



SAFER BRISTOL PARTNERSHIP DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Report into the homicide of Rasa
In June 2016**

Independent Chair and Author of Report: Laura Croom
Associate Standing Together Against Domestic Violence

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Executive Summary

1.1 Summary of Incident

- 1.1.1 Rasa, a 61-year-old Lithuanian woman, lived in sheltered housing in Bristol, in a first story flat. Nojus, a 61-year-old Lithuanian man, lived with her on and off. On the day of her murder, Nojus and Rasa had been drinking. At 13:34, Rasa pulled the emergency cord in her flat. An operator spoke to her through the intercom system. Rasa spoke very faintly, saying 'Help me, help me'. The operator told her that help was on the way. Rasa pulled the cord again 9 minutes later and said, 'Help me' again. When the Housing Support Advisor (HSA) arrived 7 minutes after, she found the door unlocked and Rasa naked and covered in blood, lying in the hallway. She saw that Rasa's throat had been cut.
- 1.1.2 The HSA spoke to the operator, who was still on the line, and asked her to call an ambulance. The HSA received advice on what to do from the ambulance operators. Rasa was still conscious at this time and kept saying, 'Help me, help me'. The HSA asked Rasa if she had hurt herself or if someone else had, but Rasa did not answer.
- 1.1.3 The ambulance arrived at 14:02 and the paramedics identified the cut to Rasa's throat as the source of the significant blood loss. There were no other injuries. The two paramedics carried her in a carry chair down on the lift to the ambulance. She was taken to Southmead Hospital where she was treated but died at 15:10.
- 1.1.4 Police arrived at the scene after Rasa had left for the hospital. They spoke to several residents in the complex who knew that Rasa and Nojus were in a relationship. Following the residents' direction, the police found Nojus hiding in the space under the stairwell. Officers noted blood on his jumper and arrested him on suspicion of murdering Rasa. Once in custody, the officers noted bloodstains on his hands, around his nails, and on his socks. Nojus made several statements when arrested, including, "I know I'm crazy, nothing's changed. If you're guilty, you're guilty." He also said, "Now I feel like a crazy guy. Just killed."
- 1.1.5 When investigating the scene, a significant amount of blood was found in the hallway, bathroom, kitchen and lounge of the flat, suggesting that Rasa had been bleeding for some time before summoning help. A large kitchen knife was found in Rasa's kitchen with blood on the blade.

1.2 The Review Process

- 1.2.1 This summary outlines the process undertaken by the Safer Bristol Partnership Domestic Homicide Review Panel in reviewing the homicide of Rasa who was a resident in their area.
- 1.2.2 The following pseudonyms have been used in this review to protect the identities of the victim, perpetrator and the victim's family members: Rasa (victim), Nojus (perpetrator), Mattis (victim's son) and Leva (victim's daughter-in-law). Rasa was Lithuanian. Nojus and Mattis are Lithuanian and Leva is Ukrainian.

- 1.2.3 Criminal proceedings were completed in December 2016 and Nojus was found guilty of murder. He was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 17 years.
- 1.2.4 The DHR process began with an initial meeting of the Safer Bristol Partnership in July 2016, soon after the murder, when the decision to hold a domestic homicide review was agreed.

1.3 Contributors to the Review

- 1.3.1 This Review has followed the statutory guidance for Domestic Homicide Reviews (2016) issued following the implementation of Section 9 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004. On notification of the homicide, all agencies that potentially had contact were asked to check for their involvement with any of the parties concerned and secure their records. A total of fifteen agencies were contacted to check for involvement with the parties concerned with this Review. Eight agencies returned a nil contact. There was no record that Nojus had registered with a GP. Two agencies submitted Independent Management Reviews (IMRs) and chronologies, and four agencies and one company provided chronologies or short reports only due to the brevity of their involvement. The chronologies were combined and a narrative chronology was written for the Overview Report.
- 1.3.2 The following agencies and their contributions to this Review are:

Agency	Contribution: Chronology/IMR/Letter/Other
Emergency Control Centre, Call Handling and Alarm Receiving Centre, Bristol City Council (BCC)	IMR and chronology
Housing Services, BCC	IMR and chronology
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	Report on police contact – only direct contact was on the day of the murder Witness statements
South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust	Notes from contact with Nojus in June 2015 when Nojus collapsed but refused to attend Emergency Department
The Cleaning Company (employer)	Chronology of Rasa's attendance at work
GP practice for Rasa (an IRIS ¹ practice)	Chronology of contact with Rasa

¹ Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) is a programme for GP surgeries that trains doctors and staff to pick up indications of domestic abuse.

