

Celebrating 30 Years of RASA



This Celebration of 30 Years of RASA is dedicated, not only to the bravery and endurance of all sexual violence survivors across the UK, but also to the men and women whose commitment and tireless efforts have, against all odds, ensured the continuation of support to them.

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Introduction

This was written to both document and celebrate the history of RASA Merseyside and all that the organisation has achieved over the three decades since it was founded in 1986. In the face of financial instability, organisational challenge and a constantly increasing client base RASA has endeavoured to make one thing constant; that this is an organisation for survivors, fighting for, and fighting with, them at every stage of the recovery process without charge.

However, it must also be recognised as a testament to the importance and monumental need for such specialist services to continue their work. RASA continues to provide emotional and practical support to survivors of rape and sexual abuse; non-recent, recent or current, as well as promoting, and fighting for, institutional and societal change at every level.

1986: Diane Sindall – A Catalyst to Action

In the early 1980's, sexual violence against women within Merseyside was a largely unexplored and unpublicised issue; with most areas having limited, if not non-existent, support available to survivors. Against a backdrop of increasing feminist uprisings across Europe, a small group of local students discussed the possibility of bringing a women's organisation to Wirral.

It wasn't until August 1986 when 21-year old Diane Sindall was raped and murdered just feet away from a busy main road in Birkenhead that it was decided enough was enough. With local women angry at the nature of Diane's death and how easily it could have been prevented, a change in attitude and the very first 'Reclaim the Night' march in Liverpool presented the perfect opportunity to strike. Round a small kitchen in a Birkenhead home, the Wirral Rape Crisis Counselling Service (WRCCS) was founded.

The Charity was founded and registered on 28th September 1987 with the charitable objects: -

“To relieve the mental and physical distress of women and girls who have suffered rape or sexual assault.”

1986-1990: The Fight Begins

Within months of Diane's death, and with virtually no experience or financial support, the WRCCS had established the service aims and objectives that would remain at its very core for decades to come. Underpinning each, a global ethos that rape and sexual violence has a devastating effect on both those targeted as well those who love them; and is no respecter of age, race or status. The WRCCS recognised those affected as not victims but survivors, who should never feel the need to suffer in silence.

The WRCCS aims to:

- 1) Offer free and confidential service to women and girls affected by sexual violence, both historic and recent
- 2) Provide accessible support by telephone and in person; both practical and emotional
- 3) Educate both public and professionals on issues of sexual violence; in training and campaigning
- 4) Work in opposition to racism, classism, misogyny and discrimination of any demographic
- 5) Link with other organisations of similar goal and philosophy, ensuring the most holistic service for survivors

The agency declared that counselling sessions would be held in a safe location chosen by the woman and would be self-referred, nondirective and last as long as needed. Information would be given on sexual health, contraception, pregnancy and legal proceedings when requested; as well as accompaniment to GP, hospital, police and court appointments. In essence, the role we today call an ISVA, was launched.

Within a couple of years, the organisation received its first grant from the Local Authority's Inner Area Programme and employed a full time paid worker to handle administrative burdens; as well as liaise with other organisations, statutory and non-statutory, and establish membership of likeminded feminist groups (e.g. the Wirral Working Party for Women Survivors of Rape and Sexual Assault and the Citizen's Advice Bureau).

Further funding allowed specialised training to be developed for all new volunteers and for external organisations. Liaison with like-minded, victim-focused organisations established a network of knowledge-sharing that would continue for years to come. WRCCS began delivering outreach support to local schools, raising awareness of sexual violence issues in children and young people.

In July 1987, the helpline was launched. The allocated number has been used ever since.

By September 1990, the helpline, staffed entirely by volunteers, ran twice a week between 7-9pm on Thursdays and 2-5pm on Sundays with already considerable demand:


Calls for support: 174

Calls for information: 222

Silent calls: 104

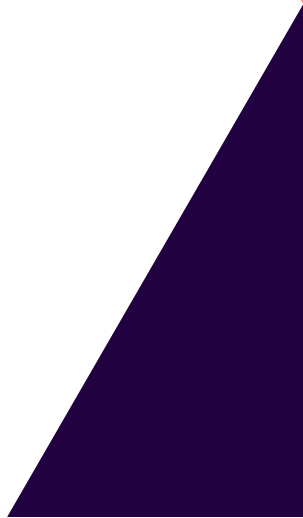

Total: 500

(Annual Report 1989-1990)



With 45.9% of disclosures reporting assaults that were committed by people known to the survivor and 8.5% being unknown, common myths of “stranger rape” and situational blame could begin to be challenged.

The high proportion of silent calls was noted early in the helpline story. We understand how difficult it can be to make that call and every silent call made to the helpline, is logged and recorded to validate the effort it took to make it.



1990- 1995: Onwards and Upwards


As the WRCCS entered the new decade, it was clear that service demand was beginning to far outweigh resources. This, to an extent led to closure of the helpline for 2 months in 1991 to give volunteers a breather as well as to dedicate time to refocus and re-evaluate service provisions. The service relaunched. 534 new callers contacted the service by the end of the financial year and the waiting list for face-to-face sessions was up to 3 weeks. The WRCCS was already outgrowing its means.

Charitable funding in the years 1992-93 meant that not only could the organisation employ their very first counsellor/trainer, but also move into its very own premises; providing a safe and confidential environment for survivors. This location, furnished by charitable donations, remains home to the phone line, group work and counselling services to this day.

