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# Revisiting the Other Side of Eden (ROSE) – rural domestic violence project report

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## Introduction

The former Eden District, roughly corresponding to the geographic area of the Eden Valley, is a significantly rural area with the lowest population density in England. The ONS notes that significant rurality may be an obstacle to accessing specialist services (ONS 2011) a concern that persists today (ONS 2023). Published over 20 years ago, 'The Other Side of Eden' (TOSE) uncovered the complexity of the situation relating to domestic violence (DV) in the area (King & Warbrick 2001). The findings of this report were meant to serve local organisations, members of the Eden Forum Against Domestic Violence - to improve the provisions for victims/survivors (Rouncefield, 2012). The original research carried out by academics at St Martin's college, a University of Cumbria legacy institution, found that the wide dispersal of the community in the rural area of Eden District and sporadic public transport further limited access to key services, including those who could assist victims of domestic violence. At the same time, the close community bonds in small villages often worked against those wishing to escape domestic violence, making it harder to leave. Finally, the original research uncovered deficits in training and knowledge around DV amongst key service providers, including police.

Over the past six years, Criminology staff and students have used the former Eden District case as a basis for ongoing tracking of changes to the findings of the report, under the umbrella of 'ROSE – Revisiting the Other Side of Eden'. The aim of the project was to understand the dimensions of rural domestic violence. Some of the objectives included tracking the changes that have taken place since TOSE research took place, assessing the current provisions and barriers against the findings of the original report. We also hoped to identify areas of focus which were not present in the previous research, attending to the concept of 'rurality' in both its geographical and social aspects. By making ROSE a pedagogic tool in the classroom, this 'close to home', rural crime-oriented project on domestic violence and abuse was also aimed at empowering future justice advocates through action responses to teaching on DV&A (McQueeney, 2016). A strand of the work involved a rolling review of literature, with a thought experiment in applying it to the local, Cumbrian reality based on students' experiences and

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knowledge. The successive student cohorts also undertook waves of documentary and mapping research, based on their interests or current conditions.

## Rolling review of literature

At the time of the publication of King & Warbrick's report (2001), rural domestic violence was a poorly understood phenomenon, but it seems to have remained a fringe interest in academic circles (Little 2017), further compounded by the stereotypical image of the idyllic life offered by countryside living. Nevertheless, multiple studies suggest that rural victims are at higher risk of domestic violence, characterised by increased severity, more frequent domestic homicide, and surrounded by ideas more conducive to domestic violence (Strand & Storey, 2019). The successive student cohorts surveyed the available literature assessing the situation of victims in rural communities, with findings corroborating TOSE. Rural victims are said to suffer because of their visibility to community and their invisibility to services (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; McCary and Williamson 2009). Comparisons with other countries suggest that geographical difficulties in accessing support are core obstacles in victims getting help (Tittlova & Papacek 2018, Gracia & Herrero 2006, DuBois, 2018, Peek-Asa, 2011). This is particularly true of children, who unlike adults are specifically reliant on accessibility of services and proper recognition (Carter 2003, Stalford, Balker, Beveridge 2003). Across the UK, the problems victims faced have been exacerbated by austerity measures imposed by successive Tory governments (Safe Lives 2017).

In Cumbria, poor public transport links and sparse population affect the mobility of victims (NCRC, 2019). Furthermore, the victims are often incapacitated by the community embeddedness of perpetrators. Corresponding with King & Warbrick, 2001 (TOSE), literature stressed the need to understand the impact of lack of anonymity and social cohesion in rural areas on victims (Sandberg, 2013; Eastman & B 2007), or the seemingly pervasive reliance on family support where community resources are lacking (Kropp & Hart, 2015). This is especially problematic for young victims (Black, Scott, Shucksmith, 2018)

Research undertaken by Little (2016) also points to disparities in service provision and differences in types of violence and between the affluent home counties 'rural residential' areas and the (predominantly northern), 'rural agricultural' ones, with the latter experiencing higher rates of DV of more severe types, facing higher levels of deprivation, and complex social issues. Services in 'rural residential' areas are generally better funded and more accessible, while there are multiple barriers to access and pervasive underfunding in the agricultural areas. The funding crisis is also significant in terms of housing provision and access to refuges for people living in significantly rural areas; being moved to a distant refuge cuts victim/survivors from social support networks, exacerbates isolation, and may force a return to the abuser (Sandberg, 2013; Bowstead, 2019). Additionally, some of the literature highlighted the practical aspect of policing rural areas, where fewer routine patrols mean heightened danger for victims (NRCN, 2019).