North Bristol NHS Trust	Chronology of contact with Rasa
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- 1.3.3 *Independence and Quality of IMRs:* The IMRs were written by authors independent of case management or delivery of the services concerned. The Emergency Control Centre and BCC's Housing Services had involvement with the victim of sufficient duration which required IMRs to be submitted. The IMRs received were comprehensive and enabled the panel to analyse the contact with Rasa and/or Nojus, and to produce the learning for this review. Where necessary, further questions were sent to agencies and responses were received.
- 1.3.4 *Interviews and statements available to the Panel.* The chair interviewed Rasa's son and daughter-in-law and two of Rasa's managers at The Cleaning Company. The police made the following statements available to the chair: one from a work friend of Rasa, and statements from 2 neighbours of Rasa and Nojus. Probation provided a report on Nojus and the judge's summing up in the case.
- 1.3.5 *Response of the family.* Rasa's family read the final review and gave their feedback to the Chair. The family was pleased with the report and felt that making people aware of the services was important, as was identifying these problems in the older population. More education was needed about what constitutes abuse. They thought that the recommendations were good and thanked the Panel.

1.4 The Review Panel Members

- 1.4.1 The following were the Panel Members

Lynne Bosanko	Commissioner of this DHR and Crime Reduction Project Officer, Bristol City Council (BCC)
Adam Smith Carol Doxsey	Detective Sergeant in Bristol Investigations Department, Avon and Somerset Constabulary Detective Constable, Avon and Somerset Constabulary
Jo Murphy and Kate Harris	Senior Practitioner, Safeguarding Adults Team, BCC Senior Practitioner, Safeguarding Adults Team, BCC
Jody Clark	Substance Misuse Project Officer, BCC
Katherine Williams	Substance Misuse Team Manager and Lead Commissioner, BCC
Paulette Nuttall	Safeguarding Lead Nurse, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Locality, NHS Bristol Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and on behalf of NHS England
Donna Sealey	Health Improvement Manager, Public Health, BCC

Peter Anderson	Manager, Emergency Control Centre (ECC), BCC
Nicky Debbage then Martin Owen and Suzanne Ponsford	Service Manager, Housing Delivery, BCC
Linda Mellows	Safeguarding Officer, Next Link (domestic abuse charity)
Tracey Judge	Safeguarding Services Manager, BCC
Mark Thompson Frances Keel	Contract Account Manager, Victim Support – allowed to step down after first meeting Victim Services Manager, Victim Support

- 1.4.2 *Independence and expertise of Panel:* Agency representatives were appropriate as they had not had contact with the victim or perpetrator, were not direct line managers of those involved, and were at an appropriate level of seniority and expertise within their organisations.
- 1.4.3 The Review Panel met a total of four times, with the first panel meeting on the 6 March 2016 and subsequent meetings on 15 May, 11 September and 22 November 2017.
- 1.4.4 The Chair of the Review wishes to thank everyone who contributed their time, patience and cooperation to this review.

1.5 Chair of the DHR and Author of the Overview Report

- 1.5.1 The Chair and Author of the Review is Laura Croom, an Associate DHR Chair with Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (STADV). Laura Croom received Home Office DHR Chairs' training in 2013. She is an independent consultant who has worked in the domestic abuse sector for 14 years. She is an experienced DHR Chair.
- 1.5.2 STADV is a UK charity aiming to see every area in the UK adopt the coordinated community response (CCR) to end domestic abuse. The CCR is based on the principle that no single agency or professional has a complete picture of the life of a domestic abuse survivor, but many will have insights that are crucial to the survivor's safety. It is paramount that agencies work together effectively and systematically to increase survivors' safety, hold perpetrators to account and ultimately prevent domestic homicides.
- 1.5.3 STADV has been involved in the Domestic Homicide Review process from its inception, chairing over 50 reviews, including 41% of all London DHRs from 01/01/2013 to 17/05/2016.
- 1.5.4 *Independence:* Laura Croom has no connection with any of the agencies involved in this case.

