA* Accreditation Project Year 3 Report



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01. Introduction

The *DACA* Accreditation Project

In 2022, **SafeLives** and **ASSIST** were funded by **the Scottish Government's Victim-Centred Approach Fund** to undertake the **Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy (DACA) Accreditation Project**.

SafeLives is the UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone, for good. SafeLives works with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. SafeLives adopts an approach that listens to survivors, putting their perspective at the centre of all work; uses robust evidence to make decisions; and learns from the expertise of people working frontline.

ASSIST is a specialist independent domestic abuse court advocacy and support service with a focus on reducing risk and improving safety. With services for adults, children and young people, ASSIST was set up as part of Glasgow's Domestic Abuse Court in 2004. Since then, ASSIST has continued to expand and now provides domestic abuse court advocacy in 13 local authority areas across the west and south of Scotland.

SafeLives partnered with ASSIST for this project due to their expert knowledge and frontline expertise and understanding of the role of a specialist court advocacy provider.

The project team is comprised of:

- ➔ Gemma Gall, Programme Lead (SafeLives)
- ➔ Louise Docherty, Subject Matter Expert (ASSIST)
- ➔ Abigail Freathy, Research Analyst (SafeLives)
- ➔ Jabeel Mahmood, Research Analyst (SafeLives)
- ➔ Maddy Austin, Project Support Officer (SafeLives)

And has previously comprised:

- ➔ Kirsty Campbell, Programme Lead (SafeLives)
- ➔ Stephanie Lammers-Rice, Project Support Officer (SafeLives)
- ➔ Lan Pham, Research Analyst (SafeLives)

Research was also supported by Dr Clare McKeown, Stirling University and SafeLives' Authentic Voice Panel members. ⁽¹⁾

03.

Project Aims and Activities

The strategic aims of the **DACA Accreditation Project** are that:

- ➔ All individuals throughout Scotland have the opportunity to access accredited domestic abuse criminal court advocacy services when required;
- ➔ Clients feel safer, heard and more empowered in the criminal court process in Scotland;
- ➔ Professionals feel more confident in how to best support victims and survivors of domestic abuse to navigate a complex justice system;
- ➔ The effectiveness, validity, visibility and consistency of the domestic abuse court advocacy role is increased across Scotland.

To work towards meeting these strategic aims, over the course of the funding period the **DACA Accreditation Project** will:

- ➔ Create a 'map' ⁽²⁾ of current domestic abuse court advocacy provision in Scotland;
- ➔ Create **national standards** for domestic abuse court advocacy in Scotland;
- ➔ Create an accreditation framework for domestic abuse court advocacy services;
- ➔ Create and deliver an SQA-accredited training unit on specialist domestic abuse court advocacy; and
- ➔ Mentor new and emerging domestic abuse court advocacy services.

(1) SafeLives' Authentic Voice Panel is made up of 10 women from all over Scotland who are survivors of domestic abuse. The panel consult on multiple areas of SafeLives' work and co-create resources.

*(2) **'Mapping and Scoping Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy in Scotland – Definitions and Evidence'** report available on the DACA Accreditation website: www.dacascotland.org.uk/resources*

04.

Terminology

Clients, complainers, victims and survivors of domestic abuse

How people with lived experience of domestic abuse refer to themselves is deeply personal. In the Scottish legal system, the term 'complainer' is used to refer to "the alleged victim in the charge".⁽³⁾ The use of the word alleged does not signify that the victim/survivor is not believed, but that the case has not at that stage been proven. We recognise that use of legal terminology has been identified as a barrier to engagement by people with lived experience of domestic abuse and these criminal justice processes. We have chosen the term 'client' to create space for people accessing domestic abuse court advocacy services who may not at this stage refer to themselves as victims or survivors of domestic abuse.

Parameters

Early in the project, a number of people with lived experience and professional stakeholders highlighted the interconnection between domestic abuse, criminal court and civil/family court proceedings. The impact of domestic abuse on children and the lack of specialist court support were also regularly raised. Similarly, the intersection of sexual abuse as a tactic of coercive control was identified as a prevalent factor in specialist court advocacy.

