

# THE DEAF HEALTH CHARITY SIGNHEALTH

## SignHealth Domestic Abuse Service

We are an award winning specialist domestic abuse service for Deaf people and children, and the first service of its kind in the UK. We have been established since 2010 and our current funding is focussed on London, Greater London, Kent and SE England. We can, however, give advice and information or assessment for Deaf people outside of these areas or undertake paid referrals. We are a small team of 11 experienced and trained Deaf women, all of whom use BSL as a first language.

We work closely with mainstream domestic abuse services and Deaf people can either use our service or, with our support, access mainstream services. Our aim is not to duplicate or replace mainstream services, but to complement existing services, and to remove the barriers that prevent Deaf people seeking support to escape domestic abuse.

### Current services include:

1. **IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate)** – the first Deaf Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service, supporting Deaf people at high risk. We provide risk assessment, safety planning and support to access refuges, MARAC and court support along with ongoing support with practical and emotional issues.
2. **YPVA (Young People Violence Advocate)** – this is a prevention and protection service aimed at 8 - 19 year olds and offers awareness-raising of healthy relationships, cyber bullying, sexting and domestic abuse through a series of bespoke workshops to 8 - 19 year olds in Deaf schools, Partial Hearing Units, Colleges and Youth Clubs. We will also offer one to one support to young Deaf people who have witnessed domestic abuse.
3. **Outreach Workers** – providing ongoing support to medium-low risk cases. We provide support to Deaf people living in refuges and help with relocation from refuges or emergency accommodation.
4. **Children and Families Worker**– this role involves supporting Deaf parents who have experienced having their children removed and the children being permanently placed with others, either through fostering or adoption. The parents involved are emotionally impacted by this.
5. **Survivors Workshops** - we provide closed 6-week workshops to Deaf people who need support for confidence and self-esteem building. This is a specially adapted programme similar to the Freedom Programme or Power to Change. For those Deaf people for whom group work is not suited we can offer the equivalent programme on a one to one basis over 3-4 days.
6. **Training services** – two main areas of training as follows:
  - a. **Professionals** – providing awareness of how to support Deaf people and children who are experiencing domestic abuse.
  - b. **Deaf community** – workshops for Deaf people that aim to raise awareness of the issues around domestic abuse and how to stay safe.



The Deaf health charity SignHealth

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7. **Equipment Loan** - we have a small bank of safety/security equipment for emergency loan, including portable fire alarms, door beacons and baby alarms for use in refuge/emergency accommodation.

We work to promote our services within the Deaf community and mainstream services.

### **Deaf Community:**

Many mainstream service providers see deafness as a disability and often fail to acknowledge that the Deaf community is very small and very close. Therefore, a Deaf person experiencing domestic abuse can be at risk from their own community, experiencing similar problems to people from ethnic communities. Deaf people share a rich culture, community and language and often these issues are not taken into account during risk assessment by mainstream services. Many Deaf people leave school with a reading age of 9 years and are often unaware of the issues of domestic abuse and where to seek help. Not all Deaf people are aware of the emergency SMS 999 service. The risk of repeat abuse cycles is higher, and few Deaf perpetrators are convicted. Around 45% of Deaf people experience mental health issues at some point in their lives, and Deaf people who are experiencing domestic abuse can experience additional mental health issues as a direct result of the abuse they suffer.

Technological advances have changed the culture of the Deaf community and they are particularly vulnerable to abuse from social networks or being coerced into unhealthy relationships, forced marriage, sexual trafficking or being used as a means for perpetrators from abroad to gain British citizenship.

This is just a brief overview of the work of SignHealth Domestic Abuse Service. For more information and advice on our services or training, or to make a referral, please contact us at:

**Email:** [da@signhealth.org.uk](mailto:da@signhealth.org.uk)  
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**SMS:** 07970 350 366

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### **Referral Process:**

We are based in Balham, South London however this is an administration base only and we operate from safe discreet locations around London and SE England. Referrals can be from a variety of agencies including police, social services, and domestic abuse service providers by emailing the address above. We also accept self-referrals from Deaf people or their families. Allocation meetings are held weekly.

Further information can be seen on our website <http://www.signhealth.org.uk/deafhope> where leaflets and referral forms can be downloaded. If you wish to be placed on our mailing list please contact us.