



***“We will support  
without judgement”***  
**Domestic Abuse  
Court Advocacy for  
LGBTQ+ people in  
Scotland**

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# 01. Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy *DACA* Accreditation Project

Since 2022, SafeLives and ASSIST have been 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, focussed on reducing risk and improving safety for those who experience domestic abuse. 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 a service in 13 local authorities across the west of Scotland. ASSIST support people of all genders whose partner, or ex-partner, has a domestic abuse case going through the criminal court. It is a free, telephone based, independent service.

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.

03.

# Aims of the Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Accreditation Project

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' of current domestic abuse court advocacy provision in Scotland <sup>(1)</sup>;
- ➔ Create national standards <sup>(2)</sup> 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 <sup>(3)</sup> on specialist domestic abuse court advocacy;
- ➔ Support new and emerging domestic abuse court advocacy services.

<sup>(1)</sup> [Mapping and Scoping Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy in Scotland – Definitions and Evidence report.](#)

<sup>(2)</sup> [The Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Standards](#)

<sup>(3)</sup> [IDAA Block 5: Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Training](#)

# LGBT Youth Scotland Charter

LGBT Youth Scotland is a national charity for LGBTQ+ young people aged 13-25<sup>(4)</sup>. The charity also runs the LGBT Charter, a programme that enables organisations to proactively improve LGBTQ+ inclusion for staff and service users, through meeting objectives and standards set out by LGBT Youth Scotland.



(4) [LGBT Youth Scotland charity](#)

# 02. Introduction

The foundations of domestic abuse court advocacy, as outlined in the standards, are that:

- ➔ Everyone has a right to live their life free from abuse;
- ➔ Everyone should have access to free, independent, and accredited domestic abuse court advocacy;
- ➔ Domestic abuse is an intersectional gendered issue.

The DACA Accreditation project undertook a year of mapping and scoping activities at the beginning of the project to understand where domestic abuse court advocacy is available in Scotland <sup>(5)</sup>. The project team recognised that there may be additional barriers for some minoritised communities, including LGBTQ+ people, in accessing domestic abuse court advocacy and began working towards achieving the Foundation-level LGBT Charter mark. As part of our charter journey, and to inform our accreditation framework, the project team invited DACA workers and managers to take part in a professional discussion focused on how to create inclusive domestic abuse court advocacy services for LGBTQ+ people in Scotland.

The key themes raised in the professional discussion were:

- ➔ Identifying LGBTQ+ clients;
- ➔ Raising awareness of DACA services for LGBTQ+ people;
- ➔ Current discourse around LGBTQ+ people; and
- ➔ Court-specific issues for LGBTQ+ people.

The DACA Accreditation project recognises that this report is based on workers' perspectives and would welcome further research which engages with LGBTQ+ DACA clients in the future, particularly around court-specific issues.

We would like to thank all the DACA workers and managers who shared their insights and expertise in the professional discussion.

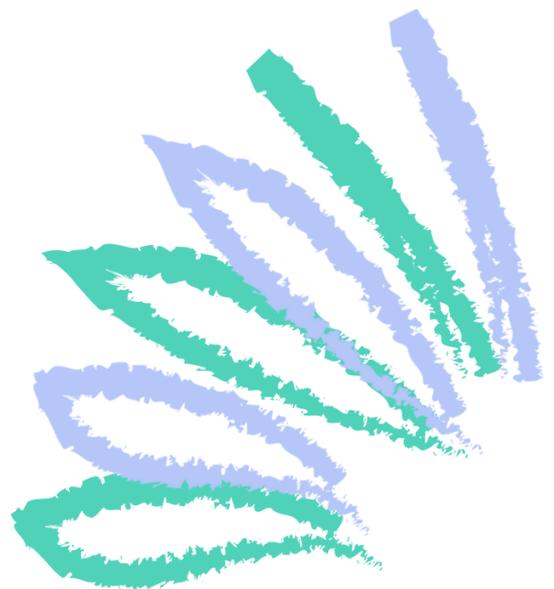
(5) [Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Accreditation Project Resources](#)

## A note on language

Throughout this report we use the terms LGBT+ and LGBTQ+ to reflect different language used in different sources. We recognise that LGBTQ+ people are not a homogenous group; every person's experience of domestic abuse is different, and their identity under the LGBTQ+ umbrella is only one relevant factor.

We also use 'victims and survivors' to refer to people with experience of domestic abuse. We understand that how each person refers to themselves and their experiences is individual, and some people may prefer to use different terms for themselves.

At times we will also use 'clients' to refer to victims and survivors who are engaging with domestic abuse court advocacy services. This recognises that some people who engage with these services may not choose to describe their experience as domestic abuse at this time.



