



The CAADA IDVA training

UK

2005-2014

A training course for domestic violence advisors

Summary

Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) has developed a training course and professional qualification for independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs), who work with victims at greatest risk of harm. The qualification is endorsed by the UK Home Office and accredited by the Open College Network (OCN) at level 3. Since 2005, CAADA has trained over 1,700 IDVAs.

The qualification aims to equip professionals with the skills to make victims of domestic abuse and their children safer. The training takes place over 14 days, organised in five classroom blocks, with an assessed worksheet at the end of each block which learners submit online. The course gives professionals the opportunity to develop an essential 'IDVA toolkit' of skills including motivational interviewing, applying the stages of change, active listening, assertiveness, negotiation, and pro-social modelling.

The course equips professionals with the skills to help victims of domestic abuse and their children, and make them safer. The effectiveness of the IDVA approach is well documented: of the 2,500 victim cases analysed in CAADA's 2012 report, *A place of greater safety*, 63% of victims reported that the abuse stopped after the intervention of an IDVA, and 71% of victims said they felt safer. The most significant reductions were in respect of sexual abuse. Victims also reported improvements in their wellbeing following the intervention of an IDVA: 69% said that their quality of life had improved and 77% were confident in how to access support in the future.

The importance of independent advice to violence victims



In the UK, support services for victims of domestic abuse first developed with the refuge movement in the 60s and 70s. Today, the Women's Aid Federation of England supports more than 500 domestic and sexual violence services nationwide. In recent years, important changes have been made to the way in which victims of domestic abuse are supported to live in safety. In particular, more attention has been focused on keeping victims safe in their homes rather than being obliged to move to temporary accommodation.

A key part of this process has been the introduction of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA). IDVAs are specialist



case workers who work with high-risk victims of domestic abuse, those most at risk of homicide or serious harm. IDVAs work from the point of crisis on a short- to medium-term basis and play a key role in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). They work with the victim to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop coordinated safety plans. IDVAs are able to access multiple resources on behalf of victims by coordinating the response of a wide range of agencies who might be involved with a case, including those working with perpetrators and children. IDVAs work in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies but are independent of any single agency. In common with other specialist domestic abuse services, their goal is safety.

What a domestic violence advisor needs to know

The IDVA training course was established in early 2005 with the aim of giving practitioners in this field a recognised qualification and a common framework for their practice and the development of service standards for IDVAs. The effectiveness of the training is proved by the fact that the training model gained formal recognition: it is accredited by the Open College Network at Level 3. CAADA is the Home Office endorsed provider of specialist IDVA training, with a contract to provide training until 2015, which guarantees sustainability until then. The efficiency of the training is evidenced by the number of learners passing through the training programme: in the last nine years the organisation has trained over 1,700 IDVAs.

CAADA provides the only specialist foundation Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) training course in the UK, run in partnership with the Home Office. The course provides IDVAs and domestic abuse practitioners with the skills and tools they need to effectively support high-risk victims of domestic abuse. The course equips learners with a clear understanding of how to identify risk, support clients and address the issues that they face in a consistent and professional way. The CAADA IDVA training has been designed to help build skills, knowledge and confidence, enabling professionals to provide the best possible support to improve the lives of high risk-victims of domestic abuse and their children. The ultimate aim of the course is to make victims of domestic abuse and their children safer. Motivating and empowering each client to make changes in their lives are key skills for effective IDVAs.

The course comprises 14 days of in-room training, delivered in five blocks, and the completion of five assessed worksheets which are submitted online. The curriculum is as follows:

- Block 1: the IDVA role and toolkit, self-care and vicarious trauma, diversity considerations
- Block 2: risk management, MARACs, multi-agency skills,
- Block 3: criminal justice response to domestic violence, case management, individual tutorials
- Block 4: civil law, safeguarding children, mental health and substance misuse
- Block 5: housing, BME clients, sexual violence.

The course aims to expand skills to respond to abuse by developing an 'IDVA toolkit' of practical skills which include motivational interviewing, applying the stages of change, active listening, assertiveness, negotiation, and pro-social modelling. It develops expertise and confidence in identifying, assessing and managing risk; provides expert input on criminal justice agency work; discusses safety options; builds confidence in multi-agency working; and introduces specialist tools, techniques and knowledge to respond to high-risk victims. It also builds understanding of risk management strategies, individually and in a multi-agency



setting, such as MARACs, 'defensible decision making' – how to ensure accountability – and how to relate risk directly to individual client safety plans.

