

The REACH Service, NHS Trust

The REACH Service is located in the A&E department of St Thomas' Hospital, part of the Guys and St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust in London. It consists of a team of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA's) who assist members of the community who find themselves in A&E as victims of domestic violence. The IDVAs are powerful and effective cross-agency workers with the respect of all the agencies they deal with (NHS, Police, Benefit Agencies, Housing, Child Services, Local Council and Courts).

The IDVA's sole focus is the safety and well-being of the victim. They can arrange an immediate rescue (hostel place, new ID documents, emergency cash and clothing, baby care supplies, new mobile phone, treatment under an assumed name or away from the main A&E area) or put a longer-term plan in place (counselling, a plan to escape from the abusive relationship, change of identity, safety of children, support in court).

The REACH team provide an exemplary service for all victims of domestic abuse. Their presence has a profound effect on the care that these patients receive in the Emergency Department, all the way from the point of routine enquiry by the staff right up to the follow up and support of these vulnerable individuals.

Despite the project's success in winning several awards and being studied as best practice by other NHS Trusts, funding was cut by Victim Support in 2012 due to its own funding pressures, and REACH was forced to severely curtail its service provision.

BCBN has committed to raising and donating funds for the Reach project since 2013, securing a post for a multilingual domestic violence advisor since February 2014. In addition BCBN will assist with profile-raising and consultancy to enable future funding and ensure the service stays open.

Key REACH Statistics

- 92% of referrals are female
- 11% of perpetrators are the same gender as their victim
- 50% of males who present as victims turn out to be the perpetrator
- 89% of clients have been injured during the latest incident
- Client age range is between 13 and 89
- 5% of clients are aged 18 or under
- 12% of clients are aged 50 or over and have additional physical or emotional needs
- 33% of clients have contemplated suicide
- Over 33% of injuries involve the use of weapons
- 60% of perpetrators have threatened to kill clients or children
- 10% of clients' children have also been physically harmed by the perpetrator
- 24% of clients have been assaulted by an ex-partner, mainly when child contact is taking place
- 6% of clients have been or are in a forced marriage
- Almost 50% of clients have also experienced sexual abuse
- There is a significant number of referrals from other departments within the Trust and from other NHS staff

Key REACH Benefits

- **Fewer repeat incidents:** Whilst 76% of all domestic violence incidents are repeat, according to the Home Office document “Crime in England and Wales 2009/10”, the REACH repeat victims figure stands at less than 5%. This means both an increase in safety and a decrease in demand for A&E services.
- **More incidents reported to the police:** Almost 50% of clients report to the police with REACH support, compared with just 16% of unsupported victims, as reported in the Home Office document “Crime in England & Wales 2008/9”
- **Improvement in immediate care and in long-term support for domestic violence victims:** Pre-REACH, the senior A&E staff realised that *‘there was no equality of service for victims of domestic abuse’, ‘it depended on what staff were on duty’* and whether *‘that said member of staff had the time or expertise to deal with the domestic abuse incident’*. Since REACH started, the staff knows *‘that all staff are trained and that REACH staff are on hand to provide specialist advice and support to staff, the victim and any children in the family’*. REACH simplifies the referral pathway for victims of domestic abuse; its ‘one stop shop’ approach simply saves clinical time and moreover is extremely effective. REACH can arrange ongoing support for domestic violence victims even after they have been discharged from A&E, which means increased safety and stability for victims and their children.
- **Improvement in care for all other A&E patients:** Their presence frees up the Nursing and Medical staff to concentrate on seeing and treating effectively all patients under their care. This also enhances the department’s ability to achieve targets.
- **Improvement in protection of children and vulnerable adults:** Referral rates by A&E staff to the Child Protection and vulnerable adults’ programmes have significantly increased since REACH came on board, as the training provided by REACH raised awareness of the needs of these victims. REACH are an additional safety net for children living in violent homes.
- **Improvement in care for victims of all ages:** The age range of referrals is from 13 to 78: REACH have thus evidenced the need for a domestic abuse service which patients of all ages can access and they are one of the few agencies that accepts such a diversity of referrals.