1.6 Terms of Reference for the Review

- 1.6.1 At the first meeting, the Review Panel shared brief information about agency contact with the individuals involved, and as a result, established that the time period to be reviewed would be from 29 December 2014 (the start date for Rasa's BCC tenancy and the first time she came to the attention of local agencies) to the date of the homicide in June 2016. Agencies were asked to summarise any relevant contact they had had with Rasa or Nojus outside of these dates.
- 1.6.2 *Key lines of inquiry:* The Review Panel considered both the 'generic issues' as set out in the 2016 Guidance and identified and considered the following case-specific issues: sex, the ages of the Rasa and Nojus, their ethnicity/national origin, and language and religion. In addition, they drank heavily together which would have increased their vulnerabilities.
- 1.6.3 As a result, research on Lithuanian cultural attitudes to domestic abuse and gender roles was undertaken. The Next Link Eastern European worker was interviewed to provide her expertise to the panel, even though Next Link had not been previously aware of the individuals involved. The commissioner for substance misuse services in Bristol and a project officer of ROADS, the Bristol Drugs Project were on the panel.

1.7 Background

- 1.7.1 *Background on Rasa:* Rasa's son, Mattis, and daughter-in-law, Leva, gave the chair some background on Rasa. She was a white Lithuanian woman and was 61 when she died. She had lived in a coastal town on the Baltic Sea and worked as an accountant and auditor for the government in Lithuania. She came to the UK in **May 2011** to be near her son after her husband died. Mattis described his mother as friendly, chatty and beautiful. Mattis said that his mother and father's relationship had not been abusive. Mattis recalled that his mother drank a bit as he was growing up, as he said everyone did, but she did not drink excessively until she was with Nojus.
- 1.7.2 When Rasa arrived in this country, she lived with Mattis and Leva for about 16 months. She then rented rooms from several private landlords before gaining sheltered accommodation with BCC. She undertook cleaning jobs in private homes and eventually was hired as a permanent employee by a cleaning company in the spring before she died.
- 1.7.3 Neighbours who also lived on the same sheltered housing site told police that Rasa spoke very little English and kept to herself. They noted that she sometimes smelled of alcohol. Rasa borrowed and repaid small amounts of money from time to time from one of her neighbours.
- 1.7.4 *Background on Nojus:* Nojus does not have family in this country. The information we have about him in this review comes from the probation service, from neighbours' statements to the police and from Rasa's family. Nojus told probation after his conviction that he has siblings living in Lithuania who are aware of his conviction. He had been married and divorced twice, has 3 adult children and 3 grandchildren. Nojus lived in the US for a time. Nojus told probation that he rented a workshop in Lithuania that he used as a bodyshop. He said that he was imprisoned for 20 years due to 'fighting the Russians', though this

information has not been able to be corroborated. Interpol revealed no previous convictions.

