

Sexual Violence Action Awareness Network (SVAAN) Meeting Minutes, 16 September 2009, 11:00 – 13:30

1. Welcome and apologies

Attendees:

- Anna Booth (Eaves) (AB)
- Namita Prakash (The Survivors' Trust) (NP)
- Nerice Gietel (Solace Women's Aid) (NG)
- Robin Newman (Galop, London's LGBT community safety charity) (RN)
- Pete Saunders (NAPAC) (PS)
- Sharon Smee (Fawcett) (SS)
- Sophie Davies (Victim Support) (SD)
- Louise Jenkins (Eaves) (LJ)
- Sarah Edwards (Eaves) (SE)
- Jennifer Drew (Truth About Rape) (JD)
- Natalia Velinor (Women in Prison) (NV)
- Helen Atkins (Eaves) (HA)
- Ruth Breslin (Eaves) (RB)
- Cate Briddick (Rights of Women) (CB)
- Cat Whitehouse (Eaves) (CW)

Apologies:

- Helen Munt (NAPAC)
- Jo Moores (WRASASC)
- Jane Spencer (Solace Women's Aid)
- Hannana Siddiqui (Southall Black Sisters)
- Karen Bailey (GLDVP)
- Petra Mohr (Respond)
- Stacy Smith (Her Centre)
- Roxane Davies (GLDVP)

2. Meetings, Events and Conferences

3. Guest Speaker: Detective Chief Inspector Mark Yexley (MY) SCD2 Sapphire, with contributions from Detective Superintendent Jim Sirett (JS) SCD2 Sapphire and Detective Sergeant Hannah O'Sullivan (HOS) SCD2 Sapphire to talk about the re-structuring of Sapphire

MY has been in the police force for 28 years, 26 of which he has spent investigating sexual offences. For the past 3½ years he has been with the central Sapphire team doing cold case investigation, supporting Sapphire teams, and policy and partnership work. He has been involved in the re-structuring of Sapphire.

Sapphire successes

Sapphire units were set up in 2001, one of many 'gemstone' projects being set up by the Met at that time. The units were given the name Sapphire in order to be more anonymous and therefore approachable for victims; previously they had always been known as 'rape squads'.

The London Havens are the only SARCs in the country which were set up 50/50 by police and health working together. The majority of SARCs have been funded purely by police money. The Haven model of early evidence kits, hand and mouth swabs, and supporting victims through the process was a Met police project.

The other area where Sapphire has proven successful is in the investigation and prosecution of cold cases.

MY credits this to Sapphire's close working with the CPS, to determine which cases would stand a good chance of resulting in a conviction before getting witnesses involved.

Problems in London

High attrition rate – the majority of cases are lost during the investigation process for a number of reasons including victim's loss of faith in the process, the length of time the investigation takes, lack of communication between police and victims. Of the cases which reach court, between 50-60% result in a conviction, however the level of attrition is too high.

There have also been the recent highly-publicised cases of poor police practice (John Worboys and Kirk Reid), which are currently being investigated by the IPCC. The reason these men were able to continue committing crimes and attacking women was because evidence and links were missed by police. MY assured the group that the Met is committed to improving their practice, both in terms of investigating and victim care.

Sapphire's current structure has also created inconsistencies around performance, resourcing, priorities, and structure between different London boroughs.

Reasons for Re-structure

A decision was taken to re-structure Sapphire in an attempt to tackle the inconsistency in performance across the boroughs. Currently Borough Commanders have responsibility for how each unit is set up, staffing, prioritising resources, and the remit of the unit. From the 23rd, the central command will have control of staffing, and Sapphire's remit across London will be limited to rape and serious sexual offences.

The new command will take effect from 23 September 2009, with a central command covering the whole of London. They are retaining the name 'Sapphire', but are becoming part of the Specialist Crime Directorate (SCD), sitting alongside Homicide Command. From the 23rd, Sapphire will be under the overall authority of Commander Simon Foy, who is currently the Met's lead on homicide and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) deputy chair on rape. John Yates held the previous post with overall responsibility for Sapphire, but he had no staff directly under him in London, the intention is that the revised management structure will be more effective.

Aims & Objectives

The manual for investigating rape and serious sexual offences was written by a Met officer. It has recently been updated to include information learned from the Worboys case.

They want to continue to work with support services to gather anonymous intelligence. The Met are aware of the reasons for under-reporting, particularly after Worboys case. They also understand why there may be inconsistencies in victims' accounts of attacks; the Met firmly believe that candour is paramount in these instances, referring to a couple of cases where victims explained the reasons for the inconsistencies in court to understanding juries.

