



**BRINGING THE VICTIM'S VOICE INTO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND OTHER SYSTEMS**

## **PRESS RELEASE – Former Solicitor General Vera Baird QC, speaks out on the treatment of rape victims by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.**

At AAFDA's (Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse) annual conference in Swindon on Friday 6 January, former Solicitor General Vera Baird QC, writer, lecturer and parliamentary consultant **revealed research findings from *Astraea: Gender Justice*, of which she is a co-director, suggesting "that rape myths prejudice the work of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) even more than they impact on criminal trials.**

Judges are now empowered to give directions to juries so that they won't be misled by myths, but the CICA's rules seem adverse to rape complainants from the start and nothing is being done to counter that".

The conference was opened by **Mayor Ray Ballman Councillor**. Prolific campaigner, survivor and businesswoman, **Fiona Bowman then explained why she spoke at these events, " I am the voice of those who cannot speak out, for every woman or man who is right now living in fear, dreading the sound of the key in the door, I am their voice."**

**Councillor Bob Wright chaired the meeting and summarised AAFDA's activities including that it had been asked by the Ministry of Justice to draft a briefing on domestic violence for all Coroners.**

Around 100 people attended the conference and were caused to reflect by **Cath Kane**, poet and Associate Director of DVT Ltd, who read three of her poems inspired by the work of other artists and writers who have the courage to articulate the unspeakable. Cath said that **"So many survivors of domestic abuse are silenced by their abusers, as citizens and professionals we have a key role to play in breaking that silence."**

**Sara Thornton QPM, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police stressed the "importance of the police response and in particular assessing risk accurately so that we can better protect the victims who are most in danger."**

**Shan Kilby, Domestic Violence Co-ordinator of Enfield** spoke powerfully on the importance of raising awareness in the wider community and gave examples of innovative techniques to cause people to confront what is otherwise a silent issue.

**Frank Mullane, Co-ordinator of AAFDA** and brother of Julia Pemberton and uncle of nephew William Pemberton murdered in 2003 talked about his work on the Home Office

panel to quality assure Domestic Homicide Reviews. Frank said he was **“Looking for Domestic Homicide Reviews to evidence humility. It means they would not be defensive and that truth would be revealed. They had to count for something if we are to take the issue of domestic violence seriously. Conducting these reviews should feel like an experience rather than be a process.”**

#### **NOTES:**

1. AAFDA helps families after fatal domestic abuse by listening to families tell their stories and by providing practical help via information, guidance, support and advocacy.
2. AAFDA also increases community awareness of domestic violence and risk factors; helps agencies improve their work on preventing domestic violence and helps improve the way these fatalities are reviewed.

<http://www.aafda.org.uk/aafdaleaflets.html>

3. AAFDA’s Co-ordinator, Frank Mullane is a member of the Home Office panel that quality assures all Domestic Homicide Reviews nationally. He campaigned for many years to ensure these reviews became law. The Pemberton Homicide Review, into the murders in Frank’s family was described as a “gold standard” by Professor **Neil Websdale, who is the director of the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative in Arizona but is originally from Swindon.**

4. Domestic Homicide Reviews became law in April 2011. They were first introduced to Parliament under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004. Frank Mullane, Co-ordinator of AAFDA, was recruited by the Home Office to write some of the statutory guidance and two leaflets that the Home Office makes available to families and friends facing these reviews.

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/domestic-violence/domestic-homicide-reviews/>

#### **QUESTIONS:**

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