

The Disabilities Trust helps to secure the inclusion of brain injury sustained through domestic abuse into screening for all prisoners in England

Wednesday 14 October, 2020

The Disabilities Trust is pleased to share that following a meeting with Victoria Atkins MP, Minister for Safeguarding, all prisoners in England will be screened for Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) sustained through domestic abuse from April 2021.

This follows five years of research from The Disabilities Trust which showed nearly half of men (47%) in HMP Leeds and nearly two-thirds of women (64%) at HMP Drake Hall had a history of traumatic brain injury (TBI). **From the women supported through our brain injury service at HMP Drake Hall, 62% reported they had sustained their brain injury through domestic violence.**

Whilst the physical symptoms may be obvious, brain injuries can also result in behavioural, cognitive and emotional consequences, which can be considered “hidden” but nevertheless can affect someone for the rest of their lives. Some of these symptoms include poor memory, lack of concentration or difficulties multi-tasking, poor impulsive control, aggression, irritability, but also mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression. The early identification of an injury could help those working within the prison estate to better support men and women to manage these symptoms, whilst helping them engage with rehabilitation programmes and services designed to help prevent reoffending.

The introduction of the new screening question follows amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill, informed by The Disabilities Trust research and put forward by Chris Bryant MP, who has long campaigned for recognition of the needs of those with a Brain Injury. Whilst these amendments were not accepted by the Government, Minister Victoria Atkins has committed to this practical step to better address the needs of domestic abuse survivors with a brain injury within the prison estate.

The Minister put forward that from April 2021, all prisoners will be screened for Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) sustained through violence and the potential inclusion of ABI within the statutory guidance for Domestic Abuse Protection Orders. These practical changes come as a direct result of campaigning carried out by the Disabilities Trust, Chris Bryant MP, UKABIF and others.

Irene Sobowale, Chief Executive of The Disabilities Trust said: “The Disabilities Trust is delighted to have succeeded in campaigning to ensure that brain injury sustained through domestic abuse is screened for across the prison estate in England. We hope that this change will ensure that prisoners with a brain injury can be provided with effective support to ensure they can engage in rehabilitation programmes and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

“This result builds on research from the Disabilities Trust working with partners and Government to achieve this.”

Jocelyn Gaynor, Head of Foundation, said: “Our work on domestic abuse and brain injury has illustrated the trauma and vulnerability experienced by survivors of domestic abuse and brain injury. The recent practical steps taken by the Minister represent a significant step forward for these survivors, and we are delighted that our research helped secure the inclusion of ABI and violence in the induction assessment for all new prisoners.”

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