They want to ensure that all their officers understand the complexities of sexual violence.

Concerns raised at meeting

CW raised concerns over the training of officers in borough operational command units, who quite often will be the first point of contact for victims. HOS stated that all officers do receive thorough training and are therefore equipped to handle these cases.

Further concerns were raised by the group around the handling of victims, disbelief on the part of officers and a total lack of communication as regards the progress of cases.

JS and HOS both assured the group that sufficient training is in place and that should there be any difficulties, complaints could be made to them personally about the performance of officers. HOS

reiterated this point by asking for the groups' contact details and saying that she wanted to build up a central database of contacts to ensure that Sapphire works together with voluntary organisations on these issues.

HA questioned MY on the way police handle women involved prostitution who come to them having suffered sexual violence. MY insisted that all complaints were taken very seriously but acknowledged that there was a degree of prejudice among officers that needed to be dealt with.

HA then cited an example of a woman who had made a complaint and who had a prostitution conviction from 12 years previously. She asked whether the police would disclose this conviction to the CPS.

MY stated that they would as they were bound to do so.

4. Post Sapphire presentation discussion

HA requested clarity with regards to criminal and sexual history in relation to the example she gave.

AB stated that she believes all evidence is gathered by the police and then sent to CPS. The CPS then first disclose the evidence upon which they will base their case. After doing this, they will disclose "unused material." "Unused material" consists of anything that the prosecutor judges as either being reasonably capable of undermining the case for the prosecution against the accused, or assisting the case for the accused. If the previous conviction is disclosed, it is then a matter for the judge to determine whether the previous conviction will be used in court, based on submissions made by prosecution and defence counsel – should defence counsel choose to make an application.

CB explained that this it is also dependent on what is classed as primary and secondary disclosure and believes that the CPS would also agree with the police comment that they would have to disclose the criminal history however historic. However, CB also explained that what the CPS disclose is dependent upon the defence case statement and whatever evidence is considered to be recent, relevant and probative. She stated that in her opinion a conviction for prostitution 12 years ago would not be disclosed because it is irrelevant, based on the fact that the defence in this particular example had nothing to do with prostitution.

5. Event and Conferences

Report Launches

Beginning of October Eaves will be launching two new reports:

- *Male-Ordered: The Mail-Order Bride Industry and Trafficking in Women for Sexual and Labour Exploitation*
- *Of Human Bondage: Trafficking in Women and Contemporary Slavery in the UK*

AB informed the group that she will forward the date once this has been agreed. There will be talks on both reports as well as networking opportunities.

Scarlet Centre Opening

Eaves will be opening their new Advice Centre, Scarlet Centre on September 24th 2009.

AB has passed on SVAAN contact details to the manager of the centre who will be in contact regarding invites.

6. Member Updates

PE:ER Project

HA informed the group of the project.

PE:ER – Prostitution Exiting: Engaging through Research is a 2 year project in conjunction with London South Bank University. The research aims to explore; 'the effectiveness of different interventions designed to support women who want to leave prostitution.' HA explained that the research will include women in on and off street prostitution as well as women who have been trafficked.

The team will be conducting individual interviews with up to 200 women in prostitution and also stakeholders such as service providers.

The project has completed the pilot stage of 10 interviews and aims to have completed the first round of interviews by the end of the year with a view to revisiting interviewees after 12 months.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and women who are/are not engaged with support services can all take part. HA asked members to let her know of women who would like to participate in the research and handed out a project information leaflet. If you know of women who might like to participate, or would like to find out more about the PE:ER project, please visit:

http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/Lilith_Research_And_Development/PeerProject.php

RN (Galop) suggested speaking with SW5. HA stated that the team have approached them.

HA clarified that the project isn't stating that women have to exit prostitution and that it isn't about the debate on this. The aim is to highlight to both local and central government the issue of exiting and for them to take this up on the agenda as they have done with trafficking, instead of local authorities saying it's a central issue and vice versa. This will be the first piece of research of this kind which will systematically assess the effectiveness of different exiting interventions for a broad range of women in prostitution.

From Report to Court

CB informed the group that Rights of Women's handbook, 'From report to court', which was developed for all adult victims of sexual violence, is in need of further funding in order to produce more copies. The handbook was originally part funded by the Home Office who agreed, within the '*Tackling Sexual Violence Action Plan*', to 10,000 copies being produced and distributed throughout England and Wales. CB explained that this was a clear underestimate of how successful the handbook would be and that RoW sent out almost all of the 10,000 copies within 10 months. RoW is now facing problems with the Home Office agreeing to fund further printing runs. CB made a request for any organisations or individuals who have used the book to email RoW stating how important the handbook is, and that survivors of sexual violence need that independent advice. The handbook has always been free of charge and RoW would like this to remain this way. The printing costs per copy are 84p.

