

## *Deceased Helena (23 years)*

### **Background**

The Safer Lincolnshire Partnership (SLP) commissioned a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) following the death of Helena. Helena was the Mother of two children, both of pre-school age. Helena had separated from her partner, and Father of the children, Rodrigo. On the morning of her death, Helena had been assaulted by Rodrigo. The children were present when the abuse took place. Rodrigo had been arrested and later released from custody. The DHR considered all aspects of agencies involvement to identify what lessons were to be learned regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard Helena and her children; how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result. The purpose of a DHR is to prevent domestic abuse and homicide and improve service responses for all domestic abuse victims and their children by developing a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to ensure that domestic abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity.

Helena had been a victim of domestic abuse; perpetrated by Rodrigo. The existence of the domestic abuse was not known to agencies; however, information gathered from family and friends after Helena's death indicated that there had been domestic abuse in their relationship. This abuse included physical assaults and coercive control. Helena and Rodrigo were Portuguese nationals. Helena had lived in the United Kingdom from a young age. Rodrigo had lived in the United Kingdom for 8 years. English was not his first language.

### **Key Learning**

- Agencies need to have in place a process that collates and reviews where there has been an increase in frequency and risk to victims of domestic abuse. This should include guidance as to how professionals should use their professional judgement to refer these cases to MARAC or other multi-agency forums, to respond to those risks.
- Where the offending behaviour of perpetrators of domestic abuse is not being addressed through criminal justice processes, then professionals and perpetrators need to have access to alternative methods in which they can respond to the offending behaviour – to reduce the risk to victims of domestic abuse.
- The completion of a DASH risk assessment provides professionals with an additional tool in which to capture detailed information on presenting and previous indicators of risk. This information can be used to inform assessment processes and aid discussions with victims of domestic abuse.
- Professionals need to keep abreast of changes in legislation in order to identify and respond to incidents of domestic abuse in accordance with the current legislative framework.
- Cultural and language barriers have a role in reducing the likelihood that domestic abuse victims will report abuse or stay engaged with services if they do make a report. Information, materials, and services need to be accessible to all communities within Lincolnshire, including where English is not their first language.
- Professionals working with minoritised communities need to have an understanding on those communities' cultures and beliefs, to help inform professionals' knowledge when seeking to engage and provide services. The Review Panel heard that domestic abuse victims from the Portuguese community have additional cultural barriers, which may prevent them from engaging with agencies.

### **Improving Practice**

- That Lincolnshire's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board requests that agencies provide them with a report detailing how their agency collates, reviews, and responds to repeat incidents of abuse.
- That the learning from this review is shared with Lincolnshire's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to inform their ongoing work around the provision and access of services for perpetrators of domestic abuse, whose offending behaviour is not being addressed through criminal justice processes.
- That Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services disseminates the learning on this case, in relation to the use of the DASH as a tool to aid discussions during assessments with in child protection processes.
- That Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board requests evidence and assurances from agencies as to how the provisions of the Domestic Abuse Act and legislation on non-fatal strangulation, have been embedded into practice. This could be achieved through the submission of a report that details the training provision, changes to policy and procedures and, if necessary, the outcomes of case audits to determine learning is embedded into practice. This should also address how professionals will identify and respond to children who are victims of domestic abuse.
- That Lincolnshire's Domestic Abuse Strategy documents how, as a partnership, it will respond to the availability of information and accessibility to services for all communities of Lincolnshire, where English is not their first language.
- That the learning from this review is shared with Lincolnshire's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, to inform them of the current ongoing work in responding to recommendations from previous Domestic Homicide Reviews and the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board strategy, on accessibility and engagement with minority communities.

### **Next Steps – What you can do**

- Understand this 'Briefing Note' and discuss at your next team meeting and make sure you and everyone understands and is able to apply the learning.
- When working with victims of domestic abuse, including those from a minority community ensure that they are aware of how to access support and report abuse.
- Maintain your professional curiosity.
- Maintain a 'Think Domestic Abuse' approach possible.
- Prevent domestic abuse before it happens.
- Maintain your professional curiosity.

