

ask:: marc

WHAT IS ASK MARC?

Ask Marc (Marc stands for “male abuse referral centre”) is a new service offering help and support for men affected by:

- Sexual violence: recent or historic rape, sexual assault or abuse, including childhood sexual abuse
- Domestic abuse: including all dynamics including family abuse, economic abuse etc
- Forced marriage and so-called “honour”-based violence
- Stalking

Black Country Women’s Aid (BCWA) has developed Ask Marc as a male service to enable us to respond to the gender-based dynamics of interpersonal violence. Ask Marc will operate in parallel to BCWA’s services for women, enabling us to tailor support, spaces, training, communications, and promotion specifically for each gender.

RESPONDING TO BARRIERS FOR MEN

BCWA consulted with male survivors, sector experts, local authorities and partner agencies to develop Ask Marc. Our research identified several key barriers for men in accessing services: men not knowing which support services were for them or what support was available; thinking they would not be believed; and concerns about masculinity, self-blame and shame.

Responding to these barriers, Ask Marc will provide an integrated regional response to men affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence:

- Offering men the **choice** to be supported by a male advocate and in a single-sex environment (good practice according to Women’s Aid and Respect standards)
- **Gender-specific** support and support toolkits (eg male support groups, Respect toolkit)
- **Training and partnership work** for professionals to develop referral pathways
- **Outreach** in communities to develop visibility of services
- **Communications** campaigns, online and offline, including social media

Sexual violence

Sexual abuse is defined as:

‘Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent. Most victims and perpetrators know each other’

Ask Marc: sexual abuse support for men

Ask Marc supports male victims and survivors of sexual abuse across Sandwell, Walsall, Dudley & Wolverhampton. We offer support both inside and outside of the criminal justice system, with a trauma-informed approach tailored to the needs of the client. Sexual violence services include ISVA and therapeutic support.

INDEPENDENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE ADVISOR (ISVA)

Our specialist trained Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) provide a frontline high quality service to male victims of rape and sexual violence. This includes recent and historic abuse. The support is tailored to the individual needs of the client, using a trauma informed approach. The team use a range of different interventions to proactively engage clients in supporting them in their journey to recovery. The support is provided both inside and outside of the criminal justice system.

Ask Marc will use specific support toolkits for male survivors (Survivors UK), and also offer group work exploring the specific issues around sexual violence for men, encouraging peer support and tackling shame

THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

Therapeutic Services underpins all of the services within BCWA. Providing a person-centred approach and specialist trauma therapy, all counsellors work within the BACP Framework for ethical practice in line with the CPS Guidance.

Principles of support

"It has been so helpful and useful to have someone to talk to...no one else knows what I have been through, so having someone who knows how I am feeling and checking to see if I am okay has been amazing. [ISVA] has completed research for me that otherwise I wouldn't have known where to begin. [ISVA] has helped me not feel so lost in all of the stress of what happened to me"

"It is so important for rape victims to be believed...your support definitely makes me feel that way"

"From the beginning of the process and all the way through to court, I have felt supported. I feel it would have been so much harder without the advice I have been given."

Quotes from ISVA clients

Our support **involves victims and survivors at each stage**. Our approach:

- is underpinned by motivational interviewing
- is trauma informed
- is gender responsive, we are here to focus on supporting male victims.
- focuses on the principles of short term safety and long term recovery

All work of the domestic abuse service is informed by several core values:

- **SAFETY**: ensuring that service users feel physically and emotionally safe as they come into the environment and that they remain safe;
- **TIMELINESS**: we act quickly in response to needs and risk;
- **RELEVANCE**: our support is needs-led and outcome-focused; interventions are targeted and relevant to each client, recognizing that different people may work in different ways. Where there are needs we cannot meet we refer to partner agencies.
- **TRUSTWORTHINESS**: service users know that providers and practitioners will ensure that expectations are clear and consistent and that appropriate boundaries
- **CHOICE**: we prioritise the preferences of service users in routine practices and crisis situations;
- **COLLABORATION**: we consult and involve clients on actions we take, so that a collaborative relationship is encouraged between those in service and providers. We ensure clients understand our interventions, the actions we take, and the actions of other professionals;
- **INTEGRATION**: our support is integrated to reduce overlap and offer a smooth support journey where clients and their children have multiple needs. We collaborate internally with other support services, and externally with police, social services etc.
- **EMPOWERMENT**: services are developed and delivered to maximize client empowerment, recognizing strengths and building skills that will enable recovery.