# 03. Methodology

The project team undertook a short review of reports and blogs focused on LGBTQ+ experiences and inclusion in domestic abuse services. This identified a number of key issues, including accessibility of domestic abuse services <sup>(6)</sup>, barriers to reporting domestic abuse <sup>(7)</sup> and challenges for non-specialist LGBTQ+ domestic abuse services <sup>(8)</sup>.

The team recognised that there is a gap in research focused on the experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ people who are complainers in criminal domestic abuse cases. To begin to address this, the project team devised six questions to be discussed in a short professional discussion for DACA workers and managers. These questions were:

- ➔ How often do you work with LGBTQ+ clients?
- ➔ What are the specific needs you've identified for LGBTQ+ people who access domestic abuse court advocacy services? What might act as barriers to you or your service meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ service users?
- ➔ What are the approaches, if any, that you or your service has taken to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ clients?
- ➔ Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you feel is important to talk about?
- ➔ What are you taking away from the discussion today that you might bring back to your service to try?

(6) Slater, A. *Making domestic abuse services accessible to LGBTQ+ people*, [www.safelives.org.uk/news-views/making-domestic-abuse-services-accessible-to-lgbt-people/](http://www.safelives.org.uk/news-views/making-domestic-abuse-services-accessible-to-lgbt-people/), [accessed 03.04.25]

(7) Stevenson, J. (2023). *Voices Unheard Peer Consultation 2022: LGBTQ+ Young People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse; In their Own Relationships, and Within Families*.

(8) SafeLives (2018), *Free To Be Safe: LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse*

Invites were sent to all 6 existing domestic abuse court advocacy services. In total 5 DACA professionals from 4 services participated in the professional discussion. All participants gave consent for their responses to be shared. All responses have been anonymised and participants will not be identified through their responses. The discussion was transcribed and the DACA project team identified key themes.

## Limitations

We are aware that we facilitated just one professional discussion with a small number of participants. The timeframe of this work meant that it was not possible to focus on the experiences and thoughts of victims and survivors. We also did not cover LGBTQ+ DACA staff or policies, but we recognise that this is a recommendation that has been suggested in evidence <sup>(9)</sup>.

(9) Maxwell, S. "We are INVISIBLE!" Same-Sex Male Relationship Intimate Partner violence

# 04. Recommendations



Workers told us about the **benefits of asking clients about their sexual orientation and gender identity at an early stage of engagement**. Services should therefore ensure that **staff are routinely asking clients questions about their sexual orientation and gender identity**. Asking about sexual orientation and gender identity allows workers to best meet each clients' individual support needs.



Services need to **routinely review information collected on LGBTQ+ identities** in order to understand any patterns or changes which may indicate issues with individual support or the service's perceived accessibility.



The **LGBTQ+ population is increasing**, particularly in younger demographics. Services need to **ensure this is reflected in workers' training and practice**.



Ensuring that referrers are aware of the service's referral criteria means that **LGBTQ+ clients can be confident that services are for them**.



Workers told us that referrals for gay and bisexual men were particularly low. We recommend that services which provide support to male clients should **consider targeted advertising in spaces where gay and bisexual men may frequent**.



Workers reported that LGBTQ+ clients often felt that their experiences would not be taken seriously by the criminal justice system. With the consent of clients, **services could consider sharing quotes around positive experiences of the criminal justice system, including LGBTQ+ clients' experiences**.



Workers are aware of the ways the current discourse can impact on clients' feelings around safe spaces. Specialist LGBTQ+ services may feel like safer spaces for LGBTQ+ clients. DACA services should partner with these specialist services to offer domestic abuse court advocacy in space which is safe for the client.



LGBTQ+ people need to know that a service is inclusive of them. Services should **ensure that policies, referrers and public-facing information are clear about the client groups that they support, including explicit mention of support for LGBTQ+ groups.** Services should further develop links with specialist LGBTQ+ organisations, both locally and nationally, to ensure that there is clarity around the support available.



Services which **do not support clients from any of the LGBTQ+ groups should signpost appropriately to a service which can support those clients.**



By exploring partnerships with specialist LGBTQ+ services, DACA services can develop an understanding of how both services can manage risk and safety, as well as providing effective domestic abuse court advocacy. This should be supplemented by **specialist LGBTQ+ training for DACA workers**, which should be advertised on service websites to increase confidence of potential clients from LGBTQ+ groups.