In recognition of the research and reporting information from all the key agencies responding to domestic abuse, the main focus of the training is on work with women experiencing domestic abuse from male partners or ex-partners. However, some training is provided on responding to women and men experiencing abuse within lesbian and gay relationships, and men experiencing abuse from a female partner.

All-round approval

The course meets with overwhelming approval, and 98% of learners say that they feel more confident in their role after receiving the training. Qualitative feedback reflects this, in that learners say they intend to change the way they work to improve the victims' experience. It is also viewed positively by the authorities that employ IDVAs, and many service commissioners specify CAADA-trained IDVAs as a service requirement. The programme has Home Office funding until 2015. By sending staff on the course, services can demonstrate to funders that they are commissioning-ready.

The success of the IDVA training shows the effectiveness of multi-agency working, as well as the importance of having highly-skilled professionals with a clear understanding of how to identify risk, to support clients and address the issues in a consistent and professional way. It has also shown the value of having a professionally trained independent advocate to represent victims of domestic abuse in a multi-agency setting.

Its existence has improved services for high-risk victims of domestic abuse, with over 1,700 IDVAs trained since 2005. At the point of case closure, 63% of victims reported that they had not experienced any abuse in the past month, with a range from 64% of those receiving limited support to 71% of those receiving intensive support. The most significant reductions were in respect of sexual abuse. IDVAs reported a significant or moderate reduction in risk in 74% of cases, backed up by 71% of victims reporting that they felt safer. Victims reported improvements in their wellbeing: 69% said that their quality of life had improved and 77% were confident in how to access support in the future.

Finally, the work of IDVAs and MARACs has saved public money. CAADA estimates that existing high-risk services cost £70m (€87m) to run and for every £1 spent, £2.90 is saved.¹

Continuous improvement of the course

The IDVA training programme is regularly updated so that the content reflects any changes in legislation, policy or best practice. This ensures that learners have the most up-to-date skills and knowledge to support their clients and are able to use all available options to make them as safe as possible.

Over the next five years, CAADA aims to work in partnership to halve the number of victims experiencing high-risk domestic abuse from 100,000 to 50,000, halve the number of children harmed by high-risk domestic abuse from 130,000 to 65,000, and halve the average time it takes victims to seek help from 5 years to 2½ years.

To achieve this, plans include:

¹ CAADA (2012) *A Place of Greater Safety*. Bristol: CAADA



- promoting the early identification of domestic abuse, by finding ways to extend the reach of IDVA services to marginalised women who are not visible, or who are unwilling to access the criminal justice system, by integrating them more with health services;
- providing training, support and practical tools to shape service provision nationally (especially for victims with complex needs);
- sharing and embedding best practice both in terms of sustaining the multi-agency response and through the Leading Lights programme;

The CAADA Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme will assist in achieving these plans. The CPD programme offers additional training on particularly complex issues linked to domestic abuse and offers those who have graduated from the IDVA training further opportunities to specialise and develop. Courses developed so far include safeguarding children living with domestic abuse, substance misuse and sexual violence.

Spin-offs

The course has had several spin-off effects: other training providers have developed further qualifications for professionals working in the domestic abuse sector. CAADA is working in partnership with specialist services to develop CPD courses on subjects such as substance misuse, safeguarding children, working with young people, sexual violence and mental health. As part of the Leading Lights programme (a programme that has developed and supported services to achieve minimum standards of service provision), CAADA training has also been developed for domestic violence service managers.

Increased funding could increase the scope and scale of the training programme, opening it up to greater numbers of learners. However in fact ongoing funding cuts to domestic violence services nationwide are decreasing the number of services operating and reducing the training budgets of surviving services.

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Website: <http://www.caada.org.uk/>

IDVA training: http://www.caada.org.uk/learning_development/IDVAttrainingIntro.htm

CAADA (2012) *A Place of Greater Safety*:

http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/A_Place_of_greater_safety.pdf



CAADA (2009) *Safety in Numbers*: <http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/research-and-evaluation.html>

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