



Growing Futures Dissemination Conference Event hosted by Doncaster Children's Services Trust

16th December 2016 in Doncaster

In December, 2016 Doncaster Children's Services Trust (DCST) hosted a whole-day conference bringing together more than 200 frontline practitioners, managers and policy makers from across statutory and voluntary sector organisations to share insights from the new domestic abuse programme *Growing Futures* which was funded by the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme.

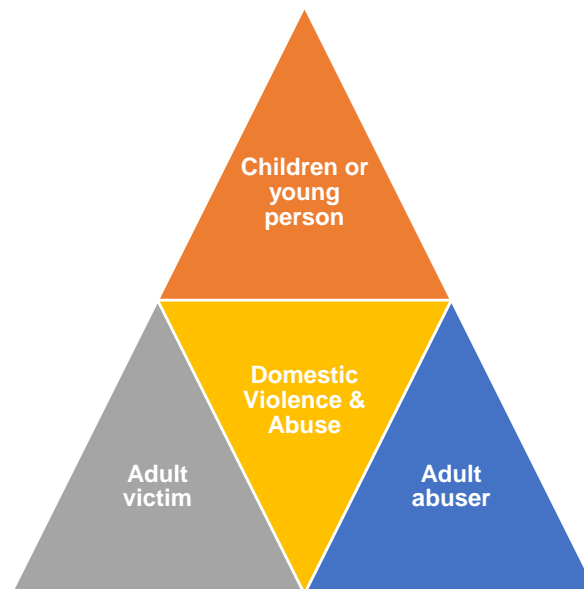
[Growing Futures](#) has been developed in Doncaster as a partnership response and way of working to improve the outcomes of families, and particularly children and young people (CYP) who experience domestic violence and abuse (DVA), by improving the services that work with them. The programme has developed a new pathway for children and families living with domestic abuse, addressing current complex arrangements that are designed around the needs of adults rather than solutions for children and their families together. The new domestic abuse navigators (DANs) work directly with families and also act as enablers ensuring consistent, effective joint DVA interventions across relevant agencies involved at case level.

Jackie Wilson, Director of Performance, Quality and Innovation kicked off the conference sharing some key highlights from the programme. Phil Hayden, Programme Manager for Growing Futures shared progress updates from the implementation of Growing Futures. Some key highlights included the launch of [a DVA-focussed website](#), a DVA training programme which includes a peer-support for practitioners, as well as new tools which enable better inter-agency working. The conference was also an opportunity to launch the new DVA strategy in Doncaster. Nicky Stanley, Professor of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire also shared some early findings from the evaluation of Growing Futures.

Key learning themes emerged from the event:

DVA is not only physical violence - When the Growing Futures Programme was launched in January 2016, there were different conceptions of what domestic violence constitutes and when services needed to intervene. The government definition of domestic violence and abuse is: "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse". Through training and the work of DAN the programme is tackling frontline practitioners' understanding and perception of their own agency.

Taking a whole-family approach to DVA - The programme highlighted a siloed approach to DVA interventions which primarily focussed on the victim, or the child individually, and often neglected the perpetrator. Growing Futures emphasises a whole-family approach which targets all three individually, or together based on the preferences of the family members.



Not all children and young people need social work involvement where there is DVA

There has been a predominant culture of referral to social services where a child or young person are living in families with DVA. Bias towards referral as a form of early intervention or overt risk management often fails to recognise the impact this has on the parent-child relationship for recovery and protection in future. In reality, fear of their children being removed can prevent victims of DVA seeking help and engaging with services, with potential removal of children traumatising victims and children equally. In many situations the victim is protecting their children and only requires additional support. This can be co-ordinated by any practitioners across a range of agencies, including in universal services. Only where there is a concern of child protection or a failure to promote a child's wellbeing should social workers need to intervene or use statutory powers.

Multi-agency working is critical to tackle DVA - The shift toward a whole family approach involves careful planning and collaboration. Families require diverse provision to meet their multiple needs, and may come into contact with a range of agencies. A skilled and coordinated response is needed from all practitioners. Growing Futures has been working towards a place-based cultural shift in how frontline practitioners understand their role in tackling DVA.

Spring Consortium