DACA services use perpetrator assessment tools to ascertain the primary victim and primary perpetrator. These should be **used sensitively by people who are knowledgeable about the gendered nature of domestic abuse, aware of perpetrator tactics and the harms caused by mis-identifying victims and perpetrators.**



Participants noted that the majority of domestic abuse cases are heard in courts which are open to the public and media, which may cause concern for LGBTQ+ clients who are at risk of having their LGBTQ+ status 'outed'. Services **should not wait for individual clients to raise concerns about court** but **should ask each client if they have any fears about court attendance and appropriately safety plan around these.**

# Section 1: Identifying LGBTQ+ Clients

## Data and support needs

*"People are really good in (service) at doing equality and diversity questions... you know... I wouldn't say it's hard and fast every single first contact straight away, but they'll remember at the next contact to do it"*

### Participant 5, DACA professional discussion

Research has shown that "LGBT+ victims/survivors are experiencing some of the highest levels of risk and complex needs at the time they access support" <sup>(10)</sup> including "unique forms of coercive control targeted at their sexual orientation or gender identity." <sup>(11)</sup> This is vital information required to best address the client's immediate and overall safety.

When asked the question 'how often do you work with LGBTQ+ clients?', respondents generally noted that they were asking equality and diversity questions that would elicit this information. However, upon further investigation of case management systems during the professional discussion, it was found that this was not necessarily the case for all staff. The participant quoted above went on to say: "I'm actually finding none on a couple of people's at all." A second participant found that 8% of cases were missing this data, and 7% of cases were marked 'don't know', which should be used when this is the response a client gives to being asked. Given the high percentage of cases this applies to, it is unclear how accurate this may be. For this service, it means up to 15% of cases did not have accurate information on sexuality and gender identity.

<sup>(10)</sup> SafeLives (2018), Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse, p25.

<sup>(11)</sup> SafeLives (2018), Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse, p11.

Another consideration is the potential that assumptions were being made about the identity of clients:

*"I've taken away from this just to make sure that we're all asking the question rather than just assuming, and the E&D (equality and diversity) stuff... you know... If it's... if you've got a (police report) and it's a husband and wife, and there's been ... you know... domestic abuse, then it's quite easy to make the assumption that it's heterosexual"*

### **Participant 3, DACA professional discussion**

In this professional discussion we did not have time to fully explore why workers may be making assumptions rather than asking clients about their sexuality and gender identity. However, one participant did note that there can be concerns from workers around the timing of asking equality and diversity questions:

*"it doesn't always seem appropriate to be asking questions like that, when someone is phoning... dealing with a crisis situation; there are other things that are ...you know... at the time, seem more appropriate to be discussing than gathering data"*

### **Participant 1, DACA professional discussion**

Whilst there may be times where there are immediate crisis situations that need to be dealt with urgently, this highlights the way that asking clients about their sexuality and gender identity is often considered more of a data gathering exercise than questions that provide important information about clients' support and safety needs.

## Recommendations



Services should ensure that staff are routinely asking clients questions about their sexual orientation and gender identity.



Services should be reviewing information collection on LGBTQ+ identities to better understand any patterns or changes which may indicate issues with individual support or the service's perceived accessibility.

## Benefits of asking clients about their sexual orientation and gender identity

*“Even the fact that we do ask the equality and diversity questions, I do think that that’s so useful, because it is telling people that ‘We can see you’ (...) it might result in a situation where they do feel more open to talk about certain things”*

**Participant 2, DACA professional discussion**

In the Voices Unheard research into barriers to accessing support <sup>(12)</sup> 69% of young people who experienced abuse in their own relationships expressed concerns that services would contact the police and 65% cited fear of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia within services. Services need to create emotional safety for clients; one way of doing this is to ask clients about their sexual orientation and gender identity:

*“if you are someone who is, for example, bisexual, and you might find it ... you know... then having to talk about maybe ex-partners that were women, that might be then a difficult thing to bring up or have to discuss, because you’re coming out at that point, whereas actively asking the question kind of presents that space that if the client is kind of open to – or feels comfortable to – come out and give you that information then that can be done”*

**Participant 2, DACA professional discussion**

(12) Stevenson, J. (2023). *Voices Unheard Peer Consultation 2022: LGBTQ+ Young People’s Experiences of Domestic Abuse; In their Own Relationships, and Within Families*, p29

In a practice blog for SafeLives, Aaron Slater, former Service Manager at a domestic abuse support service for anyone who identifies as a man or as part of the LGBT+ community, highlighted how this approach supports clients and helps build confidence in services:

*"Confidently ask about sexual orientation and gender identity at intake. It takes the burden of having to 'come out' away from the client and will help build confidence in your service" (13)*

It is important that questions include gender identity as this can impact on each communication with the client, for example in the correct use of a client's preferred pronouns:

*"in terms of asking about ...you know... their identity - it gives them the space to maybe discuss pronouns"*

#### **Participant 2, DACA professional discussion**

A few professionals in the discussion spoke about attending LGBTQ+ training, with one professional linking it to improved communication skills:

*"the whole team have had additional training specifically in LGBTQ+ so... I would be quite confident that staff are well-trained in conversations with people in the [LGBTQ+] community."*

