

Survivor engagement – domestic and sexual abuse

Engaging with survivors of sexual and domestic violence through an independent advisor coordinator, to learn about their lived experience and promote change in the criminal justice system.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Criminal justice Diversity and inclusion Ethics and values Leadership, development and learning Operational policing Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	Wales

Key details

Partners	Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Government department Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2019
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Victims

Aim

The aims of the survivor engagement co-ordinator role are to:

- improve the service, policy and practice for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence
- increase understanding around the impact of domestic abuse and sexual violence
- facilitate conversations across the whole criminal justice system to improve the response to domestic abuse and sexual violence
- empower survivors to use their lived experience to influence legislative, strategic and operational activity across the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual abuse (VAWDAS) sector
- identify and reduce any communication barriers faced by those with protected characteristics

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the survivor engagement coordinator role are:

- increased victim satisfaction (although this is a difficult outcome to measure)
- improved training to officers and staff

- improved services for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence (this can be measured through scrutiny panels and continued feedback from survivors)
- improved resources and support available for victims considering their options
- improved feedback from our partners (such as independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and independent sexual violence advisors (ISVAs))

Description

The survivor engagement coordinator role was implemented in 2019. The role is now embedded in both the governance structure of Gwent Police and within the regional VAWDAS government work.

The role must be filled by a qualified IDVA or ISVA to manage safeguarding and risk, but also to understand the entire criminal justice journey. The role also needs to be independent to avoid any organisational bias. Our role sits in Victim Services, which is a police staff department.

The survivor engagement coordinator is responsible for:

- running regular focus groups (advertised through social media)
- obtaining one to one feedback
- inviting focus group and feedback participants to join the Survivor Network and/or Victim Reference Group
- providing feedback to focus group and feedback participants as to how their participation has made a difference
- acting as a point of contact for partners to initiate service recovery with individual cases
- building relationships with partners
- raising awareness about the existence of the survivor engagement coordinator role

Overall impact

The survivor engagement coordinator role has made a significant difference across all areas of work. It has:

- contributed to a considerable improvement in culture within the organisation – with all service areas valuing survivor feedback to ensure their response is victim-centred
- become well respected by our partners

- contributed to our Victim Reference Group growing considerably – with scrutiny being requested for projects across the region by multiple organisations
- encouraged survivors to feel their voice is being heard and to feel empowered – as helping us improve can help other victims

Learning

The survivor engagement coordinator role was a big change for the organisation. The internal culture change (and acceptance of critical feedback about services areas) took a while to filter through. Chief officer support and department lead buy-in was vital to ensure this role's success.

It also took time to establish collaboration with partner agencies and build the trust required for survivors to engage. Corporate communications were key to promoting the existence of a referral pathway. We wanted referrals to be voluntary and not the result of cold calling.

It's important to understand this is a long-term change and not a quick win.

The victim should always be the focus in this line of work and while their feedback is paramount to help us learn, we must consider the impact this has on their emotional wellbeing. Risk assessments should always be completed to ensure it's safe for victims to participate.

It's important to consider Home Office guidance on the counting rules for recorded crime when considering barriers to reporting. For example, if a victim discloses information they haven't already reported, we would then have to record this. This may risk any trust created.

The wellbeing of the survivor engagement coordinator is incredibly important. There is a huge risk of vicarious trauma. This needs to be managed by someone who works in this field to fully understand the impact.

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Tags

Violence against women and girls Sexual and violent offenders Rape and sexual offences
Domestic abuse Domestic violence