Demand did not slow down with these developments but surge; with counselling sessions spiking from 5, to 28-41 per month.

In April 1993, further secured funding for the counsellor/trainer allowed the advertisement of 20-hour basic training for new volunteers, to meet rising demands. The volunteer workforce was increased from 10 to 28, with a list of 47 interested women for the new intake. Training involved basic knowledge of sexual violence issues as well as how best to support survivors.

At the end of May 1993, appointments averaged between 30 and 40 each month. In 1994, this was only intensified by the closure of the Liverpool and St Helens Rape Crisis centres; leaving the WRCCS as the only source of support for survivors in Merseyside.

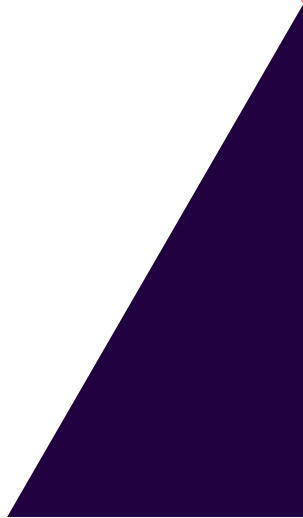


Despite rapidly increasing service demand, raising awareness remained a priority. The 'It's Your Body' project in 1991 allowed members to reach out to youth clubs, schools and young women's groups and explore the myths and facts of sexual violence; laying the foundations for future youth outreach projects. Training endeavours evolved steadily, extending to Ashworth High-Security Hospital, Wirral Social Services and Liverpool University; each receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback. With more recognition, approach came from students and organisations alike for placements and projects.

However, besides dribs and drabs of income, the WRCCS was consistently met with frustration due to lack of secure and permanent funding to ensure continuation of services year to year. 1991-1993 saw the first of many appeals for emergency funding as well as outreach to local journalists and radio stations; with members interviewing for local radio during the week of International Women's Day and newspaper articles being published in support of the service. Another successful 'Reclaim the Night' march in 1994 marked a consolidating era for the WRCCS and its place as a powerful feminist presence in Merseyside.

As the middle of the decade approached, financial troubles at the WRCCS came to a head. The waiting list for counselling was up to 2 months, and the organisation had received no statutory funding for the last 18. To reach survivors as fast as possible, initial assessments/support appointments were offered within a few days of contact; giving women an opportunity to talk, as well as to identify if the WRCCS was the best organisation to suit their needs. This immediate response is still implemented to date.

The centre was living hand to mouth, with funding coming exclusively from donations. Training for both new volunteers outside organisations continued; however, campaign work had to take a backseat. At a push, participation in the Zero Tolerance Campaign against violence towards women as well as International Women's Day celebrations continued.



With funding for the key role of counsellor/trainer due to end in 1995 and nothing secured to fill the gap, closing the WRCCS doors seemed imminent. In March 1995, however, negotiations with Wirral Health and Social Services provided vital funding for services to survive until April 1996. Without the dedication of the volunteers and campaigners, as well as the generosity of organisational funders, the story of RASA would have ended at 9 years; and with demand having doubled since year 1, this was a lifeline.

Counselling/ information calls: 1065

Counselling appointments: 483

(Annual Report 1995-1996)

1996-2000: The Birth of RASA Merseyside

The survival of the WRCCS to its 10th year was not only a testament to the dedication and commitment of its founders, volunteers and supporters, but also evidenced the ever-increasing need of women suffering the effects of sexual violence across Merseyside.

Funding from the National Lottery and Children in Need brought the organisation 5 paid workers; ensuring that each section of the service was catered to appropriately and an ease of burden on volunteers in fundraising and administration. A newly appointed young women and girl's project worker opened avenues for networking across vulnerable generations. This took shape in a 'Speak Easy' Project, providing specialised practical and emotional support both face to face and over the phone as well as training and education in local schools and youth groups.

With more secure funding, the WRCCS could consolidate many operational aspects of service; including a refinement of volunteer recruitment packages to meet new Rape Crisis Federation criteria.

FROM WIRRAL RAPE CRISIS COUNSELLING SERVICE TO RAPE AND SEXUAL ABUSE CENTRE

The biggest change happened in 1999 when the organisation officially became the Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (RASA) under the charity number 1078638; in the hopes that this could better reflect the geographical remit of clients whom often came from outside Wirral. It was also planned that this name change could line up with a new publicity campaign, promoting a more inclusive and professional service than ever before.

More resource was put into outreach; expanding to carers/relatives of survivors as well as those with hearing and speech difficulties. Research was also conducted into the initiation of a specialised multicultural phone line service. Publicity of the new RASA image was made serious business. Volunteers and staff set about creating publicity material which could be delivered to the most appropriate agencies to reach as many survivors as possible.

By 2000 the extended hours phone line had been successfully running for 18 months.

As the millennium approached, RASA had firmly established itself as a rape crisis powerhouse in Merseyside. Referrals from statutory organisations were steadily rising; outreach had expanded across the water in the city centre once a week as well as to the Wirral Women's Drug Service, and initiatives against domestic violence continued in discussion forums.

Comprehensive training programmes had reached as far as Skelmersdale, and survivor groups were meeting regularly both in Birkenhead and Liverpool.

RASA took part in a Home Office Sex Offences Review to make more coherent legislation for survivors of rape, as well as playing host to counselling placement students from various education settings.