#### **Participant 1, DACA professional discussion**

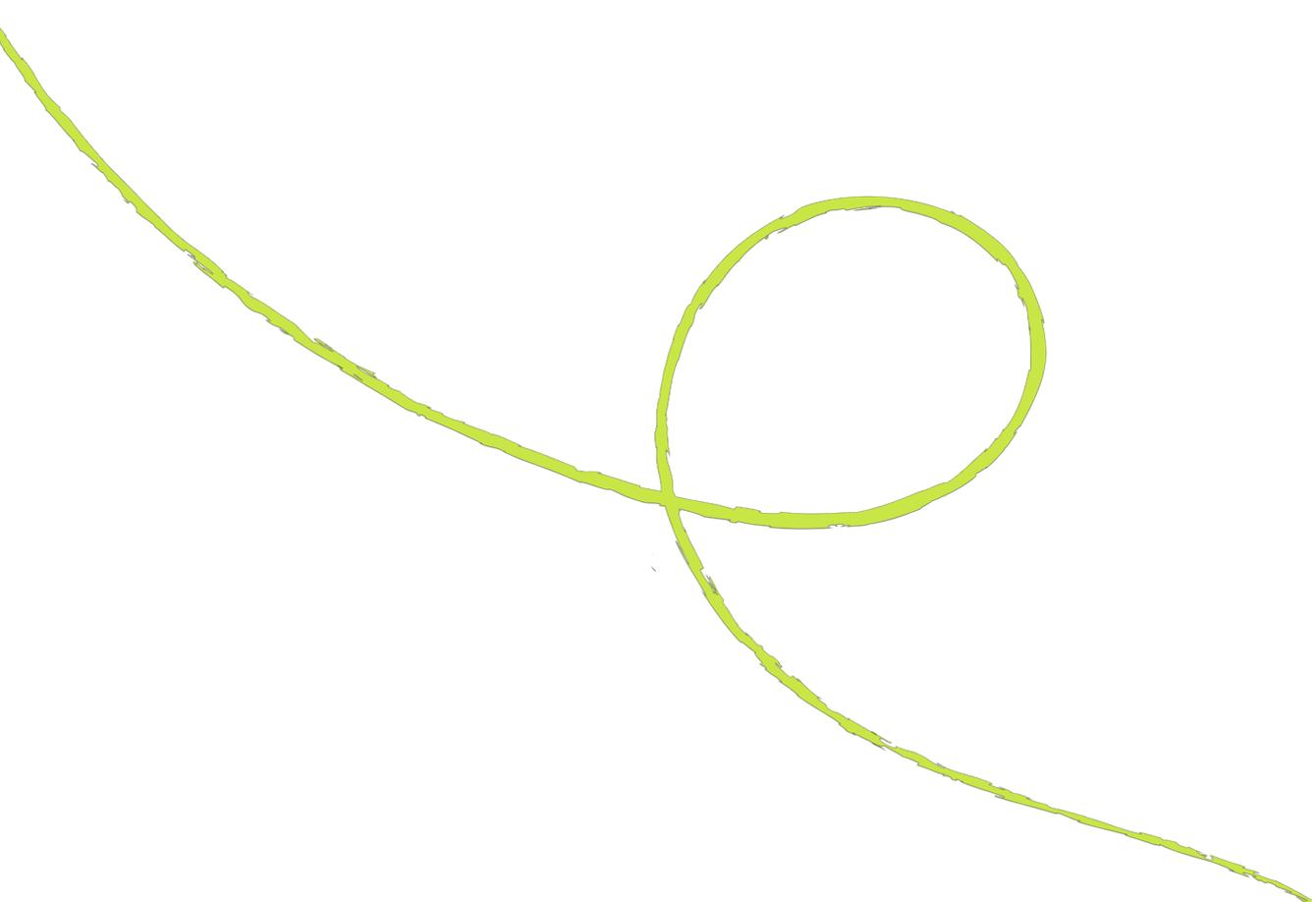
To build effective supportive relationships with clients, DACA workers need to see the whole person and how the different facets of each person intersect with their experiences of abuse, and access to potential support and safety options. This also helps to establish emotional safety, which is particularly important for LGBTQ+ clients.

(13) Slater, A. Making domestic abuse services accessible to LGBT+ people, [www.safelives.org.uk/news-views/making-domestic-abuse-services-accessible-to-lgbt-people/](http://www.safelives.org.uk/news-views/making-domestic-abuse-services-accessible-to-lgbt-people/), [accessed 03.04.25]

## Recommendation



Services should ensure that staff are linking the answers to questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to clients' individual support needs.