While King & Warbrick (2001) in *The Other Side of Eden* addressed female victims of DV, *ROSE* identified the need for a better understanding of services available to children, the elderly, and minority groups living in rural areas (Rouncefield 2012, Hester 2012, Bates & Douglas 2020, Walker 2018, Aune & Barnes, 2018). Access to refuges and housing, especially for older male children, is a particular issue, making teenage boys a group perceived variously 'at risk' and more of 'a risk' (Save the Children, 2007). As previous research shows, the relationship between the professional groups involved in supporting domestic violence survivors (advocates/supporters and police) is also not without tensions. It is well established that police

recorded data do not offer a complete picture and crime victimisation surveys do not access all victims. The hidden nature of domestic violence can lead to underestimations of the levels of abuse and a lack of understanding of victims' strategies to escape (Bowstead, 2019). Finally, both practical issues and perceptions may affect the ways in which victims approach the services. With a rapidly ageing community in Eden Valley, the attitudes of those aged 60+ (Aune & Barnes, 2018) may affect the ability of services to recognise and serve older victims.

## Analysis of documentary evidence – wave 1 (2018-2019)

Using a thematic approach and a framework developed through engagement with the subject matter, one student team conducted an analysis of documents available publicly at the time, including *Staying Safe Joint Strategic Needs Assessment* (2016), HMIC (2014) review of Cumbria Constabulary's approach to tackling domestic abuse, *Crime and Community Safety Strategic Assessment 2016-17* drafted by the Constabulary and the then-Cumbria County Council, Victim Support & PCC Cumbria (2017) Review of Improving compliance with the Victims' Code in Cumbria, and HMICFRS (2018) PEEL Police effectiveness 2017, as well as the Cumbria Constabulary Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2018. Overall findings from a thematic analysis of these documents indicated a coordinated action was taking place to improve the training and knowledge of service providers. Agencies were found to be recognising the general vulnerability of the population. The group found that at the time, some programmes for offenders were being established. Somewhat worryingly, Eden District was experiencing a rise in rates of domestic violence, as reported by the Police. However, through the analysis of the documents, which suggested Police have received targeted training on the issue, it is possible that improvements in recording incidents and crimes as DV could have been partially responsible for the increase in numbers. At the time of the first wave (2018-19), a joint agency group had been established to support coordination of work on DV and prevention, with children's needs increasingly recognised within the framework of statutory organisations. Cumbria overall had a strong level of compliance with the Victims' Code, which was positive.

## Mapping of services – wave 2 (2019-20)

Much of the DV services in Cumbria, and especially in Eden, focused on access to emergency housing (Eden District Council, nd). Other support was available through organisations and charities in the area, most notably the Churches Together in Cumbria (CTiC) who deliver training on domestic abuse and advocate for policy change and who have also commissioned research on the local extent of domestic abuse (Aune & Barnes, 2018). Another organisation identified in the second wave were the local chapter of Soldiers, Sailors and Airman Families Association (SSAFA). However, most of the main and best advertised organisations which victims could access – Safety Net, Victim Support, Cumbria Constabulary – were located in Penrith (at the time the urban centre of the District) and in Carlisle. The available online listings for some local organisations proved to be to defunct organisations and projects, or web pages with limited functionality and out-of-date information (Cumbria Council, Let go, Cumbria Together).

Based on the mapping and corresponding to the literature surveyed, access to services was mediated through ownership or access to telephones, both landline and mobiles, as well as access to public transport (Averill, Padilla, Clements, 2008). It was noted that mobile and

broadband coverage, while improving, was far from universal in the area (cf. Ofcom, 2022). In the TOSE report, transport was seen as an element of services crucial for victims (King & Warbrick 2001). At the time of second wave (2019-20) the time Cumbrian transport was in notable decline (Lawler, 2018), with some lines serving the Eden District running seasonally (in the summer). While some alternatives, such as Community Transport ‘Fellrunners’, ‘Rural Wheels’, and car-sharing offered by the council appeared, regular (and more anonymous) bus connections were limited to services once or twice a week, on specific days. This severely curtailed the accessibility of Penrith or Carlisle based domestic abuse services and charities, but also access to GP healthcare. With possible ‘third party’ reports coming via the NHS, this is a significant barrier to accessing support (Dheensa, Halliwell et al, 2020). More frequent were buses serving local schools; this was important as schools were recognised as source of potential third-party reports. Research with professionals working with school aged children in Cumbria suggests many are aware of the specific needs of children affected by DV (Buchanan, 2019). The extension of the Operation Encompass across the county in 2018 meant that a key worker from each school received training and could act as the main point of contact for any information on domestic abuse and can act accordingly.