Support model

We offer a range of flexible contact/support options so that we can engage clients in ways that work for them, including:

- Client one to one support interventions provided face to face, by phone or video call depending on client preference and risk;
- Support groups offered online or in person;
- Whatsapp/text referral line in addition to telephone and email referral options, and a live webchat service, so survivors who find it hard to find privacy to make a phone call can contact us discretely;
- Flexible support times for clients to work around childcare commitments, with evening support/counselling appointments where needed;
- Peer mentoring as an onward referral pathway to provide continued support post-intervention.

Finances

The service has been made possible with funding from the Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, and was developed by Black Country Women's Aid. You can find out more about or funding on the Charity Commission for England and Wales website: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1032298>.

Use these details to monitor our finances: Company number: 2791788, Registered charity number (England & Wales): 1032298.

Service Plan

The Ask MARC service is committed to deliver a high quality service and is accountable for working in alignment with our strategic plan. The key focuses for the service is specified:

Activity	Impact/outcome
Provide advice and guidance to male victims of domestic and sexual violence	Men feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• better about situation• satisfied with the service• happy with info received• confident to report
Provide casework support to male victims of domestic and sexual violence	Men receive practical and emotional support which meets their needs
	Men: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feel better about their situation• Feel more able to cope• Improve their wellbeing• Improve their confidence• Know what to do if another incident occurred• Are safer
	Men have access to other appropriate support
Develop awareness of service	Men have access to specialist support

Training for professionals	Professionals per year understand abuse dynamics and support pathways for men Increased referrals into service
Awareness raising for men (community sector)	Men understand abusive relationship dynamics and support offer Increased referrals into service (self/community sector)

If there is anything that we could improve on or you would like to make a comment on any of these areas, please do get in touch.

Staff provision

Our ISVAs are accredited in according to Limeculture standards, their certificates can be seen upon request. We have both a male and female ISVA available to work with male clients. The client can decide who they want to work with at any point of your support. If we cannot immediately allocate you to a specified gendered ISVA, we can create a support plan with you whilst we allocate you to whom you would prefer. Your options will be:

- Begin support with an ISVA and then be allocated to a male/female ISVA upon their return. (They may be sick or on annual leave).
- You can be allocated to a senior ISVA, this may bring you reassurance that you are working with an highly experienced practitioner and then work with the male specific advocate when they return
- You can work with a Male Advocate within BCWA alongside an ISVA to ensure that your immediate practical support needs are met and then be allocated to a male ISVA upon their return
- Work with an external male practitioner that has a therapeutic approach but has worked with Ask Marc in the past
- Be referred to an external agency if these options do not meet your requirements

INTERNAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

We have several internal performance management systems, enabling us to focus on the outcomes of our service delivery, service user needs, and staff competence. These systems include:

STAFF SUPERVISION

Your case worker will have formal meetings with their supervisor to ensure that they are supported to deliver a high quality service.

CASE REVIEW

Managers/seniors will discuss any reoccurring trends in your ISVAs case management style, offer clear and constructive feedback with possible suggestions and recommendations.

Case reviews with managers/seniors offer a second opinion on where a case is, what next practical steps could be offered and what outstanding actions have been identified. They assist staff to identify uncompleted actions, additional actions and bring cases to an appropriate conclusion, ensuring cases are only submitted for closure when all needs have been met to the best of their ability.

TEAM MEETINGS

Regular team meetings ensure clear communication about news and updates, performance, and aims, of Ask Marc. Team meetings take place every 8 weeks to:

- Review work over the past two months
- Disseminate information from quadrants/senior management meetings
- Review referral throughput and quality response
- Plan upcoming work
- Share good practice
- Share news eg new projects or funding

SERVICE QUADRANT MEETINGS

Take place on a quarterly basis, aiming to:

- Review progress against strategy
- Review strategic drivers and any action plans
- Review operational functions
- Review quality systems
- Review data and performance information
- Develop any action plans needed

REPORTING

Our reports monitor and demonstrate both **outputs** and **outcomes**:

- **Outputs** are a quantitative summary of an activity. For example, the activity is 'we provide support to victims of domestic abuse' and the output is 'we provided X number of support sessions to X victims'. An output tells you an activity has taken place.
- **Outcomes** are the change that occurs as a result of an activity. This is also sometimes described as distance travelled.