## Changing demographics

*"I do feel that it's maybe slightly more that I'm working with young people that are LGBTQ+ than I was when I was working with adults."*

### Participant 2, DACA professional discussion

The latest Scottish census data found that 4% of people aged 16 and over were LGB+, and that just under half a percent (0.44%) of people were trans or had a trans history. However, the numbers vary significantly for younger people compared to older age groups. Around 10 in every 100 people aged 16 to 29 identified as LGB+, whereas in the 40+ age group around 2 in every 100 people were LGB+. For trans people, almost half (46.1%) were aged 16 to 24, and over a quarter (26.1%) were aged 25-34.<sup>(14)</sup>

This was reflected in the experience of one participant, who had experience of working with both adult clients and with children and young people who required domestic abuse court advocacy. They reported that a higher proportion of their clients who were young people identified as LGBTQ+ compared to the proportion of adult clients who identified as LGBTQ+.

For domestic abuse court advocacy services, this raises the need to futureproof services to effectively meet the needs of changing populations. As more young people age into adult services, there is likely to be an increase in the number of LGBTQ+ clients services are working with.

## Recommendation



Services should be alive to changing demographics and ensure that this is reflected in the training of their workers and in their practice.

(14) Scotland's Census, Scotland's Census 2022 – Sexual orientation and trans status or history, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-sexual-orientation-and-trans-status-or-history/> [accessed 03.04.25]

# Section 2: Raising awareness of DACA services for LGBTQ+ people

## Referral pathways: professionals

*"I do think that can be helpful for the Police to be canvassing it (the service), and it kind of reinforces for that person that... that that is a service that is for them."*

**Participant 2, DACA professional discussion**

Research has shown that a lack of clarity as to how inclusive a service may be for LGBTQ+ people can be a barrier for some. As one young person from the Voices Unheard project suggested: *"I would think that because it doesn't explicitly say they support LGBT people then we're not welcome at that service."*<sup>(15)</sup>

For DACA services, the majority of referrals are received from Police Scotland and other partner agencies. This should reduce the need for potential clients to have to research the inclusivity of the service themselves, as the referrer should be aware of the eligibility criteria for their local service.

<sup>(15)</sup> SafeLives (2018), Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse, p36.

LGBTQ+ people are often not reporting domestic abuse to police. As the SafeLives spotlight *Free to be safe* highlights "78% of gay and bisexual men and 80% of gay and bisexual women who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police". (16)

Domestic abuse court advocacy is only available to people who are victims in criminal domestic abuse cases, so many LGBTQ+ victims and survivors are not able to access the support. We know that concern around what support is available can be a barrier to reporting for different minoritised communities, for example, one survivor in conversation with the DACA project stated: "*I chose not to report very serious offences because I didn't understand the systems or have someone to walk with me through it.*" (17)

Participants reported that their services had not developed formal partnerships with any specialist LGBTQ+ organisations; unfortunately we did not have time to explore why this was. This is an area that could be developed, with potential benefits both for the DACA service and for LGBTQ+ clients; it could develop trust for LGBTQ+ clients around what the support offer is if they were to report, whilst also giving opportunities for joint working with a client to best meet their needs.

## Recommendations



DACA services should ensure that their referrers are aware of their referral criteria and are feeding back the positives of referring to the DACA service.



DACA services should develop partnerships with specialist LGBTQ+ services where possible.

(16) SafeLives (2018), *Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse*, p23.

(17) *Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy Accreditation*, <https://www.dacascotland.org.uk/what-is-daca> [accessed 03.04.24]

## Referral pathways: word of mouth

*"Because we have supported same sex couples – not so much trans, but lesbian and gay couples absolutely – the word kind of trickles out. And I think that's quite a powerful tool, as well, for spreading the word that yeah, we support... we will support without judgement, a victim's a victim."*

### Participant 3, DACA professional discussion

Word of mouth recommendations are particularly important for LGBTQ+ victims who "are most likely to seek help informally from family or friend." <sup>(18)</sup> Whilst the majority of referrals to DACA services are from Police Scotland and other organisations, self-referrals are also accepted. Recommendations from within the LGBTQ+ community may encourage self-referrals from victims and survivors who have potentially been reluctant to accept the initial offer of a referral to a DACA service, or who were not offered a referral.

However, for clients researching potential supports themselves, it isn't clear how much information is available. One participant was unsure about what information was publicly available about who their service could support: *"I might go and google what our web page says!"* (Participant 5, DACA professional discussion). Having accurate and up-to-date information publicly available allows victims and survivors to make better informed decisions about support.

<sup>(18)</sup> SafeLives (2018), *Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse*, p35.

## Recommendations



DACA services should ensure that public-facing information is clear about the client groups that they support, including explicit mention of support for LGBTQ+ groups.



Services which do not support clients from any LGBTQ+ group should signpost appropriately to a service which can support those clients.