In 2002 the Charity became a Company Limited by Guarantee and re-registered as the Rape and Sexual Abuse (RASA) Centre Limited under Charity Number 1094462

2000-2007: 21st Century

RASA

A new decade brought many challenges and changes for the newly formed Rape and Sexual Abuse centre. Focus on meeting the continually increasing demand remained a priority, as well as expanding its sphere of influence across Merseyside communities and professionals.

In 2001, the Freedom Programme allowed more outreach work for survivors of domestic violence, with weekly sessions taking place in Merseyside. The year also saw RASA moving towards more national initiatives, using its own understanding and experience of the myths surrounding rape to join forces with the 'Truth about Rape Campaign' to challenging these misconceptions on a larger scale.

Call rates increased by 75% between the years 2000 and 2002; with demand for face to face sessions similarly on the rise. By the end of 2003 there were 2504 documented face to face contacts and 3164 calls; new callers had increased by 300% and outreach had increased over 200%. Although a larger volunteer intake aided this, it was not seamless. National Lottery funding was running out, and the centre was barely surviving on small unstable bids. With the closure of the much-celebrated multicultural helpline in 2001, for a while it seemed as though doors may have to close altogether.

The future looked somewhat brighter as 2004 came to an end; with RASA achieving funding from the Active Communities Unit of the Home Office for a full time Service Co-ordinator role, alongside a Victims Fund grant for a 12-month programme of development of services across Merseyside. A Service Coordinator was appointed, and a period of growth ensued.

Volunteers

A key part of the grant funding received in 2004 was to radically change the volunteer recruitment and training programme while also designing projects and initiatives that would retain volunteers in placement. As part of this work, RASA designed, wrote and presented a mini-guide to managing volunteers. It was well received by the Home Office funders and was widely distributed. Its contents and methods are still used today in the RASA recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Media contacts

In 2006, RASA made its first venture into TV. The organisation played a role in educating and preparing Hollyoaks actress Christina Bailey for a drug rape storyline, as well as providing counsellor and survivor interviews for a Channel 4 documentary exposing the truth about rape. As a thank you, Christina ran the Great North Run, donating her sponsorship funds to RASA. In 2007, Hollyoaks twins “Mel and Sophie” also visited the RASA Centre to learn about the impacts and effects of so called “date rape” drugs – for their upcoming c storylines.

A grant was awarded by The Rathbone Foundation to produce a radio advertisement and air it on Buzz Radio for the whole of 2006 and 2007. This gained national recognition when the ad’s designer received a media award for excellence and provided crucial publicity to enable more women to reach the service.

The strong and powerful advert started with five seconds of dead air followed by a female voice stating, “I got raped”. It certainly caught people’s attention.

Media engagement remained strong – and RASA had plenty to say about the TV Drama “The Verdict”.

RASA AT 21

Throughout 2004-2006, Allen Lane Foundation continued to support the work of the Counselling Coordinator and John Moores Foundation supported the training and management of the RASA volunteers.

Despite everyone's best efforts the income for year to 31-03-2006 remained low at just £81,000. Despite rising client numbers and corresponding increases in outgoings for premises and staffing, 2007 saw a drop in income. It was tough.

By its 21st Year of service, RASA had exceeded every expectation; coming a long way from its humble beginnings. The refurbishment of the original Birkenhead safe house marked this occasion, as did the rise in volunteer numbers up to 50 in 2007.

This was a far cry from a small group of determined and passionate women working out of a kitchen to improve women's rights in 1980's Merseyside but the value of the work carried out by volunteers continued to exceed the amount of funding coming into the organisation.

But while RASA dreamed of becoming a hugely professional specialist service providing high quality independent services for everyone who needed them – we simply couldn't afford it. Something had to change.

RASA celebrated 21 years of service with a rather grand party at The Lauries Centre in Birkenhead and the publication of the 21 years of RASA Story collated, written and edited by Dr Helen Jones and Dr Eileen Berrington of Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Change – The Move Into Professionally Recognised Service Delivery Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA's)

One of the biggest achievements of the 21st year of service was the establishment of RASA's own ISVA service, which remains a fundamental part of the organisation to date. Funded in part by the Home Office from 2007, the title solidifies and professionalises the practical legal advocacy provided by the organisation since its very beginning.

With statistics showing bleak conviction and reporting rates, as well as a clear absence of women featuring in the criminal justice system, sexual violence was becoming high on political agendas. Initially ISVAs were trained through the CAADA Training Courses and RASA was pleased to contribute knowledge and experience to the development of this work. Funding in this year allowed 2 trained ISVA's to begin to tackle crisis calls from women across the region.

ISVA's provide flexible and practical support in the immediate aftermath of sexual violence; taking the form of advice, advocacy, accompaniment to doctor, police or court appointments or liaise on behalf of the client. Advice and assistance is tailored to the individual and their needs; ensuring the survivor is both supported and prepared for every aspect of the criminal justice system and their investigations.

With this new service and plans for a Sexual Assault and Referral Centre for Merseyside in 2008, a campaign was underway to raise awareness for sexual violence in the legal system as well as look to secure funding for future maintenance.

The search for suitable premises for the new SARC was a challenge RASA enjoyed. It seemed to be an endless round of meetings, site visits, drawings and plans and it was with huge relief that the site in Dale Street was finally agreed upon and work began to develop the space into a bespoke sexual assault referral centre for Merseyside.