- 1.7.5 Nojus followed Rasa to the UK and for a time lived with Rasa at Mattis's and Leva's house. Mattis reported that Nojus was not drinking heavily when he first arrived in the UK, but eventually Nojus was drinking so heavily that he could not hold down a job. Sometimes he lived with Rasa and sometimes he appeared to sleep rough. Mattis threw Nojus out of his house and his mother's subsequent residences several times when he found him drinking or drunk there.
- 1.7.6 *Their relationship.* Rasa met Nojus in Lithuania after her husband died. He moved to the UK shortly after Rasa did and moved in with her at her son's house. When Rasa's son threw Nojus out of her rooms, Rasa did not intervene to stop this and for a time after such incidents, Rasa and Nojus lived apart. Rasa's son reports that during these periods without Nojus – which were sometimes for weeks or even months – his mother did not drink and seemed to return to her chatty and friendly self. But eventually they would get back together.
- 1.7.7 Mattis and Leva were so concerned about Rasa's drinking that Leva sought advice from her own company's employee assistance scheme. She was given information about local services but was advised that unless Rasa herself sought help, there was little that could be done to help her.
- 1.7.8 Rasa's son does not know who instigated these reunions but when Rasa and Nojus were together, she seemed to cut off contact with others, spent money on drink rather than necessities, and was unreliable about paying her bills and managing her money. Mattis found that Nojus was using Rasa's cards sometimes, though he was not sure if this was with his mother's permission.
- 1.7.9 Though worried about Rasa's and Nojus's drinking and its consequences, Mattis and Leva never saw or heard Nojus being violent, abusive or controlling of Rasa. Mattis noted that even when he was throwing Nojus out of the house, Nojus did not physically resist.
- 1.7.10 Leva asked Rasa several times if Nojus scared or harmed her and Rasa always said no. Mattis talked to his mother many times about her relationship with Nojus but still does not understand what she thought about that relationship. He could see that Rasa appeared to be happy when she was with Nojus. Though she accepted that her life was better without Nojus, she obviously missed him when he was not with her.
- 1.7.11 Mattis was so concerned about his mother's financial situation that eventually he threw Nojus out for the final time, took control of Rasa's money, paid off some of her debts so she did not lose her house, kept accounts for her, kept her credit cards and went shopping with her, and gave her cash. After about 3 months of this, Nojus moved back in and the pattern began again. Mattis found the situation hard to watch and did not know what else he could do. He decided to leave them alone for awhile. He had not seen his mother for about three months when she died.
- 1.7.12 Neighbours gave permission for their police statements to be used in this review. One, with whom Nojus had lived for a period after Rasa had thrown him out over the Christmas period

2015-2016, said that Nojus was infatuated with Rasa. Nojus had told upsetting stories about his treatment of prisoners while in the Lithuanian army. Though Nojus's stories of his military background have not been corroborated, it may be that Nojus had both suffered and inflicted brutality in the course of his life.

- 1.7.13 Neighbours told police after the murder that they heard Rasa and Nojus arguing in Lithuanian from time to time. One neighbour described the relationship as 'tempestuous'. Because of the language difference, the subject of those arguments was unknown to the neighbours.
- 1.7.14 Neighbours reported knowing that Nojus drank a great deal. One tried to befriend Nojus to help with this problem but was unable to engage him long enough to have an impact.

1.8 Chronology and contact with agencies

- 1.8.1 Rasa and Nojus had little contact with agencies and services. No one, including Rasa's son and daughter-in-law, had any indication that Nojus was abusing Rasa. She was directly asked on a number of occasions by her family if she was being hurt by Nojus and she said no.
- 1.8.2 *BCC Housing*. When Rasa moved into sheltered housing in **December 2014**, she was assessed to see what support she would need and want. Rasa identified no particular needs and was assessed as needing minimum support. She declined the weekly face-to-face welfare checks. The needs that Rasa might have requested help with were her alcohol use, managing her money and concerns about debt. All these are asked about in the course of the housing assessment and Rasa did not identify that she had any of these needs. There are no questions specifically about domestic abuse.
- 1.8.3 Rasa started her tenancy in arrears and this continued. In such circumstances, tenants are offered debt advice, but Rasa did not accept this help. The problem appeared to stem from Rasa not setting up payments for the right amounts. Eventually, in **September 2015**, a Notice Seeking Possession was served on Rasa in response to the rent arrears. By the end of **November 2015**, correct payments had been set up and the court action was stopped.
- 1.8.4 Though BCC Housing did not know that Nojus was living with Rasa, it is not unusual for tenants to have others living with them and the tenancy agreement does not prohibit this or require that others are declared. There were no complaints about breaches of her tenancy, noise or any anti-social behaviour received during Rasa's tenancy.
- 1.8.5 *ECC*. **Between December 2014 and her death in June 2016**, Rasa activated the alarm system 59 times. The number of activations from Rasa's flat during her tenancy were not unusual, and about half of them were related to problems with the fire alarms. Nojus collapsed in the flat in June 2015 and an ambulance was called. He was shaking and his lips had gone blue. Correct procedures were followed and Nojus, having refused to go in the ambulance, was advised to attend the hospital. He did not do this.
- 1.8.6 *The Cleaning Company, her employer*. In **April 2016**, Rasa started work at The Cleaning Company. She worked a night shift as part of a team with both men and women.