Due to the tight timeline, resourcing and the need to maintain a focus on domestic abuse court advocacy standards for criminal proceedings, the decision was made to set parameters for this work, limiting the focus to domestic abuse and criminal court considerations only, with a primary focus on adult clients – with the possibility of building on this work to incorporate interconnected factors in the future. Rape Crisis Scotland's court advocacy service is well established and it was agreed referrals where the primary charge libelled was sexual in nature, Rape Crisis would – generally – be the most appropriate court advocacy provider.

⁽³⁾ <https://www.scottishsentencingcouncil.org.uk/about-sentencing/jargon-buster?c=C>

02. Mapping and Scoping

In Year 3, the project team worked on consolidating the data gathered during the initial Mapping and Scoping stages of the project into a Mapping and Scoping report. During the writing process, it was recognised that there are a number of audiences for this research, including:

- Prospective domestic abuse court advocacy services
- Criminal Justice partners
- The wider domestic abuse sector
- Government
- Academia

As such, the decision was made to create two reports, which were launched in December 2024.

Mapping and scoping domestic abuse court advocacy in Scotland – definitions and evidence: ⁽⁴⁾ this report outlines how the research activities and findings have supported us to define domestic abuse court advocacy, map domestic abuse court advocacy provision in Scotland, highlight current issues with current forms of service provision, and concludes with the current limitations in service provision.

'It's like walking blindfolded through a minefield' – domestic abuse court advocacy provision in Scotland: ⁽⁵⁾ this report builds on the findings and analysis explored in depth in the definitions and evidence report to highlight opportunities to better meet the needs of victims and survivors of domestic abuse across the country who have cases going through the criminal court.

⁽⁴⁾ [Mapping and scoping domestic abuse court advocacy in Scotland – definitions and evidence](#)

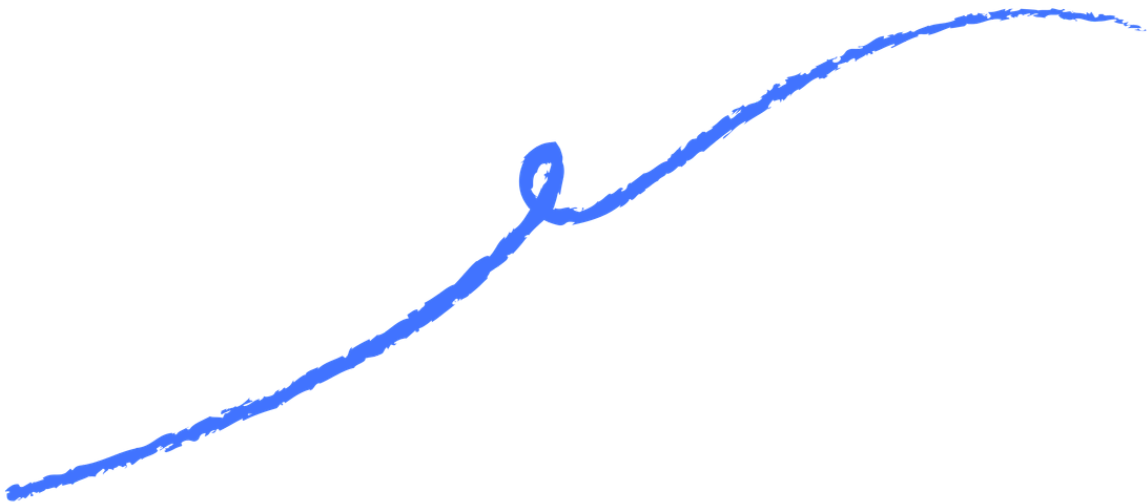
⁽⁵⁾ ['It's like walking blindfolded through a minefield' - domestic abuse court advocacy provision in Scotland](#)

03. Standards

The Standards have three primary purposes; they are:

- A way to explain domestic abuse court advocacy to the general public, including victims and survivors and professionals.
- A way for everyone to know what to expect, at a minimum, from domestic abuse court advocacy services.
- The basis for accrediting services.

The Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy standards were launched on 8th March 2024. Since their launch, we have been using the standards to develop an accreditation framework and appropriate training for DACA workers to work towards these goals .