2008-2011: Expansions and Expenses

The MERSEYSIDE SARC

As promised, 2008 marked the opening of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Merseyside, creating opportunities for RASA to expand its service even further and ensure that victims and survivors of sexual violence not only received immediate aftercare, but that they received full support through the criminal justice process and beyond.

RASA engaged fully in this new development and spent considerable time interviewing and training the first cohort of SARC Support Workers. New referral links with the SARC complemented already established partnerships with the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC) in providing more thorough and holistic services for survivors.

Importantly, the SARC partnership and the development of the ISVA programme encouraged RASA to make the bold decision to begin supporting male survivors. It was a huge step forward from the intrinsically feminist foundations of the WRCCS and not one taken lightly.

Requests for support from men across Merseyside had been such that it could no longer be ignored. After much consultation and passionate debate, the RASA membership narrowly voted in favour of the action on condition that male clients would be seen by specific counsellors only, who confirmed their willingness to work with men and that males would be excluded from the safe house leaving it a female only space.

Commissioning was confused. Contracting was fractured and within six months of a seemingly concrete agreement being reached pan-Merseyside, the funding became localised by borough and somewhere in the struggle to understand how it all worked, RASA started to struggle for survival. Small grants from a variety of generous grant funders carried us through the year and we will always be grateful to John Moores Foundation, The Rathbone Foundation, Liverpool CVS and The Nationwide Foundation for that support in a difficult year.

RASA Liverpool

In 2009, RASA Liverpool went live thanks to Tudor Trust funding. This was a brilliant recognition of the quality of the work RASA was delivering as the Tudor Trust carry out considerable vetting and authentication procedures before agreeing to grant fund. We were especially delighted to welcome them to our centre in Birkenhead and demonstrate for them some of the great work we were carrying out.

The expansion was long overdue, as outreach to the city centre had been inundated for years. By 2010, the small centre was supporting 155 individuals with referrals flooding in from Police, the SARC, MARAC and the phone line.

As the end of the decade approached, the theme of growth and change continued. Dedicated workers were carrying out services with places like the Merseyside Refugee and Asylum Seekers and Post Natal Support Group and Wirral Drug/Alcohol services to add to RASA's selection of outreach specialisms. Ellesmere Port and Southport had both established RASA outreach services, and a generous donation and one-off government grant in 2008 had allowed the set-up of a Sefton outreach service based within a local domestic violence agency.

With expansion, however, came more pressure. In 2010 RASA Liverpool was forced to expand within its Duke Street premises to match rising waiting lists. The closing of a local Barnardo's group meant RASA needed to adopt the male survivors group to continue their recovery. With the service under pressure, advertisements and promotion of the service had to be kept to a minimum to ensure a wait no longer than 1 week for an initial support appointment, as per the organisations founding principles.

Working closely with the SARC meant RASA supplying more ISVA services. Within weeks, the service had taken on 163 new cases; many sadly dropped through lack of evidence, and one of which seeing the perpetrator go on to commit a similar assault. Conviction rates were on the rise nationally, and with such pitfalls in the legal system more pressure fell on rape services to support survivors.

Visitors and Awards

2008-09 saw a surge of interest in RASA as sexual violence once again hit the headlines. Over the course of six months RASA received visits from several serving MPs including Stephen Hesford MP who was serving at the time as PPS for Vera Baird and who, as a barrister had a keen interest in the work that RASA did and the challenges clients faced in achieving justice. Another visitor to the centre was Chris Grayling in his capacity as Shadow Home secretary. It was an excellent opportunity to explain to him some of the challenges faced by survivors of sexual violence and rape. Sadly he moved into another area of work shortly afterwards.

RASA was also visited by a then little-known MP Theresa May – at the time she was the Shadow Minister for the Family. Mrs May spent a full afternoon at the Birkenhead Centre talking about the issues facing survivors of sexual violence. Liz McClarnon was also a frequent visitor to the centre during a period of twelve months or more and was most supportive of the organisation, raising small but significant funds for the service at a time when we were struggling to survive.

RASA Staff were intrigued to be invited to the Merseyside Woman of the Year Awards in 2008. Knowing little about the awards and understanding less about the expected dress code, two staff turned up for a bit of lunch and a chat. It was to be a lunch to remember as RASA was awarded Women's Group of The Year at the lavish ceremony and an impromptu speech was required – thank goodness we had only recently completed the annual report and had all our stats to hand.

RASA in Sefton

Over in Sefton, achieving funding from local statutory services was proving difficult. Between 2009 and 2010, the service carried out £138,000 worth of support on a budget of £22,000 received. It wasn't until 2011 that 3 years' worth of funding was secured through a Ministry of Justice award, by which time the service was well known for working with younger clients and had established strong links with local child services. RASA in Sefton settled into rented space within the Sefton Women and Children's Centre. This made for a great and supportive partnership that greatly benefited the clients of both services.

By 2011 referrals were being received from the NHS, and work with both men and children was steadily on the rise. Although the centre was not specialised in these areas specifically, the closure of other organisations as well as RASA's long-standing experience with survivors meant this was the last hope for many.

It was clear that the nature of the funding beast had changed considerably. Services were more strained than ever, however there was an emerging need to prove service utility through monitoring, evaluating and evidences all service outcomes. One thing was certain; the next few years could make or break RASA Merseyside.

2011-2014: Demand Vs Deposits

At its 25th birthday in 2011, the RASA known to Merseyside was miles away from its humble Birkenhead beginnings. Two things, however, remained the same; that the needs of survivors continued to far outweigh funds supplied, and that the faith and dedication of WRCCS/RASA workers and volunteers was both invaluable and unshakable.

