

Cheshire Police joins forces with domestic abuse charity My CWA to offer revolutionary new custody service

Tuesday 1 November, 2022

Cheshire, UK – Tuesday 1st November, 2022 – Cheshire Police has joined forces with domestic abuse charity My CWA (formerly Cheshire Without Abuse) to offer a revolutionary new custody programme designed to prevent reoccurrence of domestic abuse – thought to be one of the first in the UK.

From early November, all those accused of committing domestic abuse and taken into custody in Chester, Middlewich and Runcorn will be offered support from domestic abuse specialists from My CWA - a Cheshire-based charity supporting families affected by domestic abuse.

Once the perpetrator in custody agrees to engage with My CWA, the charity's team members will begin by discussing emotion-regulation tools with them – including the de-escalation technique 'Time-out', and calm breathing exercises. The offender can then be referred to one of the charity's behavioural change programmes. The support service does not replace the criminal process - this is still implemented as usual – but, for offenders wishing to change their behaviour, the new service provides opportunity to avoid future harmful actions and break the cycle of domestic abuse.

As part of the programme, the My CWA domestic abuse specialists are also able to reach out where possible to the victim of the perpetrators' abuse to make them aware of the support available to them and their family.

My CWA offers recovery programmes, refuge and emotional and practical support for victims of domestic abuse, and their families; and also offers behaviour change programmes for those wishing to change their harmful behaviours. Those who do not wish to engage with My CWA while in custody, are left with information on de-escalation techniques and the charity's helpline number in their personal belongings.

Initial impact of the new programme has been significant, with six in ten (61%) people taken into custody for domestic abuse incidents consenting to My CWA staff discussing safety net strategies with them; leaving the custody suite equipped with tools to de-escalate harmful behaviours. Of these, four in ten (43%) agreed to then be referred for specialist domestic abuse intervention.

The new custody service began as a pilot in December 2021 at the Middlewich custody suite, with the programme's remit expanding to cover more locations and hours in recent months. Such is the positive impact of the programme, from today the My CWA team will now be available seven days a week at three sites across Cheshire.

Police and Crime Commissioner John Dwyer said: "Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on the whole family and it's important we look to stop this cycle of abuse.

"I worked with the Home Office to secure investment for this valuable programme and, following the success of the pilot, we are already seeing the positive impact it has had on perpetrators and the reassurance given to victims as a result.

"Working with My CWA enables us to bring in the very best support when offenders leave custody and gives us confidence that they have access to all the tools possible to stop this harmful behaviour.

"Protecting vulnerable and at-risk people is a key priority in my Police and Crime Plan, as is delivering justice for victims. This programme allows us to do both by giving us the opportunity to change behaviour for the better and break the cycle of domestic abuse."

Superintendent Claire Jesson said: "Domestic abuse can affect anyone and it remains a force priority. Our focus is on problem solving and preventing reoccurrence, so we're working with perpetrators to address their offending and the reasons behind their behaviour.

"At the same time as supporting offenders, we have specialist domestic abuse officers who support the victims which allows for a joined-up approach for the family.

"Cheshire Police has a really close working relationship with My CWA who provide a fantastic service. This is reinforced with the wonderful support that we receive from the IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisers) in the county's domestic abuse hubs.

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“As a force, we have a zero-tolerance approach to domestic violence and this programme supports that, it’s not a replacement for punishment.”

Beverley Wrighton, Deputy Chief Executive at My CWA added:

“My CWA has been supporting families affected by domestic abuse across Cheshire for over 45 years and our relationship with Cheshire Police has always been a valued and effective partnership. Together, we share insights and innovate to create new initiatives such as the recent custody suite programme.

“We believe that only by working hand-in-hand with police and wider Cheshire public services can our approach to tackling the issue of domestic abuse across Cheshire be consistent and impactful, and can we realise our vision of a community free from the fear of domestic abuse.”

- ENDS -

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