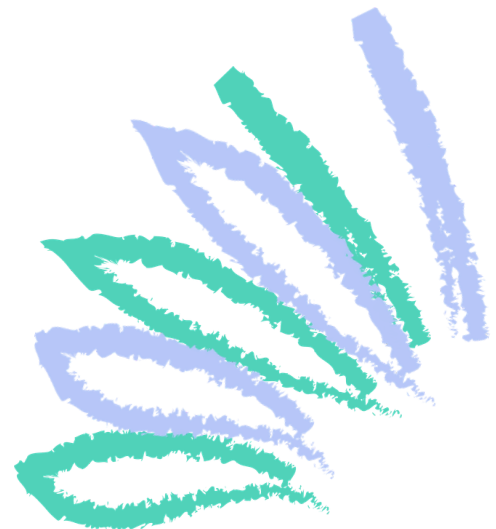
04. Training

Development

Since 2013, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has accredited Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDAA) training.⁽⁵⁾ This has been delivered by a partnership consisting of ASSIST, SafeLives and Scottish Women's Aid. IDAAs are specialist professionals who are involved in risk assessment, safety planning, signposting and referral, and provision of practical and emotional support.

Throughout year 2 the DACA project team collaborated with key agencies and individuals to develop an additional specialist module for domestic abuse court advocacy workers.

Completion of the training and assessments leads to the awarding of a Higher National unit by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Learners who have completed this training, and the four units of IDAA they must complete prior to entry on this course, will have completed a total of over 200 hours specialist training.



(5) More about the Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDAA) training can be found on the SafeLives website – <https://safelives.org.uk/training-courses/idaa-training/>

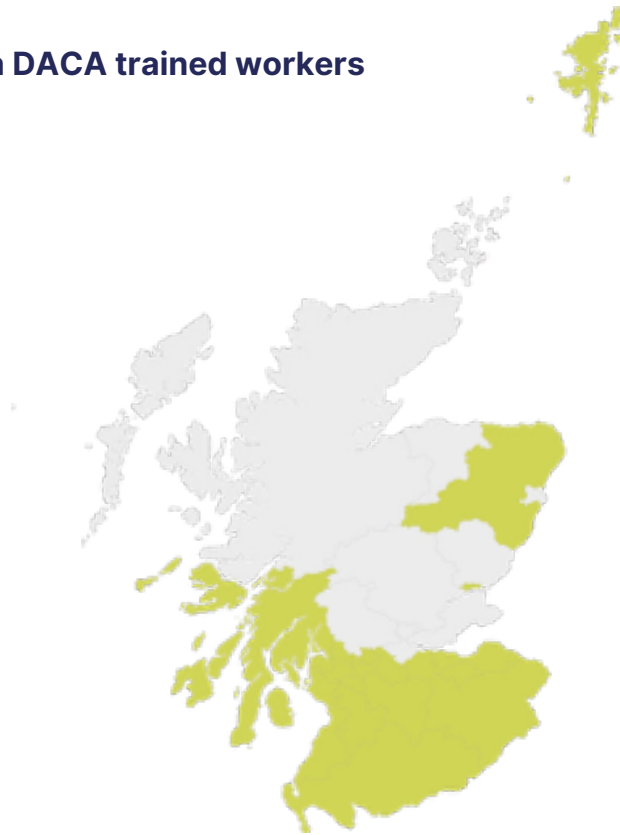
Cohorts

The specialist module is suitable for those who have completed the existing 4 blocks of the IDAA Professional Development Award and are either:

- ➔ Working in an existing domestic abuse court advocacy service, or
- ➔ Working in a service which is being mentored by the DACA team to develop a new domestic abuse court advocacy service.

The team has trained a total of **29 learners across 2 cohorts in Year 3 of the project**; this amounts to just under a third of the current estimated number of DACA workers in Scotland. Learners represent all seven eligible services, including learners from established and emerging services and from urban, rural and island areas.