You can contribute to our reports if you wish. Your feedback and opinions on the service is always very valuable to how we report and reflect on how we deliver our service. Here at Ask MARC we take your thoughts and feelings seriously. You are the most valuable person when it comes to making this services better for everyone else. Therefore, you are encouraged to provide feedback in a few ways:

- Our online survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/7KZNQKL>
- Join in on our consultation panel: please ask your advocate about this, the consultation panel is available to attend in person or via online platform.
- Anonymously, via the feedback form: <https://blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk/contact/>
- You can call in and give an anonymous complaint on: 0121 553 0090
- Advocates are available to assist with completing feedback if required.

Please also ask for our feedback and complaints policy from your advocate or a manager if required

WHAT WE REPORT ON

Information we provide	Where we get this	What commissioners are looking for/what demonstrates success?
Referral numbers and referral sources	Client Information from our online data system	Good level of demand for the service Referral sources appropriate to the service
Demographics (age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender, location etc)	Client Information from our online data system	Diverse range of people referred and accessing service, appropriate to diverse population
Response: timeliness	Client Information from our online data system	Timely response against risk level, with proactive attempts from staff
Engagement: whether clients did not engage, engaged in advice and guidance, or engaged in casework	Client Information from our online data system	Strong engagement rate demonstrates service quality
Client risk and needs identified	Safety and Support plan (SAS), Risk assessment	Demonstrate need for the service: clients enter with high level of needs and risks

Support provided and actions taken	Number of support plans and risk assessments Number and type of SAS actions completed Other actions eg telephone calls, safeguarding actions etc Referrals made Partnership actions	Demonstrate appropriate range of actions and interventions against the needs identified. Demonstrate diverse range of specialist interventions. Demonstrate appropriate level of partner contacts.
Client risk reduced	SAS risks (compare first and last) Case closure form: risk reduction Exit feedback	Demonstrate an effective service: should demonstrate strong level of risk reduction Clients should feel safer at exit
Client needs met	SAS scores (compare first and last) Case closure outcomes Exit feedback	Demonstrate we can meet diverse range of needs and client need scores reduce across all relevant areas Clients give positive feedback and feel better at case closure
Service quality across all areas The change we make Client experience	Case studies Client quotes (staff collection and surveymonkey feedback questionnaire)	Highlight the dynamics of sexual violence and client experiences, demonstrate the support journey: how we engaged and supported, how things improved. Case studies can also demonstrate challenges eg access to other services/ issues with police responses. Client quotes are essential for reporting and communications: when clients tell us about their experiences in their own words this is very powerful.

IDENTIFYING PERPETRATORS

Perpetrators of abuse posing as victims may approach victims' services, or agencies misunderstanding a relationship may refer perpetrators for support. It is crucial for victims' services to have a clear process to screen for and respond to this. Ask Marc's approach includes:

1. At referral, checking our online systems for any previous history
2. Asking questions at initial contact to understand relationship dynamics
3. Gathering information from other agencies where necessary
4. Caseholders remain alert to potential red flags

5. Utilising the industry standard screening tools and categorisation to identify perpetrators.

Our working with perpetrators policy can be discussed upon request.

Ask Marc exists to protect victims from perpetrators and support victims to recover from experiences of abuse and violence.

Gendered spaces

Across BCWA's range of abuse support services, we accept referrals for both women and men. Our male clients work with the Ask Marc service unless they request to remain within BCWA.

Services should be gender-sensitive and gender-specific, therefore we have specific spaces where men and women can do within our offices. The experiences and needs of male victims differ from those of female victims and should be met separately from services for women and children.

Male victims should be supported in designated male or mixed-gender spaces within our community offices, or at partner agency sites.

Support is provided according to our Visitor and Gendered Spaces Policy and Procedures.