On a rare sunny day, RASA women celebrated with a barbecue and buffet at the home of one of the key change makers. As Chair of the Board of Trustees for several years she had brought in many positive advances in clinical excellence, management standards and in developing outcomes tools still largely used today.

Between the years 2010 and 2011 another RASA Staff Member was hugely honoured to accept a flurry of awards for work carried out both within RASA and for the periods before she joined the service. Perhaps the most special was the award of an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list, but local awards received, including the Wirral Civic Award, NSPCC Cheshire Woman of The Year Award and Merseyside Woman of The Year Award in the category "Making A Difference" ensured the cause of sexual violence made headlines and news across Merseyside.

RASA as an organisation achieved runner up in The Morgan Foundation's "Against All Odds" award. RASA had previously been recognised by this same foundation for runner up in the Best Entrepreneurial Social Enterprise or Charity. It seemed that, finally, the organisation was being recognised amongst wider communities for its professionalism and dedication. This, however, was to be put to the ultimate test throughout the year.

Trials and Tribulations

When a series of 3rd sector funding cuts hit local media in 2011, the future of ISVA and RASA services was threatened. In response, volunteers and clients took to the streets, collecting hundreds of signatures for presenting to the City Council. RASA was joined on this campaign by the amazing campaigner Jill Saward. Jill was born in Merseyside and had dedicated her life to fighting for victims and survivors of sexual violence and rape. On a cold wet windy day, Jill and RASA staff and volunteers hovered on corners in strategic locations, collecting signatures and support.

Eventually, 2 commissions were won for SARC ISVA services and non SARC ISVA services in Liverpool, allowing continuation of a proven vital service. In the meantime, it looked as though 596 Sefton outreach clients would be carried forward with uncertainty into the new year with no contracts in place. The Liverpool outreach service had funds to pay a worker, but not rent or rooms to support their 209 clients efficiently. Short extensions were granted for the ISVA services, but beyond this the outlook was bleak. By the end of 2011, RASA had spent most of its 25th year keeping staff employed, clients attended, and new outreach centres consolidated. Meanwhile, demand continued to grow.


A relationship forged with The Brook Trust secured five years of invaluable funding towards the core costs of funding the finance and development position. The Brook Trust trustees are aware of the difficulty in achieving such core costs and were extremely generous in their support in this period.

596 clients carried forward from 2010, 553 carried forward to 2021

693 new referrals received

Counselling appointments double from 3180 in 2010 to 6360

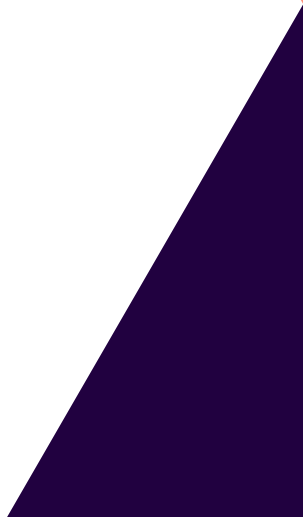

ISVA appointments also doubled from 538 in 2010 to 1076



Over the years 2011-2013, the central government funds known as emergency funding, special funding and finally transformation funding needed to be applied for on an annual basis. RASA was successful in all these applications and managed to survive, but not grow in this period.

In 2012 the Ministry of Justice released funding to be competed for by all sexual violence services. RASA applied for funding to support Sefton and Liverpool and was successful in those applications. Although small awards, they would be sufficient to keep both centres open.

Things began to look up in 2012. New forms of measuring support outcomes were introduced to bring the service in line with NHS expectations of outcomes. For this development we can thank the mentoring and assistance of the former Wirral PCT that helped us understand the language and workings of the NHS and then develop an outcome measuring system that would be acceptable evidence for our funders.




RASA in West Wirral

In 2011, RASA was delighted to achieve a five-year funding stream for a new West Wirral centre. This would be a RASA run Holistic Therapy shop complete with therapy rooms; providing a potentially self-sustaining centre. As per requests from clients, the shop placement at the front of the building also provided discrete access from those who needed it. Within weeks of opening it was clear we were reaching a previously neglected group of people and providing a much-needed service in the heart of the coastal town.

2012 also saw RASA join the 'Justice for Jane' campaign. After the tragic death of Jane Clough at the hands of the ex-partner inexcusably out on bail for her rape and abuse, RASA became fiercely involved in the campaign to change the law to ensure it could not happen again. The campaign eventually saw laws change on bail decisions, whereby police, prosecutors and child protective services could challenge choices made by the crown court if these are ill-advised or dangerous.

RASA worked closely with the parents of Jane – both John and Penny Clough fought tirelessly to achieve some level of justice for the dreadful events that lead to her death and the decision not to prosecute her murderer for rape. Justice for Jane was hugely supported in this task by the now Sir Keir Starmer who will always be held in high regard for his powerful representation in these matters and in his determination to make things better for survivors and victims of serious and violent crime.

Meanwhile, despite lack of funding the Liverpool Centre was becoming the most accessed service with the largest client database; a total of 1274 survivors in 2012. This meant splitting the client list by borough of residence, and using the funding from the Ministry of Justice, moved the Sefton Service to designated space in Bootle as part of Sefton Women and Children's Aid. With more space the waiting list was immediately reduced by two months.