Figure 1: Areas with DACA trained workers

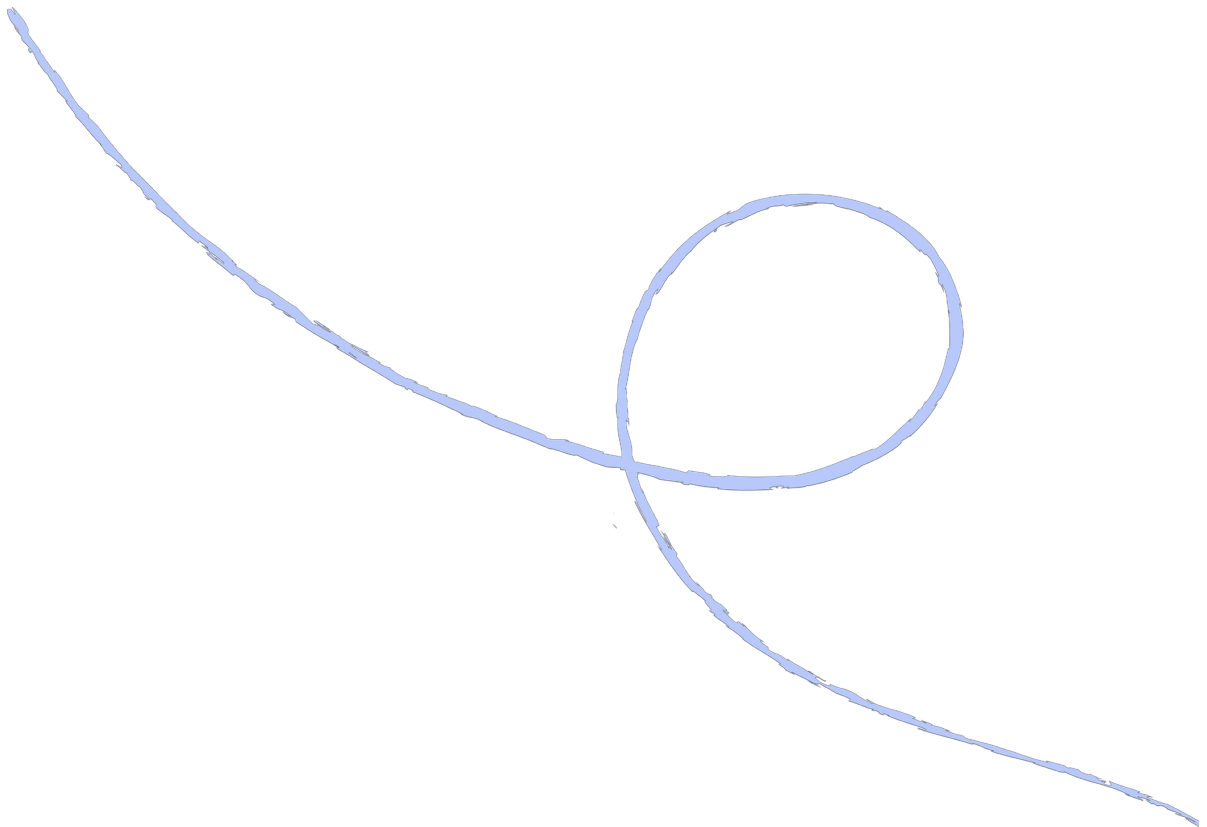


Learners benefit from the expertise of our Lead Trainer, Fiona McMullen, who has worked in domestic abuse court advocacy for over 20 years and is currently an Operations Manager at ASSIST, the largest DACA service in Scotland. We are also grateful to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) for their guest input, led by Dr Emma Forbes, Lead Procurator Fiscal for domestic abuse, and Jennifer Gilmour of the COPFS policy department.

Evaluation of training

Of the 29 learners who have completed the training:

- ➔ 100% reported there was an increase in their ability to support clients in a safe and supportive way through the criminal justice system;
- ➔ 97% felt that the training increased their understanding of the role and responsibilities of a DACA worker;
- ➔ 97% told us that there was an improvement in their confidence in explaining the criminal justice system to clients; and
- ➔ 97% of learners found that the training increased their ability to support clients in a safe and supportive way through the criminal justice system.



05. Accreditation



In Year 3, we have been building on the foundations of the Standards to develop the Accreditation Framework which outlines the process for services seeking accreditation and the evidence indicators required to demonstrate that each standard has been met.