- 1.8.7 Later that month, Rasa did not come to work and did not call in. The company assumed she had left their employment and followed their procedures for ending her employment. When she returned in **early May 2016**, she explained that her son had died in Lithuania. She was upset and asked for her job back. As she had been such a good worker and her managers felt sorry for her loss, they negotiated with the HR department to reinstate her. Shortly after this, she came into work once smelling of drink. Her managers, sympathetic to the grief they assumed she was suffering, decided that they would watch her and if it happened a second time, they would address it. She then missed work without notice, and then rang to say she would be late and did not appear. That was the day before Nojus murdered her.
- 1.8.8 Rasa's employers described Rasa as an excellent employee with a strong work ethic. She arrived promptly at work which required that she take a train to the site and then walk two miles from the train station to the warehouse. She seemed grateful for the job and worked hard. She appeared very happy when she was working. The staff at The Cleaning Company had no indications that Rasa suffered abuse. She did not mention any abuse to her employers or other staff members. She had no visible injuries.
- 1.8.9 *Police.* Neither Rasa nor Nojus were known to the police before the day she was killed. Nojus was not known to Interpol.

1.9 Conclusions and key issues arising from the review

- 1.9.1 It is not clear that Nojus was abusing or controlling Rasa, but there are patterns in Rasa's behaviour that are commonly found in controlling relationships:
- (a) The pattern of separating and reuniting is common;
 - (b) Rasa's neglect of herself when with Nojus;
 - (c) The use of alcohol – perhaps as a coping strategy;
 - (d) Absenteeism;
 - (e) Isolation from family and friends. The language barrier would have added to this;
 - (f) Regular contact with the abuser when he is not with the victim. Rasa was in touch with Nojus regularly while he was in London in the weeks leading up to the murder;
 - (g) Nojus's use of Rasa's money.
- 1.9.2 Of the behaviours above, the only two observed by agencies or organisations was Rasa's absence from work and the occasion when she came to work smelling of drink. The first she explained with a convincing lie and the second was viewed by her managers as a bad day for a hard-working employee.
- 1.9.3 Though the panel examined the information provided closely, there is no clear evidence of domestic abuse between Nojus and Rasa. Rasa's family observed no controlling behaviour or physical abuse when Rasa and Nojus were living with them. Rasa's son and daughter-in-law had also asked Rasa the question directly many times and Rasa had consistently said

that she was not being abused. Neighbours heard them arguing, but did not think Rasa was being hurt.

- 1.9.4 There remains the possibility that Rasa was being controlled by Nojus but because of her cultural understanding of gender roles and expectations of male behaviour, she did not identify it as such. This is more common in the older generation of women and is also seen in immigrants from areas where the gender roles are more traditional, such as in Lithuania. It is possible that the privacy gained when Rasa moved out of her son's house also isolated Rasa and provided the opportunity for Nojus to exercise more control over her.
- 1.9.5 The Review Panel was also concerned with the vulnerabilities of Nojus and Rasa as a result of their drinking.
- 1.9.6 As there was little contact with agencies and no contact around Nojus's treatment of Rasa, the panel looked at awareness raising and how agencies might use existing systems to identify those needing help. In the absence of clear evidence of domestic abuse, the panel drew on the little contact with Rasa to address itself to what lessons could still be learned.
- 1.9.7 This includes educating employers around signs of abuse and getting more effective help to family members around relatives' harmful drinking and abuse.
- 1.9.8 There are gains to be made in focussing information to older women and women from immigrant communities around coercive control.