Service refinement and restructure continued in 2013, with the formation of the post of Clinical Lead to oversee all clinical aspects of service and maintain high standards. Uniform systems and procedures were applied across centres to support clients and volunteers alike. This was suited to RASA's burgeoning reputation as the specialist sexual violence service in Merseyside; solidified by becoming full members of Rape Crisis England and Wales by September.

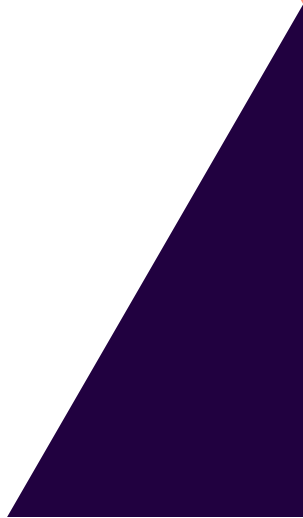

Having achieved full qualification under the Rape Crisis National Service Standards for Sexual Violence Services – which involved writing, implementing and proving a whole new set of policies and procedures, RASA was ready to face the challenges ahead.

Conquering our initial reluctances, RASA adopted and instigated the web based client database known as DPMS in 2013. This would, in that year, prove our greatest asset and our greatest challenge. For years RASA had recorded all client activities on paper, in huge files. This created storage problems and had margins for error that could no longer be accepted. It also meant for a huge task at monitoring and evaluation time and involved weeks of work counting appointments, calls and activities to produce full and accurate reports.

From the beginning of year to 31-03-2014 RASA logged all client details and activities on a tightly controlled and highly secure web based database that allows for instant snapshots of the organisation as well as providing clear and consistent reports on all aspects of our work for funders and commissioners.

Tears were shed in 2013 as staff and volunteers battled to come to terms with this huge change in recording and processing data. It was to be worth the battle.

As Sefton Centre became part of the Local Children's Safe Guarding Board and Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group, it became apparent that many local service providers had little or no training in these issues and RASA became integral in developing new training plans for statutory and voluntary agencies.



A guide for families to identify signs and clues to child sexual exploitation was also developed and received well across Merseyside as part of a 'Keeping Kids Safe' programme.

Outreach and awareness work once again targeted students to promote healthy relationships and challenge sexual violence myths; as well as expanded to collaborations with CAMHS and the Merseyside Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence Group. This would extend further into areas like trafficking and slavery by 2014.


The Hoylake Holistic Centre promoted its expertise and offerings at local Mind, Body and Spirit Fairs as well as School and Hospice Charity events. The centre was going from strength to strength, having raised £19,243 and supported 256 clients after its first year. This was a triumph for RASA, as opening a centre in Hoylake was hotly contested amongst many locals who didn't believe such a service was needed in such an affluent area. The centre's success proved that sexual violence is no respecter of socioeconomic status or location.

As RASA continued work with Merseyside Police to ease the reporting processes for survivors, ISVA services continued to be in high demand with a total of 820 cases dealt with in 2014.

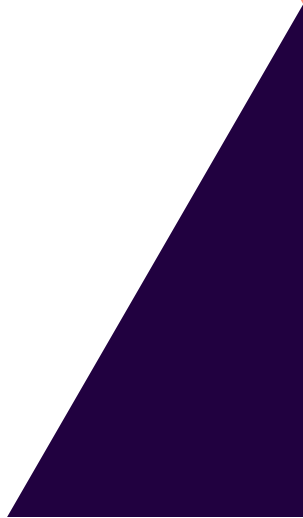

This year also saw RASA moving into the world of social media, with pages on Twitter and Facebook to help respond to survivors and raise awareness across even wider audiences.

By the end of 2014, the situation across the board seemed more stable and diverse than ever.

Birkenhead and Hoylake both had secured more statutory links to be a part of every inch of a survivor's journey, whether it was medical or mental. Further increases continued in child referrals as well as the support of male clients with new outreach in Wirral and Hoylake. Collaboration between RASA and other agencies also saw the rehoming and support of a transsexual survivor of abuse.



Success was beginning to be reflected more statistically, with GAD and PHQ-9 scores showing significant improvements of service users with depression and anxiety. Even the ISVA service began to see more engagement between clients and the legal system, as well as a proportionate increase in convictions. After a rollercoaster few years, the future for both RASA and the survivors of Merseyside began to seem a lot brighter.



2015: Great Expectations


As the end of the financial year in 2015 approached, RASA had extended its sphere of support across almost every age and demographic. The helpline had been relaunched to cover four days a week, email services were utilised on a large scale, training was of the highest standard for both the survivors and the public and, of course, the ever-important face-to-face support and advocacy was going from strength to strength. The year brought in 1310 new clients alongside 538 carried over from 2014, with 1155 clients having completed therapy; reflecting growth across all centres particularly in reports of non-recent abuse and referrals from children and young people.

Sunflowers

Further influx in young clients corresponded with a newly established, and long overdue, specialist children's service at RASA. The aptly named Sunflowers Project, relating to the astounding ability of children to grow in harsh conditions, was funded by BBC Children in Need in a three-year grant to provide specialist therapy and ISVA services as well as staff training. Treatments are holistic, integrative and child-centred alongside psycho-educational in exploring emotion and resilience in young survivors. The service almost immediately became oversubscribed taking on 237 children in its first year, the youngest of which being just 3 years old.