PS asked if there was an electronic version available. CB explained that this was available on the RoW site however it is not an ideal option as it is over 100 pages long and therefore not practical to send out. There is also the concern if the handbook is only available off the RoW website that this could deter male victims.

SD asked if RoW have a breakdown of who has received a copy and where the 10,000 copies have been sent.

CB explained that she knows copies went out to individual Victim Support offices as well as all Sapphire Units but does not have a further breakdown. At present RoW will send out 1 per organisation but still wish

to be able to send out copies to each individual survivor who puts in a request. Ideally they would wish for all organisations to have enough to give out.

RB stated that the handbook has been used a lot by Eaves and that they would be happy to send a supporting email.

CB explained this would really help and requested that everyone email her as soon as they can and to emphasise that the handbook should remain free. Contact: cate@row.org.uk

Clause 13

CB updated the meeting about Clause 13, the proposed criminal offence of purchasing sexual services from someone who has been subject to force. CB stated that prostitution must be seen and responded to as a form of violence against women.

CB explained whilst Clause 13 doesn't go far enough it is a step in the right direction. CB explained how Clause 13 makes it a criminal offence for any 'buyer' who pays for sex where a woman has not 'chosen' to sell sex and incorporates the use of coercion. What it does not apply to is any situation where a woman has freely chosen to sell sex and who is not controlled in any way. CB also emphasised that clause 13 will assist in dispelling the myth that this is already illegal. CB explained that the 'pro sex' lobby believe that the legislation will put women at more risk and punish them. CB stated this is not the case and that clause 13 will move the debate to a greater focus on the demand side of the sex industry.

CB explained to the meeting that a position statement has been written and asked for all organisations to sign up to the statement. Where organisations cannot sign up CB encouraged individuals to sign the petition [online](#).

CB explained that Clause 13 is backed by the Home Office but not liked by the Lords and it is uncertain if this will pass as they take the view that it 'discriminates against the poor man'. They have all taken the stance of the buyer's view. One Tory peer expressed the view that prostitution is inevitable and will always be around. CB emphasised that organisations must get on board and support clause 13 in order for it to go through the Lords. It is about challenging and changing attitudes.

RB emphasised how the buyer is often the one who is in the shadows and that it is interesting the Peers spoke more from a buyer's perspective. RB stated that it is the buyer who has the empowered choice and therefore the campaign must look at them. The women exploited in prostitution who have been supported by Eaves clearly state that the 'glamour' perception of prostitution is a complete myth. Eaves is promoting the position that prostitution is a form of violence against women and is calling for the adoption of the 'Nordic Model' adopted in Sweden, Norway and recently Iceland. It is about decriminalising those who sell sexual services and criminalising those who buy sexual services, as well as calling for the government to fund exiting programmes. Though clause 13 doesn't go this far, it is a step in the right direction in regard to tackling the buyer and the sex industry.

RB gave out factsheets and postcards for the DC! Campaign and advised members to contact either Eaves or OBJECT! for further information.

CB stated that Clause 13 may be a way to reword the debate and explained that the law has always been about prostitution on the streets. Clause 13 emphasises that this is a VAW issue and that the campaign can build on this with an aim to moving closer to the 'Nordic Model'. The evidence is clear that this is the only model which really works in terms of deterring the proliferation of illegal aspects of the sex industry.

7. Member Updates

RN (Galop) – described a new joint project between LGBT Domestic Abuse Partnership, Broken Rainbow, Galop, London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, PACE and Stonewall Housing. The project aims to link agencies together so that those requiring support can contact a central number for advice on housing, benefits etc as opposed to having to make several calls to different agencies. Jamey Fisher is the lead on the project.

NP (Survivors Trust) – Handed out information packs regarding their service.

8. Consultations

AB explained that we are still awaiting feedback from the consultations for both the national and London VAW strategies, and the Job centre consultation, more information to follow.

CB explained that she had heard through a Home Office contact that Harriet Harman had requested a Rape and Sexual Violence review however this had been stalled.

AB added that she had read in the papers that the review had initially intended to focus on the CPS and police. When Harriet Harman demanded that the review take in the law as well – as a means of addressing the concerns of women – the announcement was stalled, apparently because there would not be enough time before the next general election to complete such a review.

9. Funding

AB will email SVAAN members next week with an update.

10. A.O.B

None

NEXT MEETING NOVEMBER 12TH 2-4PM. THIS MEETING WILL BE AN OPEN FORUM.