1.10 Lessons to be learned

- 1.10.1 *Lesson 1:* That Bristol employers can play an important role in identifying abuse and alcohol problems in their staff and signposting staff to appropriate help;
- 1.10.2 *Lesson 2:* That Bristol employers can ensure that their international staff understand the help that can be offered to them through the HR policies of the organisation and through local services;
- 1.10.3 *Lesson 3:* That older women and women with more traditional understandings of women's roles are less likely to identify coercive and controlling behaviour as abusive. There are opportunities for Bristol City Council and for those providing services to older people to help victims identify this abuse and to get them the support they need;
 - (a) Information should be created and targeted at older women and women with more traditional understandings of women's roles to help them identify controlling behaviour by men as abuse. It is important that this information should be in the languages of the local immigrant communities; and
 - (b) There is the opportunity for the Emergency Control Centre to identify patterns of help-seeking and provide information to service providers so they can act.
- 1.10.4 *Lesson 4:* That families struggling to help relatives with problematic alcohol use need effective support too and should be signposted to appropriate services. Such services are available in Bristol through Recovery Orientated Alcohol and Drug Service (ROADS), but need promoting.

- 1.10.5 *Lesson 5:* Residents of Bristol need guidance on reporting concerns about arguments overheard in neighbouring properties.
- 1.10.6 *Lesson 6:* Though housing staff have been trained on domestic abuse in the past, the training needs to be refreshed so that the existing processes and questionnaires can be developed to include an understanding of coercive control and the ways that abuse may present in older residents' lives and conversations.

1.11 Recommendations from the review

1.12 IMR Recommendations (Single Agency):

- 1.12.1 **Recommendation 1: BCC Emergency Control Centre** to define vulnerability reporting criteria, including indicators of domestic abuse, for the new alarm monitoring system for Estate Management Services by July 2018.
- 1.12.2 **Recommendation 2:** Ensure that the Team Leaders within the BCC Emergency Control Centre receive domestic abuse awareness training which is refreshed annually.

1.13 Overview Report Recommendations:

- 1.13.1 The recommendations below should be acted on through the development of an action plan, with progress reported on to the Safer Bristol Partnership within six months of the review being approved by the partnership.
- 1.13.2 **Recommendation 3: Bristol Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy Group (BDSASG)** to work with local employers to provide and promote information about domestic abuse to their employees and provide this information in the languages of the workforce. Employers should be trained to identify employee behaviour that might indicate abuse and how to support victims. Bristol City Council should develop outcome measures to assess progress as a result of this work.
- 1.13.3 **Recommendation 4: Bristol City Council** to provide and promote information targeted to older people about coercive control and the help available to victims. Ensure this information is provided in the languages of the immigrant communities. BCC to share this information with the Bristol Older People's Forum, with care-givers, with Bristol Housing Partnership and related groups. Information to be sent to the Safeguarding Adults Board to cascade to relevant organisations.
- 1.13.4 **Recommendation 5: Bristol City Council** to ensure the ROADS substance misuse treatment services are promoted through the city's business and commercial sector through Public Health's annual targeted health promotion campaigns.
- 1.13.5 **Recommendation 6: BCC Housing work with Next Link** to develop their assessment for sheltered housing to include substance misuse and to develop training for staff to use the form to identify and address domestic abuse, including referral routes. Training to be extended to other providers of sheltered housing.

- 1.13.6 **Recommendation 7: BDSASG** to develop information campaign guiding neighbours and families in how to respond to concerns about domestic abuse. **BCC Housing** put up domestic abuse posters in common areas of properties so that tenants are alerted to this information and guided as to how to respond.
- 1.13.7 **Recommendation 8: BDSASG, Next Link and local drug and alcohol services** develop training for housing providers that enables them to identify and respond to domestic abuse, in particular coercive control, and substance misuse in tenants over 50.
- 1.13.8 In order to continue to develop BCC's response to domestic abuse and implement the changes suggested, the following recommendation.
- 1.13.9 **Recommendation 9: BDSASG** prioritises populating the current strategic Action Plan and develops outcome measures to show the improvements intended by the actions.