Moving to Bootle – Consolidating Our Support Services

After specialised funding received in 2014 had allowed continued work with male survivors that dated back to 2008, RASA could officially accommodate male clients whilst retaining woman only spaces. By 2015 men made up 10% of the service. To accommodate these changes as well as rapid client increases, a merger between Liverpool and Sefton Centres commenced alongside searches for a larger building to house not only both services but also provide training and activity space.

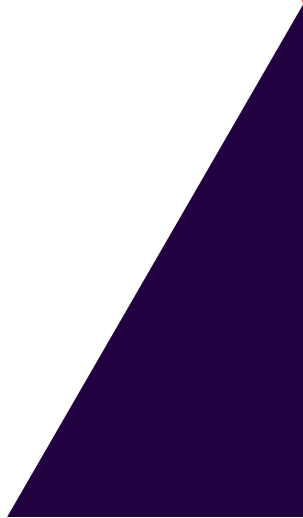



External professionals continued to take notice of RASA's expertise in 2015, as training reached over 10000 school children and teachers as well as trainee GP's and agencies like Addaction and YMCA. As ever, relationships with statutory and non-statutory agencies across Merseyside was key, with each centre manager working to forge close relationships with local groups to ensure continued outreach to specific populations with specific needs; including refugees, asylum seekers and the LGBT community. This included the organization's very first visit to Merseyside Pride!

As a team, RASA was functioning like a well-oiled machine. The structure was working, with an operational management team specialising in clinical governance, ISVA management and development, safeguarding, finance and monitoring, HR and staff management overseeing the centre managers and leads of each of the projects the service was delivering.

Standards had never been higher, and reporting was becoming slick, accurate and dependable – leaving more time free to focus on the core service delivery at the heart of all we do.

Monitoring and evaluation targets were consistently followed in accordance with other Rape Crisis Centres and professional standards of data management were maintained by the team at every step. The counselling supervision team was now well established for excellence in clinical provision, and for all intents and purposes the organization was at its best with the ever-increasing diversity and demand of survivors at its heart.



Fundraising – the Hard Way

In a burst of enthusiasm matching RASA's organizational progress, volunteers decided to embark on a fundraising extravaganza in October 2015. From cake sales to street collections to band nights and bag sales, RASA warriors came out in droves in efforts to raise £100,000 in 100 days to drastically improve financial stability. Weeks of creativity and commitment brought funds up to £78,000; just shy of the target but a clear testament to the dedication and passion of RASA's heart and soul: its volunteers.

Fundraising endeavours were well documented on RASA's new Twitter and Facebook accounts which, alongside the even newer YouTube Channel, had done wonders in promoting the new helpline; bringing total calling hours up to 111.55 in the year 2015! Staff and volunteer attendance at anti-rape and pro-diversity events (like Reclaim the Night and Pride) as well as various colleges and universities in Merseyside were also proudly displayed to the 333 Facebook and 713 Twitter patrons.

In March, RASA further embraced diversity of service by using its influence to help organise the International Women's Day Event at the Devonshire House Hotel, attended by people from many Merseyside communities. Here there were talks on issues like female genital mutation, gender inequality and women's empowerment alongside servings of different national cuisines and opportunities for women of every community to talk to staff members. The drive also established links between RASA and City Heart for trafficking victims and opened a new contract with Learning Line to attend to non-English survivors.

Over in Wirral, things were just as fast-paced. The closure of the local Zero Centre meant the uptake of domestic violence survivors into service, although this was only partially responsible for the monumental 60% increase in Wirral referrals in 2015. Fortunately, this demand was met with determination; helped along by various fundraising efforts by Asda Supermarket and the National Citizen Service totalling at £481 towards vital service needs.

This success seemed to be across the board in over the water services, as the Hoylake Holistics Centre continued to defy naysayers with social networking and local promotions generating good solid stock sales at open days. This was complimented by RASA presence at local School Wellbeing Days and attendance at the unbeatable and hugely successful Tomorrow's Women Wirral Project and of course the Christmas Santa Dash. For a centre that was "unwanted and unnecessary" in such an affluent area, the RASA logo was making itself a comfortable home in Hoylake!

Lime Culture and the Truth Project

Early in 2015, the issue of sexual violence took an encouraging step into the national spotlight with the launch of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA); an initiative towards "investigating the extent to which institutions have failed to protect children from sexual abuse."


As more than half of RASA's referrals are adult survivors of non-recent child sexual abuse, RASA was pleased to see this development.

In November 2015, the IICSA Chair launched the "Truth Project" at RASA.

Inquiry chair Hon. Lowell Goddard DNZM said:

"I would like to thank the Merseyside Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre and Stepping Stones North Wales for meeting with me today. The work of organisations such as these is incredibly important in helping support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. I am grateful for the time they have taken today to talk to me about their work and about some of the challenges faced by those whom they support.

It brings home to me the importance of the work of the Inquiry in identifying organisations and institutions which have failed in their duty to protect children from sexual abuse. And it highlights that this Inquiry must, as I have said before, shine a light on the failings of organisations and institutions across the breadth of England and Wales - and not simply within the Westminster context."




In partnership with Lime Culture, the leading sexual violence training and development organisation, RASA staffed the North West Regional office, delivering the vital support services and counsellors to those survivors wishing to make representation in person.

RASA Education

After several years of writing courses, training staff and trainers and generally learning.....the RASA Education Centre was born in 2016. Frustrated at the lack of effective trauma training, RASA developed accredited training courses in all aspects of counselling. These courses from Level 2 – Level 6 are available for staff, volunteers and external agencies and individuals who want to study to become counsellors of the future. This took a lot of time, effort, blood, sweat and tears but it is an amazing achievement and in its first year of operation, all courses on offer have been fully subscribed. The future is looking good.

