

**Name of Project: SignHealth Deaf Domestic Abuse Service**

**Lead Partner: Signhealth**

**Borough: Islington**

Trigger warning: verbal abuse, neglect, and coercive control

Mavis\* is a 28 year old woman who has been underestimated and taken advantage of her entire life. Mavis's first language is British Sign Language but due to limited joint movement on her hands, even some of the highest level of communication professionals fail to comprehend her completely. SignHealth is led by native speakers of her first language who succeeded where so many others have failed, she was able to understand and be understood fully without judgement or assumption for the first time in her life.

As a result, Mavis' IDVA from the domestic abuse team at SignHealth, has seen the transformation of a neglected and frightened young girl, to a blossoming and confident young lady with a new positive outlook on life that she had never dreamed of before. Mavis had lived in constant insecurity as she often repeated "my father hates me" and "I don't feel safe", the change she has undergone after being granted her freedom, as noticed by her IDVA, is astounding.

After several years of trying to escape her father's torment, she had contemplated taking her own life. Mavis has severe disabilities and complex needs, including Deafness. This meant she was reliant on her father for her care needs. These were often neglected with her father often leaving her to stay in bed for hours at a time, as a result, she would not be able to use the bathroom and would end up soiling herself. She felt that by taking her own life she would release the burden on her father as he had repeatedly showed her his frustration with looking after her and that his life would be better without her.

Mavis had attempted to seek support several times, but on each occasion, she felt unheard, she explained that the safe spaces created for people in situations like her own, did not feel safe for her. She gave up hope of finally feeling free from her father's web. In one more attempt to be understood, Mavis contacted her local adult safeguarding team, who again failed to meet her needs. She requested deaf support and was referred to SignHealth. She was promptly assigned an IDVA from our domestic abuse team. Mavis felt overwhelmingly grateful to have hope again, having reassurance that her situation is being taken seriously.

After assessment of her situation, the SignHealth DA team identified her as a high risk case which was agreed by the Islington MARAC board. The situation was then escalated as her father threatened to remove her devices which would cut her off from the outside world and our DA service. Normal circumstances wouldn't apply to her case, as she has physical disabilities and a language barrier so unlike others, she cannot simply call anyone or walk to a public service to seek refuge or support in emergencies.

Within a month of being our organisation gaining support from MARAC, Signhealth successfully moved Mavis out of her family home. She is now residing in temporary accommodation whilst assessment of her needs and equipment is taking place to ensure the accessibility of her permanent home. The evening Mavis was transported to her new accommodation, the

professionals left one by one until her IDVA was the last to be with her. At this time Mavis looked like the weight of the world had lifted from her shoulders, when it was time for the last person to leave and she would be on her own, the professional looked back worried to see if Mavis was scared to be left on her own, but instead she saw Mavis pleased when looking at her very own room without looking back, to the professionals pleasure she was assured that Mavis had "stopped looking back as she was able to see the future ahead".

In Mavis' allocated IDVA's professional judgement, she has recognised Mavis as a bright and positive person who was not allowed to show this due to stereotypes and assumptions of her capability. After SignHealth have worked to keep her safe, they have simultaneously empowered her to the point that she has seen the light at the end of the tunnel. Mavis is now sitting taller, smiling wider, and she has said "I am independent" this is due to the tireless efforts of the team working on her case, working overtime to ensure her safety and protection.

\*not her real name