



**Derbyshire Domestic Abuse Helpline**

**08000 198 668**

## **LEARNING BRIEF 'David'**

### **The Review**

The Safer Derbyshire Community Safety Partnership have undertaken a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) to learn lessons regarding the murder of David<sup>1</sup>, a resident of Derbyshire at the time of his death in summer 2019. Mark was convicted of his murder in 2021 and was given a life sentence with a minimum tariff of 27 years.

The key purpose for undertaking DHRs is to enable lessons to be learned from homicides where a person dies as a result of domestic abuse. The DHR was completed by a panel of senior representatives of all the agencies and organisations who had known the victim and the perpetrator, and they would like to express their sympathy to the family and friends of the victim for their sad loss in such tragic circumstances. Chaired by an independent reviewer, the panel and chair worked together to examine and analyse service involvement and identify any learning from the circumstances.

David was a very private and somewhat solitary man with limited contact with the people around him, despite attempts to identify and engage family, friends, neighbours and community in this review, this was not possible. As a result, the review is heavily weighted towards information provided from agencies and this largely relates to the perpetrator. This has restricted the ability to fully understand the nature of the abuse over the period that the two men were connected. The review has nonetheless been able to identify areas of learning for agencies in relation to this sad event.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the identity of the victim and the perpetrator in line with national guidance the names David and Mark are given as pseudonyms for the victim and perpetrator respectively.



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### **Background**

David lived a simple and solitary life, the only living member of his immediate family he resided in the same property for thirty years. He had worked in the local area and was retired. This very private man was largely unknown to any agencies.

Mark was taken into care by the local authority at the age of seven. He had experienced neglect and exposure to domestic abuse and his father was deceased. His childhood involved unsuccessful foster care placements and Local Authority Residential Care, though he did have regular contact with his birth family, but his mother died in 2011. Unsettled accommodation, involvement in crime, alcohol and drug use were an ongoing feature of his life. It is thought that David and Mark met in 2005 when Mark left the care of the local authority and relevant historical information from this long connection between the two men was considered, but the review concentrated on information available on David and Mark between January 2009 and July 2019.

In September 2009, Mark was convicted of defrauding David of money from his Building Society account for which he was sentenced to six months youth custody, once he reached eighteen, Derbyshire Probation Trust became responsible for his supervision after his release. In 2011, Mark was sentenced to twenty-four months custody for several counts of distraction burglary from the homes of elderly people carried out with his brother. He was released to reside at David's home who had volunteered to accommodate him whilst he was supervised under licence, the fact that David had been the victim of a crime committed by Mark was not recognised and an assessment of vulnerability was not undertaken, however this arrangement rapidly



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broke down. In 2014 Mark was convicted of assaulting David when refused access to his home whilst under the influence of alcohol and then in 2018 David reported to the police that Mark was trying to break into his home, officers attending the incident found Mark under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The lengthy and troubled connection between the two men was the precursor to events of summer 2019 when David visited the local police station to report that he was having problems with Mark who was staying at his house and taking money from him. An officer attended his home address the following day as arranged, but no contact with David was made at this time. Police procedures were followed, with their system updated subsequently to indicate that a crime had been generated, requiring further investigation. The day after the updating of the system, David's next door neighbour contacted the police, with concerns that he had not seen David for a week and further concerns that an individual he identified as David's nephew had moved into the property. The report of these concerns meant that police officers attended the address, and encountered Mark, who was recognised as a suspect on another, unrelated matter and therefore arrested. David was not present at his home and could not be contacted by mobile phone. When questioned in relation to the whereabouts of David, Mark gave an account which proved on investigation to be untrue. Subsequent enquiries about Mark's movements led to the discovery of body parts believed to belong to David, leading to him being charged with murder, which he continued to deny. Mark was found guilty of murder in early 2021.

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### **Learning from the case**

A DHR will always provide an opportunity for areas of development to be identified for services involved, this is summarised below.

#### **1 Learning related to Professional Curiosity**

There was a lack of professional curiosity and exploratory investigation by agencies to understand the nature of the connection of these two men. Some agencies were aware of their connection but failed to register the exploitative or abusive nature of that connection. In some instances, David did approach agencies and referenced the problems he was experiencing with Mark but there was a failure to see beyond the presenting problem and identify the risks to David. Whilst lack of clarity about the nature of the relationship between the two men may have mitigated against defining the domestic abuse, it is clear that although David was not generally vulnerable, he was certainly vulnerable in his connection with Mark.

Offender managers and Court Report Authors did not follow expectations of policy and good practice and repeatedly failed to identify David as a victim. The result of this being that there was no active management of the potential risk towards David. Similarly, the lack of clarity over the nature of the relationship between the two men - sometimes self-identifying as uncle and nephew and at other times denying it, meant that responding to the incidents as domestic abuse was not always appropriate. As a result of this ambiguity the cumulative risk to David from Mark was not identified. Agencies should ensure that frontline staff interacting with the public are aware of the need for professional curiosity where there is any indication of abuse or exploitation and use exploratory questions in their contacts with individuals to enable thinking beyond the presenting issues.



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## **2 Learning related to historical information**

On occasions historical information did not inform assessments of the situation. For example the National Probation Services did not request information from the Youth Offending Service about previous involvement of the two men, to inform a thorough risk assessment and Police did not use historical information to understand the accumulative picture of a perpetrator's pattern of offending against David or Mark's propensity to target vulnerable individuals in pursuit of personal gain. Agencies failed to appreciate David's specific vulnerabilities with respect to his involvement with Mark, he had been a victim of economic and physical abuse and had approached agencies identifying this, but this information regarding historical abuse was not sufficiently considered when assessing the risk that Mark posed to David subsequently.

Agencies should ensure that they access all relevant historical information to inform assessments and interventions and to identify patterns of behaviour and those who may be at specific risk.

## **3 Learning related to understanding that anybody can be vulnerable to domestic abuse**

All professionals need to consider the possibility of any member of the community being vulnerable to domestic abuse or physical or economic exploitation, irrespective of age, gender, sex, sexual orientation and family relationship including none-intimate partners. The barriers to disclosure of domestic abuse faced by males are complex and require a different approach by services in raising awareness and promoting support services. Agencies need to develop understanding internally of the criteria that





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constitutes domestic abuse, specifically raising awareness of economic abuse and recognising that men, older people and those who are not intimate partners may be victims. Promotion with the public about the wider understanding of domestic abuse, what it entails and who can be affected should be undertaken to develop understanding and encourage all victims to recognise and disclose abuse and seek support.

#### **4 Learning related to Multi-Agency response**

Agencies generally worked in isolation with only limited information sharing and co-ordination. There were occasions when Mark was in contact with a number of agencies particularly as his life became more dysfunctional and chaotic in 2018, but there was a lack of follow up or coordination to support him making the necessary changes and the process would begin again. Most agencies were not significantly curious to explore his wider circumstances which may have led to more robust assessments and more relevant interventions. Mark displayed elements of poor mental health, paranoia and drug and alcohol misuse, gambling, debt and abusive, threatening behaviour. These factors are known to increase the risk in an abusive relationship. However, he was never assessed by professionals as presenting a high risk of harm to others. There was no collective multi-agency assessment where agencies pooled information and knowledge to arrive at a risk management plan. Greater information sharing and a multi-agency approach to his situation may have had a more positive impact and enabled a better understanding of the possible impact and risk of the perpetrator to his wider household, family members, friends and community.

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