## Impact of COVID-19 – third wave (2020-21)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while both urban and rural areas were affected by stay at home orders (‘lockdown’) periods, evidence from social media, helpline reports, charities and NGOs, commentaries and letters showed an increase in experiences of domestic violence (Viero et al, 2021). The increased reporting on domestic violence has seemingly raised the profile of the issue and highlighted the problems in service delivery (Krishnadas & Hayal Taha, 2020; Williamson, Lombard, Brooks-Hay, 2020). While other forms of crime seemed to decrease in frequency and incidence, DVA remained the only crime on the rise in Cumbria (Keswick Reminder, 2021), however Eden has seen a decrease in the rate of controlling and coercive behaviour offences and in domestic violence safeguarding records (*Crime and Community Safety Strategic Assessment*, 2021). There is no way of assessing if this was due to decreased reporting by victims due to proximity of offender (cf Hohl, 2023). At the same time, however, three wards (Ullswater, Perith South, and Appleby) were in the top 10 highest for sexual violence and one of those (Appleby) was high on stalking and harassment (CCSSA, 2021).

The Domestic Abuse Act for England and Wales was to be passed prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and was passed into law in April 2021, at the close of the third wave. One of the major changes is that the Act recognises children who witness domestic violence as victims in their own right. This has placed an onus on schools to become further involved in safeguarding children, especially as the school environment was possibly one of the few regular ‘touchpoint’ settings – for both children and vulnerable adults in the same household. During the pandemic, schools became hubs of information sharing, as well as spreading awareness of alternative forms of connectivity for residents of Cumbria. Three of the student researchers in this wave, resident in Eden District, West, and South-West Cumbria, had some form of responsibility for school-aged children and identified this increase in communication on DVA as a novel pattern. Information about DVA support was provided via school communications (emails, parental apps) and leaflets, focusing in particular on emergency accommodation and reporting (Fig. 1). Importantly, the Supporting Families Outcomes plan 2021-22 (CCC, 2021) identified victims of ‘honour based’ violence, young adults, and all victims of DV as a vulnerable category in need of support planning.

## Domestic Abuse Support Services Cumbria during COVID-19

To report: **Cumbria police non-emergency call 101** or online [www.cumbria.police.uk](http://www.cumbria.police.uk), **in an emergency always call 999**

**No one should suffer domestic abuse.**  
If you are at risk or experiencing abuse help and support is available.  
For more information contact:


