



Victim Support NI

# WHO WE ARE

Victim Support is an independent charity providing help and support to people affected by crime.



# Our Community Service Offers

- An opportunity to talk in confidence
- Relevant information
- Referral to other relevant agencies
- Information and assistance on the criminal injuries compensation scheme
- Help with the compensation process



# Our Witness Service Offers

- Support before and during trial for prosecution witnesses and their families
- Pre trial visits before the court date
- Explanation of the court layout and Court procedures
- Separate waiting areas
- Our staff and volunteers can liaise with court officials and legal representatives on your behalf, and can explain legal jargon and court processes
- Accompany witnesses into court
- Make arrangements for witnesses with additional needs



# Specialist Roles

## **ISVA – Independent Sexual Violence Advocate**

ISVAs support all victims of sexual violence, regardless of gender, provided they are over 18 years old. This includes non-recent and current cases. The service is available to both those victims going through a criminal investigation or trial, and those considering reporting to the police.

## **Hate Crime Advocacy Coordinator**

Victim Support NI's Hate Crime Advocacy Coordinator monitors and coordinates the overall running of this service, which partners with The Rainbow Project NI, Migrant Centre NI and Leonard Cheshire Disability to give support to victims of hate crime.

## **Criminal Injuries Compensation**

Our specialist advisors can help people with their claim, and advise on appeals, hearings and tribunals.

# Service Provision Pre COVID

- Mainly paper based and offered only support face to face, including home visits for those who were not able to attend the office.
- Providing in person support in courts, offering pre-trial visits
- Support sessions delivered primarily by volunteers. Active body of 120 volunteers across NI
- Sessions carried out in two main office hubs and outreach locations across NI including Courthouses
- Only beginning to offer telephone support as a 'last resort' or for those who did not need an appointed time
- Introduced Online chat as a pilot on 1 March but not formally launched as it was a testing phase
- Virtual 360 courts set up on website for victims/witnesses



# Service Provision Post COVID

From 23 March the whole organisation was moved to a WFH situation

- Move to paperless assessments and correspondence
- No face to face sessions offered
- Access moved to telephone, video or online chat
- Reduction of active volunteers from 120 to 40
- Court shutdown, delay of most court cases



# Main Issues



- maintaining continuity and quality of service to clients
- retaining/retraining volunteers to provide distance support
- health and safety of staff and volunteers
- ensuring that victims/witnesses are kept up date with court proceedings



# Steps Taken

- Creating a simplified Needs Assessment that can be easily completed over the phone
- Setting up new process with volunteers to send back information from support sessions – including ES notes and CICS applications
- Setting up new procedures for admin staff to process any paperwork that is coming in
- Setting up procedures around an office presence
- Setting up an online chat team to provide cover during office hours for any queries coming through



# Steps Taken

- Contacting all clients for assurance and explaining how appointments would be delivered and giving them the option to wait if they wanted face to face
- Contacting all clients that had delayed court proceedings and informing them of any arrangements being put in place by the courts
- Contacting all the volunteers and assessing who would be willing to give support over the telephone/video
- For WS volunteers explaining what would happen now and offering them the opportunity to provide support in CS
- Switching over all WS staff to the CS to provide support to clients



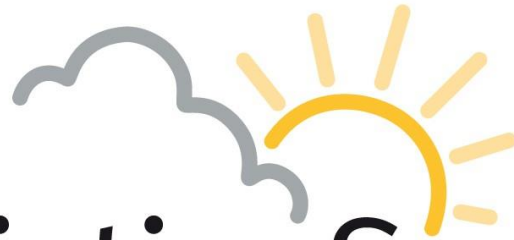
# Good Practice



- VSNI has been pushing partners to consider allowing victims to give evidence remotely
- We are now pressing that vulnerable victims will be allowed to give evidence remotely supported in person by our staff and volunteers from remote locations where we provide the IT and the emotional support. This means that they won't have to attend court to access video links.
- We are also a lead partner in a consortium which is pushing to establish a new remote evidence centre in Belfast that will move video links out of the court into a less intimidating location where there is no threat of meeting the defendant etc.
- Covid has meant that the system can't bring as many people together into court so this has created a need to schedule cases. VSNI has been lobbying for this change for years to reduce the time a victim is waiting at court. It seems that Covid will enable us to test this, and there is a possibility of this being a permanent system change.

# Good Practice

- Greater flexibility around appointments
- Pooling resources across the organization enhancing consistency and continuity of practice
- Increased formalized check ins with staff to ensure good communication
- Movement from reliance on paper records to digital
- Faster response to clients by increasing ways of accessing service
- Movement of volunteer recruitment process to increase communication and retention
- Collection of client feedback to ensure support is appropriate and effective



# Victim Support NI

Supporting people affected by crime



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[www.victimsupportni.com](http://www.victimsupportni.com)