RASA Merseyside at 30!

In 2016, RASA Merseyside entered its 30th year of service against all odds; having moved leaps and bounds beyond a humble but passionate women's support group in Birkenhead into a beacon of hope across Merseyside for all genders, age groups, sexual orientations, cultures and abilities. Offering legal, medical, emotional and practical support for all survivors the RASA we know today still holds the same fundamental values as it did in 1986. However, these values now reach survivors in their 1000's and are bound together by institutional and clinical excellence on a scale never imagined.




We are commissioned by the Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver ageless, genderless services across our patch. We are funded to deliver full ISVA service to all Liverpool residents. We are funded through the Home Office to deliver ISVA Services to Wirral residents – although we are aware this ends in March 2017. We are funded, as we have been for many years through competitively achieved tenders, to provide counselling and support to Wirral residents and we have grant funding to deliver varied essential work to minority groups, vulnerable individuals and to support our own volunteer development.

Our Children's ISVA was awarded the first ever Limelight Award for services to children.

RASA had moved from supporting only women over the age of 13 to both men and women of all ages by 2010. One humble centre in Birkenhead had spread across three boroughs after continually outgrowing the outreach centres in Liverpool, Southport and Sefton. Legal support had professionalised into a fully-trained and specialised ISVA service for all survivors and RASA had begun to try its hand at more holistic healing as well as established training in CBT and REWIND therapies to ensure that almost every individual could find the right therapy for them.

Alongside supporting individuals and groups who have experienced abuse at any time in their lives, RASA has also developed its passion to educate the wider population in awareness and technique. At 30 RASA has not only implemented but pioneered training for both statutory and non-statutory organisations, parents, teachers and public across Merseyside. Challenging sexual violence across the North West on every institutional level remains an essential part of the RASA initiative; an initiative which has brought both better sexual violence reporting techniques in Merseyside Police and the establishment of the first Liverpool SARC centre in 2008.

Constant reimagining and assessment of policies, procedures and measures to keep up with the times has established the most professional service possible in line with Rape Crisis Standards. This type of refinement allowed the service to always be up to date with the requirement of funders and ensure we remained strong contenders for any bids. Despite these efforts, however, financial crises have been inevitable with service surviving from bid to bid.



In its 30th year of service, RASA now supports over 2000 survivors annually from Liverpool, Wirral and Sefton. For 30 years these survivors have remained the heart and soul of RASA endeavours, however as 2017 has begun devastating financial cuts and funders giving North West sexual violence centres the cold shoulder mean that once again doors may have to be closed. Constant financial challenge means that survivors may soon not have a safe place to be listened to, believed and supported without question, judgement or discrimination.

Despite somewhat secure funding for specific aspects of the service, huge chunks remain unstable. Successful bids have allowed Liverpool and Sefton to merge and make its home in a spacious office in Bootle as well as a refurbishment and expansion of the Birkenhead base. However, without continuous and permanent funding these safe havens for survivors will become nothing more than vacant properties. With overwhelming referrals from all sides and no guarantee of the finance necessary to accommodate it, survivors will face a monumental waiting list or be turned away.

The core values of RASA remain the same as when it all began, with survivors at its heart, one thing is certain: staff, volunteers and patrons will continue to fight tooth and nail for the survival of a service which has changed the lives of 1000s of survivors both directly and indirectly. New space in Birkenhead, including rooms for children's therapy, holistic therapy, creative activity and drop-in service will forge ahead; a new engagement project will aim to enhance flexibility of outreach services and encourage more survivors to come forward. Training is expanding in Bootle, with staff now offering professional training programmes for professionals looking to expand their expertise in sexual violence and therapeutic practice.

Each year, more and more people from across Merseyside are brave enough to come forward and ask for help.

For 30 years, RASA has been here to listen without judgement, believe without question and support without discrimination.



With demand for support showing no signs of slowing down, neither will the determination of this organisation to support them.

We must remember – sexual violence is not going to go away. The cost of unaddressed sexual violence is huge – not only in terms of emotional distress, but in the cost to society of women unable to fulfil their dreams, unable to carry on with their work, unable to manage their families, and ultimately their lives.

Victims are not weak. Victims are damaged by the violence they have experienced. At RASA we help those victims become survivors and then we help those survivors to thrive. We help them achieve all they dreamed they would achieve despite what has happened to them. Too often we receive referrals from drug and alcohol agencies, from police and probation, from social services – and these are generally non-recent cases of sexual violence.

Sexual violence that has gone unheeded for years – even decades – and sexual violence that has led women and men into adopting negative strategies for surviving the abuse they have endured. Today's children are tomorrow's victims – help us help them to know the signs of abuse, to recognise abusers, to know what to do if they are hurt – to speak out and get the support they need.

We should not be asking – can we afford to support survivors of sexual violence. We should be asking – can we afford not to?

With grateful thanks to Dr Helen Jones for having provided so much of the contained information in the publication “21 years of RASA” and to Alex Cavanagh for all her hard work and research on this publication.

Thanks to – to Big Lottery Awards For All – Celebrate – for funding not only this publication but permanent wall boards for our centres – compilations of information, news reports and key events in the life of RASA – and for funding our celebration event on 29th November 2017.