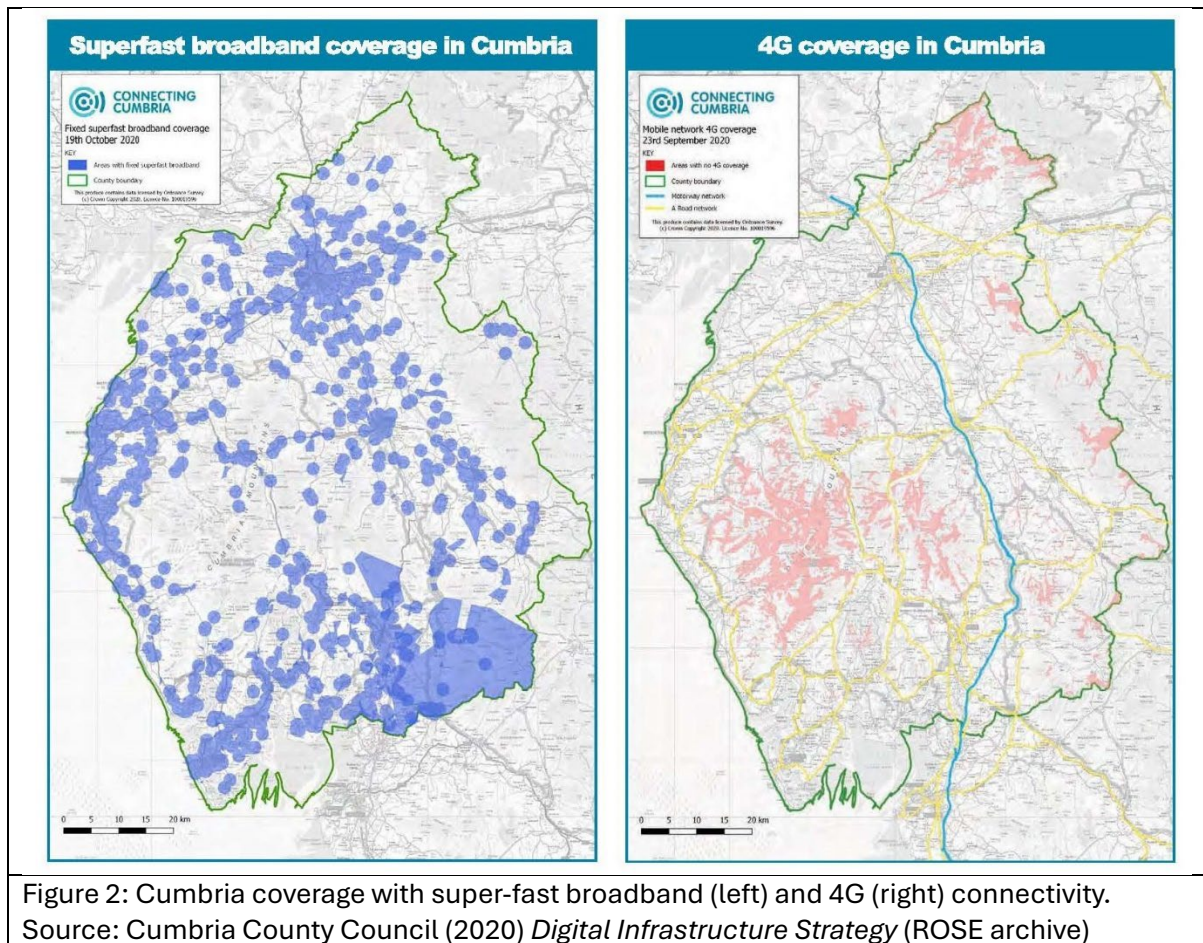
<p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <p><b>Safety Net</b> for women and men affected by Domestic Abuse. t: 01228 515859 e: <a href="mailto:office@safetynet.org">office@safetynet.org</a></p> <p><b>Gateway 4 Women (Carlisle)</b> t: 01228 212090 e: <a href="mailto:admin@cumbriagateway.co.uk">admin@cumbriagateway.co.uk</a></p> <p><b>Women Out West (Whitehaven)</b> t: 01946 550103 e: <a href="mailto:contactus@womenoutwest.co.uk">contactus@womenoutwest.co.uk</a></p> <p><b>Women Community Matters (Barrow)</b> t: 01229 311102 e: <a href="mailto:reception@womenscommunitymatters.org">reception@womenscommunitymatters.org</a></p> 	<p><b>CUMBRIA</b></p> <p><b>Cumbria Victim Support</b> t: 0300 3030 157 (local) Mon-Fri 9-5pm and 24/7 Support Line 0808 1689 1111 e: <a href="mailto:Cumbria.Admin@victimsupport.org.uk">Cumbria.Admin@victimsupport.org.uk</a></p> <p><b>Domestic Abuse Partnerships Emergency accommodation</b></p> <p>Allerdale t: 01900 702660 Copeland t: 01946 598300 Barrow t: 01229 876599 South Lakes t: 01539 73333 Carlisle t: 01228 817079 Eden t: 01768 817817</p> <p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <p><b>LGBT Domestic Abuse Victims</b> t: 0800 9995428</p> <p><b>Mankind Initiative</b> t: 01823 334244 and Men's Advice Line 0808 8010327</p> <p><b>National Child Line</b> t: 0800 1111</p>
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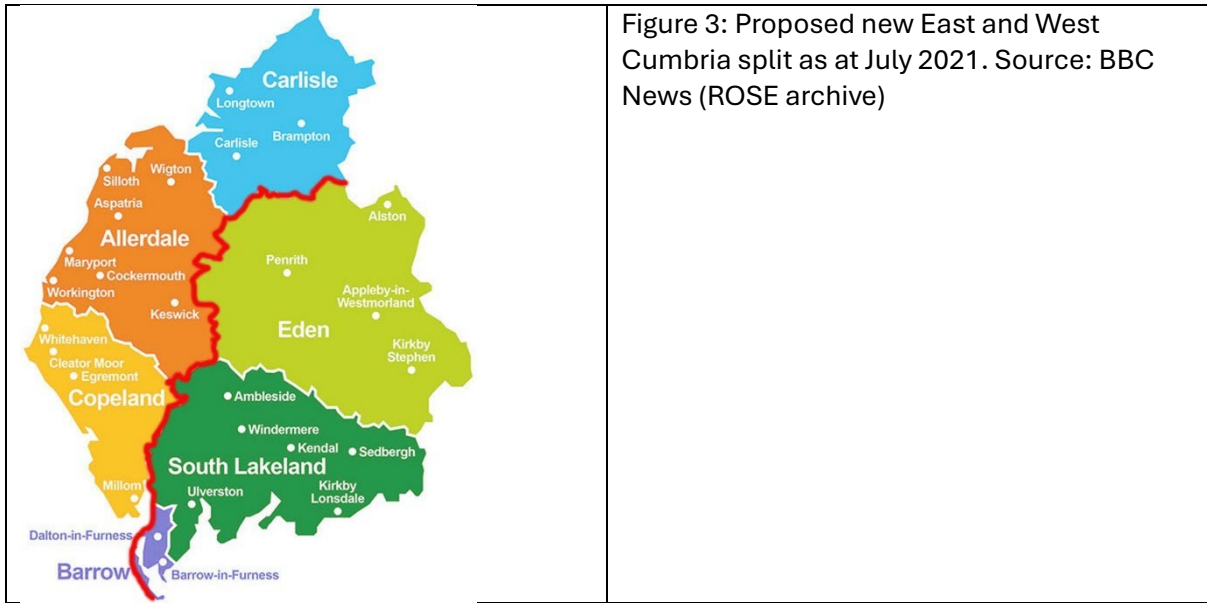
Figure 1: Leaflet informing Cumbria residents about Domestic Abuse Support Services. Source: Cumbria County Council (ROSE archive)