## Clients services are not currently reaching

*"in terms of the LGBTQ+ clients that I've supported – it's only been young people who are either female and either lesbian or bisexual, or assigned female at birth, and are maybe trans. And I don't actually know that I have worked with... with gay men, or trans women who were assigned male at birth; I don't actually think that that's someone who I've ever had in my caseloads."*

### Participant 2, DACA professional discussion

The experience of participants reflected wider research, which has found variations in the rate of different groups within the LGBTQ+ community accessing services. "GBM [gay and bisexual men] experience unique risk factors and multiple barriers in accessing services for inclusive support including potential judgement and dismissal by services." <sup>(19)</sup> SafeLives' Insights data found that: "bisexual women were represented in the Insights dataset as just under four times the rate of gay men but, according to available research, experience domestic abuse at a rate approximately two times higher". <sup>(20)</sup>

However, these statistics differ from Galop's specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse service, which found that "Galop clients most commonly identified as male (65%); it may be reasonable to assume that LGBT+ men are underrepresented within non-LGBT+ services, while more likely to access LGBT+ services, because many non-LGBT+ services are women-only or perhaps predominantly advertised with women in mind." <sup>(21)</sup>

<sup>(19)</sup> Maxwell, S. *"We are INVISIBLE!" Same-Sex Male Relationship Intimate Partner violence*, p1.

<sup>(20)</sup> SafeLives (2018), *Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse*, p35.

<sup>(21)</sup> SafeLives (2018), *Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse*, p35.

## Recommendations



Services which provide support to male clients should consider targeted advertising in spaces where gay and bisexual men, may frequent.



Services should look to develop links with specialist LGBTQ+ organisations, both locally and nationally, to ensure that there is clarity around the support available.

# Section 3: Current discourse around LGBTQ+ people

## Safe spaces

*"if you're from a group where your kind of access to spaces is kind of a topic of discussion a lot of the time, then even services that might... you know... say, "We can support anyone" might still not... you know... it might still kind of not feel like you're fully convinced whether or not that space is going to be for you. And not even in terms of just accessing, but also in terms of "Will the people who are delivering this service... will they understand me? Will I have to explain myself? Will they think that I'm strange, or will they have negative feelings or opinions about me?""*

### Participant 2, DACA professional discussion

Public discourse on 'safe spaces' often frames the issue as preservation of women-only spaces in a way that excludes LGBTQ+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This 'debate' may make LGBTQ+ victims and survivors concerned that the service would not provide them with safety. "LGBT+ survivors also often believe that non-LGBT services are 'not for them' and fear and/or anticipate being misunderstood or discriminated against by services. This fear is often rooted in significant experiences of discrimination due to sexuality or gender identity, which may include family rejection, hate crimes and previous experiences of discrimination. These experiences may inform a belief that service provision is a priori prejudiced and may result in concerns around disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender identity."<sup>(22)</sup>

(22) <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/barriers-to-accessing-services-for-lgbt-victims-and-survivors/>

All DACA services offer individual telephone-based support; they do not offer group sessions and therefore there are no physical space considerations. However, establishing emotional safety remains a key objective for all clients.

DACA services may find it best to work with LGBTQ+ victims and survivors in a space that is already considered safe for them, such as a specialist LGBTQ+ service. DACA services will often work alongside specialist support a victim/survivor is already engaged with, developing a clear understanding of each organisation's role. This could ensure that LGBTQ+ clients are able to have their range of needs met.

## Recommendations



Services should explore partnerships with specialist LGBTQ+ services, including developing an understanding of how both services can manage risk and safety, as well as providing effective domestic abuse court advocacy.



Services should be clear about how the service is offered; currently all services offer telephone-based support.



DACA workers should receive specialist LGBTQ+ training and advertise that this is the case on their websites.



Services should have clear policies in place around who the service can support, and appropriate referral pathways for support for any groups which the service cannot provide support to.

## Gendered nature of domestic abuse

*"I think it's more of a barrier, is... in this scenario, is that (service) use the...a perpetrator assessment tool to try to bottom out primary victim, primary perpetrator... you know... in terms of sort of good practice around that, but ... you know... some of those questions are quite... hard-hitting."*

### Participant 5, DACA professional discussion

Scotland has an explicitly gendered understanding of domestic abuse. In 2014 the Scottish Government published the Equally Safe strategy, a collaborative approach between the Scottish Government, COSLA and key partners which aims "to prevent and address all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation directed at them because of their gender." (23) It recognises that "[t]his behaviour is predominantly carried out by men and stems from deep-rooted gender inequality [...] It is both a cause and a consequence of women's inequality." (24)

Equally Safe does recognise that lesbian, bisexual and trans women experience abuse, and that men do experience forms of abuse:

*"While men are at lower risk of experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of GBV (Gender-Based Violence) than women, and are far more likely to perpetrate it, there are men across Scotland who have experienced domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and exploitation." (25)*

- (23) Scottish Government and COSLA, (2023) [Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#), p3
- (24) Scottish Government and COSLA, (2023) [Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#), p3
- (25) Scottish Government and COSLA, (2023) [Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#), p23

27.

