

Learning Briefing in respect of Zac

1. Zac

Zac was a 22-year-old white British male when he died, following a stab wound to the chest in summer 2021. His recently separated partner Scarlett, who was 21 years old at the time of the incident, was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to nine years imprisonment.

Zac and Scarlett met in their late teens, and both had the support of Personal Advisors,¹ having both been in the care of the Local Authority as children. Zac had experienced one supportive and stable placement, whilst Scarlett had been in numerous placements that had all been unable to meet her needs. When they met, Scarlett had a baby who was living in foster care.

Prior to meeting Scarlett, Zac engaged well with his Personal Advisor and had aspirations of attending college, this was despite having learning difficulties, and a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder,² and Dyspraxia.³ Once in the relationship with Scarlett, who had a diagnosis of Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD)⁴ and other mental health issues, he disengaged with services, and it was felt that Scarlett spoke for him and made the decisions about their lifestyles.

Police were involved with Zac and Scarlett on numerous occasions due to violence, often Zac was recorded as the perpetrator, although both sustained injuries. Professionals found it difficult to identify a clear “perpetrator”. When Scarlett fell pregnant, they moved from their home County to Lincolnshire, where Scarlett’s family were based – it was felt this move aimed to disrupt the involvement of Children’s Social Care. Once the baby was born, a mother and baby placement was sourced, which also accommodated Zac. There then followed a stable six-month period, where both engaged with Probation Officers, Social Worker, and Health Visitors. Following a successful mother and baby placement, they returned to live in the community and care proceedings were concluded.

Issues began to emerge, there were disputes between both families. Zac and Scarlett moved back and forth between Counties for a few months, and there were further incidents involving police, which led to further Child Protection planning. Zac and Scarlett separated, and she moved back to their property with the baby. Zac travelled between Counties, and had no fixed abode, and following an incident at Scarlett’s home, Zac was fatally wounded.

2. Reflective Practice

The learning from this review was vast, and generated twenty-one single agency recommendations, and six multiagency recommendations which can be reviewed in the full report. Please see below a selection of these recommendations and some reflective questions that you can use as part of group sessions or as individual practitioners.

¹ This is a professional who offers advice, support, and information to care leavers, to prepare them for living independently and to achieve their goals.

² [What is autism? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/what-is-autism/)

³ [Dyspraxia in adults - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/dyspraxia-in-adults/)

⁴ [Symptoms - Borderline personality disorder - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/symptoms-borderline-personality-disorder/)

Theme – Male Domestic Abuse Victims

Zac was recognised as a victim of Scarlett's violence on occasions and was referred to MARAC following one incident. He was referred to the same local domestic abuse service which Scarlett had been referred into previously. Research shows that men often believe generic domestic abuse services are created for women, and this makes them less likely to engage with their service.⁵

Recommendation	Reflective Questions	Useful Resources
Reminder to all services and professionals to offer option of a referral into a national specialist male domestic abuse service when supporting male victims of domestic abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you aware of specialist male domestic abuse services you can refer into? Do you regularly offer a specialist male domestic abuse service to male victims you are supporting? Can you think of other reasons why referring both partners into the same service could be problematic? 	<p>Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men Men's Advice Line UK (mensadvice.org.uk)</p> <p>ManKind Initiative - Supporting Male Victims of Domestic Abuse</p> <p>National Male Survivors Helpline – for male survivors of sexual abuse and rape 0808 800 5005</p>

Theme – Typologies

Throughout Zac and Scarlett's involvement with Police and Statutory services, it was generally accepted that both had been violent to one another at different times throughout their relationship. It was unclear whether one held power and control over the other continuously, and professionals remarked that they both had ways of controlling the other. Zac and Scarlett's relationship may not have fit into the power and control model of domestic abuse – although there was certainly violence within the relationship. Typologies⁶ allow professionals to gain a better understanding of the nuances of relationship dynamics, and respond, support and safety plan accordingly.

Recommendation	Reflective Questions	Useful Resources
The Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Partnership will develop a policy template, for multiagency use, to raise awareness of "typologies" to assist services in identifying and responding safely and appropriately to mutual couple violence, and violent resistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you think of families you have been involved with, where there appears to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Mutual violence b) A lack of coercion and power from one partner to the other c) A lack of fear of one partner by the other Are there occasions when you have made referrals for both partners to domestic abuse services, with a request for the service to decide who the abuser is? 	<p>Respect Toolkit for work with male victims of domestic abuse Respect</p> <p>Friend et al "Typologies of Intimate Partner Violence: Evaluation of a Screening Instrument of Differentiation" <i>Journal of Family Violence</i> (2011)</p>

⁵ Bates, E "Barriers to Men Seeking Help" *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (37) (7) (2020)

⁶ Johnson, M P *A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence* (2008)

Theme – Asking about Domestic Abuse

Zac and Scarlett were asked about domestic abuse in their relationship by social workers, health visitors, and their Personal Assistants – however this was following reports of incidents and was within the context of their support. Scarlett was asked about domestic abuse when she attended maternity services, however Zac was not asked in this setting, neither was he asked in any acute care setting – even when seeking treatment for injuries. Routine enquiry about domestic abuse should become embedded in all frontline practice, as a victim/survivor may choose to disclose at any time, and this should not be limited by gender.

Recommendation	Reflective Questions	Useful Resources
To remind professionals of the importance of asking about domestic abuse, either within a routine enquiry process, or as part of increased professional curiosity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways does your professional practice include routine enquiry about domestic abuse? If your agency policies do not include routine enquiry about domestic abuse, in what ways could you safely enquire about domestic abuse? What tools would help you to regularly ask questions about domestic abuse 	DASH/S-DASH Best Practice for Completion Bitesize Guide: Professional Curiosity Video Professional Curiosity Resource Pack

Theme – Care Leavers

Zac and Scarlett were both care leavers. Services need to be aware that there remain many options and services for care leavers even when they reach eighteen. Services should also be made aware of the value of including Personal Advisors in discussions regarding care leavers. Often, they may have a fuller understanding of the situation than individual agencies dealing with specific aspects of a young person's life.

Recommendation	Reflective Questions	Useful Resources
Work will be undertaken to raise the profile of care leaver services, including the role of the Personal Advisor and how they should be included in discussions around safety planning, attendance at MARACs, and utilised by other services to facilitate conversations with the care leavers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you aware of the options and services available to care leavers once they turn eighteen? Are you aware of how to link in with Personal Advisors in your area? Does your agency ask young people if they are care leavers – and if not, how could you incorporate this question into your initial contact with a young person? 	Our offer to care leavers – What we do - Lincolnshire County Council