A compendium on local organisations, their activities and availability over telephone and online was distributed to professionals and the wider community in the *Guidance for professionals for Domestic Abuse Emergency Operating Procedures – COVID19* (April 2020), including Victim Support, Gateway4 women and Safety Net. Their online and telephone only accessibility did likely mean that some victims remained unseen. Figure 2 shows the broadband and 4G coverage of Cumbria, taken from the *Digital Infrastructure Strategy* (Cumbria County Council, 2020); it shows that the area of interest remained under-served. Furthermore, as the *Strategy* states, as at 01/10/2020 ‘only 6.3% of properties [were] able to access gigabit capable services’ (CCC, 2020: 4).





Towards the end of 2021, the government announced a proposed change to the structure of local government in Cumbria, which saw two unitary authorities replace the previous County Council and six District Councils, among those Eden District (Fig.3). By late 2021, the plans evolved to propose shadow councils for the newly formed Cumberland (Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland) and Westmoreland and Furness (Barrow, Eden, South Lakeland) Councils. In the life of the project, this also offered an opportunity for change and reflection – the project has been in hiatus. Elections took place in May 2022. Since 1 April 2023, these authorities have now superseded the former division of the County.



## Where are we now?

Despite some progress, challenges in providing support to victims of DVA largely persist. Recent studies and reports confirm ongoing issues with accessibility to services in rural areas (DEfRA 2022), including the geographic Eden Valley, and highlight the continuous need for improved training and resources for service providers to effectively support DV victims. Policing of domestic violence in rural areas remains a challenge (Lewis et al, 2022, Barlow et al. 2022, Davies and Barlow 2024), with frontline officers lacking the depth of specialist knowledge to tackle complex cases. Barlow, Davis and Ewin (2022) found that even experienced response officers in Cumbria lacked the awareness of the impacts of rurality, experiences of intergenerational violence, and minoritised status on experiences of domestic abuse and violence. The evidence these authors gathered from police officers also highlighted that even in emergency situations the remoteness, rurality, and the vast geographic area covered by Cumbria Constabulary meant that travel times to reach victims were an issue.

The passing of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed a duty on the local Westmoreland and Furness council to provide services to victim/survivors. In Eden, emergency accommodation is still provided by Eden Housing Association and local services by Gateway4women/Cumbria Gateway, Safety Net, and the Birchall Trust.

While other forms of violent crime are generally low in the Eden Valley, DA remains a challenge (Lewis et al, 2022). Given its rural-agricultural character, declining transport links, and sparse population, those affected by DVA will encounter specific obstacles to obtaining support. The impact of isolation and social exclusion through sporadic public transport is somewhat ameliorated by improvements in digital services and telemedicine.





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