DACA services see the gendered nature of domestic abuse daily, whilst also recognising that men and LGBTQ+ are also victims. To ensure safety of all clients, services must ensure they are not colluding with perpetrators and putting the primary victim at increased risk. To reduce this risk, many services will employ perpetrator assessment tools to ensure that they are working with the primary perpetrator, which may feel like an additional layer of scrutiny for LGBTQ+ victims and survivors. However, the Dyn Project, which is a specialist domestic abuse project supporting gay, bisexual and trans men, have stated that this is a vital approach:

*"It's important to do background checks so that you're not helping a potential perpetrator to perpetrate. You don't want to give the perpetrator tools to equip them to become better perpetrators" (26)*

One of the professional discussion participants noted that their service was undertaking work around how this is done in a way that meets the needs of all clients; this could prove to be a valuable piece of work.

## Recommendation



Services should ensure that they are using established perpetrator assessment tools correctly and sensitively, by people who are knowledgeable about the gendered nature of domestic abuse, aware of perpetrator tactics, and harms caused by mis-identifying perpetrators.

(26) SafeLives, *Supporting GBT men: The Dyn Project*, <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/supporting-gbt-men-the-dyn-project/> [accessed 03.04.25]

## Worries that experiences will not be taken seriously

*"I've actually... I've had young people say that to me, and I've also noticed that in adult clients as well, from previously, kind of worried about people maybe not taking it seriously because they are with a woman"*

### Participant 2, DACA professional discussion

One participant noted that in their experience LGBTQ+ young people and adults have reported to the worker that they felt their experiences of domestic abuse would not be taken seriously, especially when the perpetrator was female.

This reflects the Voices Unheard research, which found that when young people were asked about barriers to accessing support when experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships, the largest categories were concerns that their experiences were not bad enough (88%) and worries that they wouldn't be taken seriously (73%).

## Recommendation



With the consent of clients, services could consider sharing quotes around positive experiences of the criminal justice system, including LGBTQ+ clients' experiences.

# Section 4: Court-specific issues for LGBT+ people

## Open courts

*"... I guess that must be something that would be really big for someone who's not 'out', having that kind of loss of control around being in this... you know... courtroom and this situation where there will be people from the public that come in, or potentially people reporting on that as well."*

### Participant 2, DACA professional discussion

Professionals spoke about barriers to attending court as a witness. The majority of criminal court cases in Scotland are held in open court, meaning that members of the public will be able to sit in the public gallery to watch the trial proceedings. As the participant quoted above has highlighted, this has a real impact on LGBTQ+ people who could lose control of who they tell about their identity and could be 'outed'. This was a fear reported by 35% of the young people involved in the Voices Unheard project. <sup>(27)</sup> Services shouldn't wait for individual clients to raise concerns about court, but should ask each client if they have any concerns about court attendance.