In developing this, we have benefitted from working alongside other accreditation frameworks including SafeLives' Leading Lights programme, Scottish Women's Aid's National Service Standards, and the European-wide Working With Perpetrators standards. Lessons and questions arising from this included:

→ Will accreditation be a process of investigation or partnership?

Our decision is that the accreditation process is one which focuses more heavily on partnership. We are not requiring services to have already reached a point where they are ready to meet a significant percentage of of the standards, but to assess where they are in their journey in order to offer capacity building to support all services to meet the standards.

→ Whether to develop different levels of accreditation?

The standards are based on minimum levels of good practice. Whilst we know that there are lots of areas where services may be surpassing this level, our goal is to ensure a consistent minimum level of provision.

→ How best to link DACA accreditation with existing models services may already have achieved?

A number of DACA services have already achieved, or are working towards, existing accreditations, such as SafeLives' Leading Lights or the Scottish Women's Aid National Service Standards. To minimise additional work, the project team have been working with these bodies to align evidence requirements where possible.

The Project Team are grateful for all guidance in this area, particularly from Frances Keel, Becky Jones and Sandra Jovanović Belotić.

In Year 4 the project will begin piloting accreditation.

06. Mentoring



The project team have held conversations with services in 7 areas interested in developing a domestic abuse court advocacy service. 2 services are now officially signed up to be mentored by the project team.

As of 1st March 2025, Grampian Women’s Aid is providing a DACA service to female complainers in criminal domestic abuse court cases calling at Peterhead Sheriff Court. The service aims to expand into Banff in due course. In 2023-24 369 domestic abuse cases were reported to Peterhead Sheriff Court and 80 cases in Banff Sheriff Court. This expands DACA provision to an estimated 450 people each year. Discussions are ongoing around ensuring that male victims with domestic abuse court cases in Aberdeenshire courts are able to access DACA.

In total, if all 7 areas (including Aberdeenshire) we have been in conversation with around DACA were to be in a position to offer domestic abuse court advocacy in their area, this would increase the availability of support to include victims in nearly 7,000 charges.⁽⁶⁾

Barriers

Of the 7 areas who have expressed an interest in developing a DACA service, only 2 areas have been in a position to proceed. The most significant barriers are detailed over page:



⁽⁶⁾ Using 2023-24 figures

Lack of dedicated funding

The current funding landscape for Violence Against Women and Girls services is challenging, as outlined in the ***Violence Against Women and Girls – Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Services*** report. Despite being highlighted as a core minimum service in the report, there is no dedicated funding for domestic abuse court advocacy currently available to new and emerging DACA services. This leaves services in a position where they are either trying to access smaller pots of unrestricted short-term funding or stretch their existing funding even further.

DACA services need to be able to offer support to everyone within a defined geographic area who is the complainer in a criminal domestic abuse court case where the accused is their partner or ex-partner. For some areas which currently do not have a DACA service, this number is prohibitive without significant ring-fenced funding; an example is Fife, where there were nearly 2300 domestic abuse cases heard in its courts last year.

Inability to support male victims

Specialist domestic abuse support organisations are best placed to develop DACA services as they already have a specialist knowledge of domestic abuse and are often already providing a level of court support. Women's Aid groups operate in every area of Scotland providing support for female victims and their children. The number of male victims is statistically significantly smaller, which is reflected in a smaller number of services able to support male victims.

(7) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/violence-against-women-girls-independent-strategic-review-funding-commissioning-services-report/>

07. Evaluation

At the end of Year 3 we will conduct a light-touch evaluation of the project, incorporating the lessons that we have learned. Our outcomes tie with different areas of focus, as detailed below:

Area of focus for the project	Outcome
Individual clients	Clients feel safer, heard and more empowered in the criminal court process in Scotland
Domestic abuse court advocacy professionals	Professionals who feel more confident in how to best support victims of domestic abuse to navigate a complex justice system
Domestic abuse court advocacy worker role in Scotland	Increase the visibility of the domestic abuse court advocacy role in Scotland for all stakeholders
	Raise the efficacy and validity of the domestic abuse court advocacy role across Scotland
	Raise domestic abuse court advocacy provision to a minimum standard across Scotland
Whole population	All individuals throughout Scotland to have the opportunity to access accredited criminal domestic abuse court advocacy services when required

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