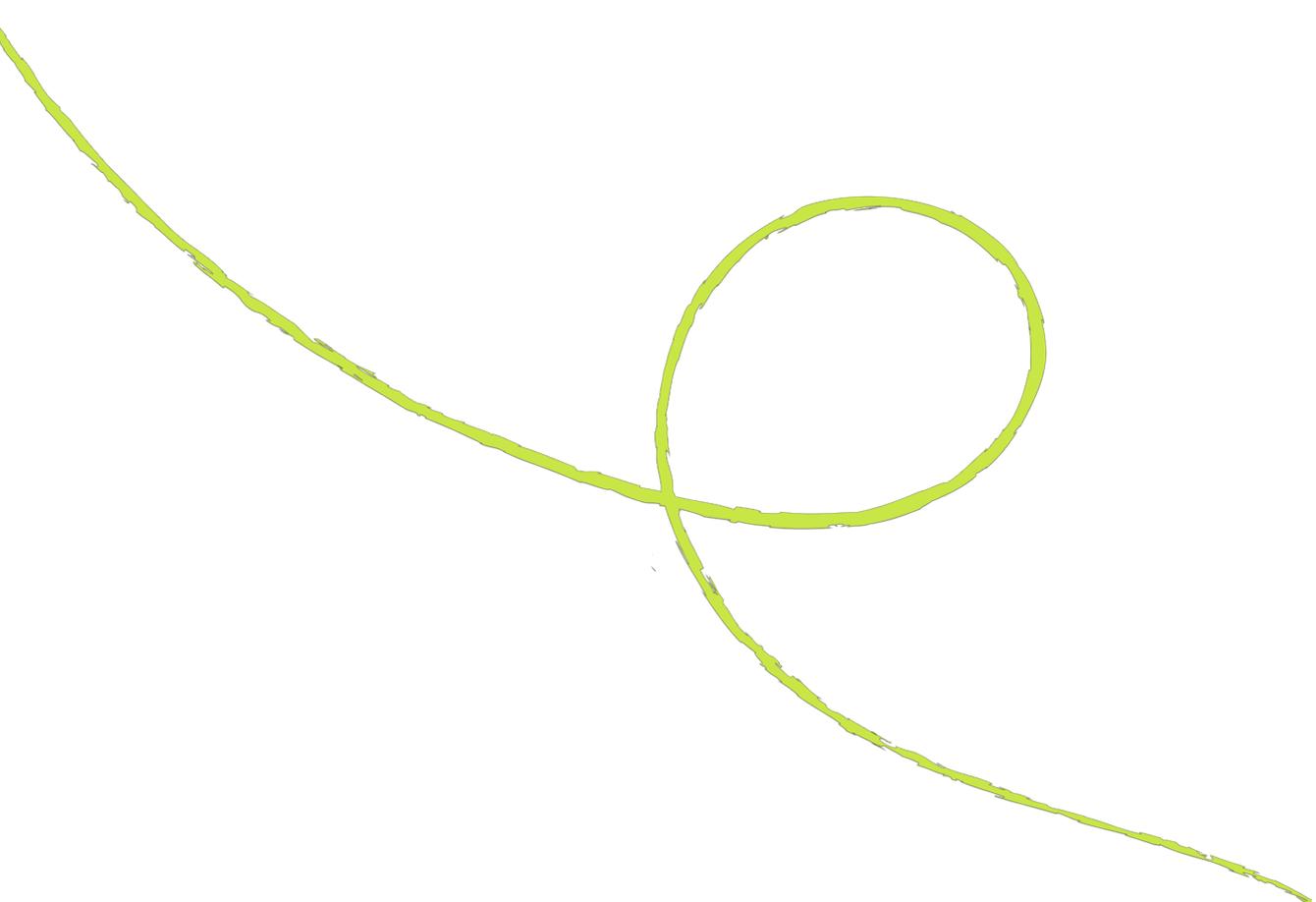
DACA workers work with victims and survivors who are cited to court as witnesses to safety plan around their physical and emotional safety in attending court. For LGBTQ+ victims, this potential risk should be considered as early as possible.

*(27) Stevenson, J. (2023). Voices Unheard Peer Consultation 2022: LGBTQ+ Young People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse; In their Own Relationships, and Within Families, p29*

## Recommendation



Safety planning around attending court should include consideration of any concerns around open courts, such as 'outing'.



## Media presence

*"I can imagine that for some people, if they're not 'out', then there might be questions around closed courts, or people going into the courtroom, and... even reporters... because we have issues with reporters for clients that aren't in the LGBTQ+ community"*

### Participant 2, DACA professional discussion

For most cases, including some cases heard in a court which is closed to the public, the media is able to be in attendance at the trial and report on proceedings.

During initial mapping and scoping work, the DACA Accreditation project found that in rural areas in particular, local media would often routinely report on domestic abuse cases. This can cause distress for all victims and survivors, but for LGBTQ+ victims and survivors there may be additional concerns around being 'outed' if their LGBTQ+ identity is not publicly known.

Additionally, some LGBTQ+ people may have worries around how a case may be reported. As discussed in section 3, the current discourse on LGBTQ+ people has been heated, and even reporting which is not salacious may be the topic of discussion from people holding homophobic, biphobic or transphobic views.

## Recommendation



DACA workers can use the **IPSO domestic abuse** leaflet to explain the rules the press should follow when reporting on domestic abuse.

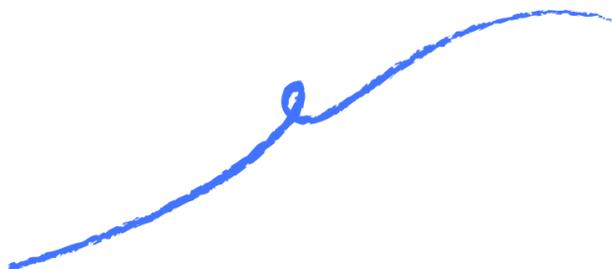
# 05. Conclusions

In order for DACA services to provide the most effective support for LGBTQ+ clients, it is important to first create safety. This will often begin before the victim/survivor even encounters the service, through clarity around whether the service is inclusive and accessible for the individual and their needs. Clarity may be provided through public-facing information, clear eligibility criteria for referral partners and through partnership with specialist LGBTQ+ partners.

Services should also be asking clients about their sexuality and gender identity; this is key to ensuring that all support needs are identified and addressed appropriately. In collecting this data, services can also assess any patterns which may indicate that LGBTQ+ clients, or particular groups within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, are not accessing the service.

There are specific issues that arise for LGBTQ+ victims and survivors who are attending court to give evidence; workers should be aware of how to safety plan around these issues.

This report is an initial light-touch consideration of this topic; the DACA Accreditation project would support more in-depth research in this area, including research directly with victims and survivors.



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