

EXCERPT

18/10/2014

Essex victim's perspective support for victims services

2 Key findings

Priorities for a support service for victims were that it be *local, personal and thorough*.

Higher frequency crime types such as *burglary and theft* often have a relatively short-term emotional effect on victims; up to six months after the incident. Calls from Victim Support are often received with surprise as victims of higher frequency crimes typically associated support as applicable to victims of more serious crimes only, but are well-received as it is reassuring for victims. As such these victims typically felt that the service experience that they received either *matched or exceeded their expectations*.

Victims of more serious offences, such as *sexual assault and murder* often had a range of very intense and long-term needs, given the effect the incidents had on them. Furthermore the needs of these victims changed over time. Although mainly positive about the support they receive eventually, *the process of receiving support is often complicated and provision is felt to be inconsistent*.

There is some *confusion around the referral process for support services*, especially amongst victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Victims not following a criminal justice system route often felt as if they had not been given the same level of support as someone formally engaged in the justice system.

Victim's *friends and family are a key source of support for most victims*, especially those experiencing lower level crimes. For the more serious crime types, whilst friends and family also provide core support, they themselves are also seriously affected by the crime and in turn would benefit from support too.

Although victims gained support at the beginning of the life cycle of the crime many felt that *as the process went on they were not supported throughout it all*. For example at the end of the court proceedings or on the anniversary of the crime; a time when victims of more serious crimes were often feeling particularly emotional and prone to reliving past trauma.

Victims see the police as a key individual to liaise with. As they are usually the first point of contact *sensitivity, care and consideration by the police is a necessity*.

If requested *Victim Support should be liaising and co-ordinating the support for the victim and the providers*. Knowledge of these support centres is important. It is vital for the victim that they are provided with the most convenient (in terms of location) and specialist (in terms of their needs) organisations possible. It was felt that Victim Support should act as a comprehensive directory for all relevant and local services.

Victims may have *multiple care needs* and support services should be ensuring all are met.

5 How victim services should be delivered ideally

Chapter 5 outlines how participants feel services would work best for their crime type. During the interviews victims were asked to design their ideal support services. Combining the suggestions that were made during this part of the discussion with experiences where services were felt to work well and where there were clear gaps identified,

Key findings

The police are a key group to be a part of the ideal system. This is because they are usually the first point of contact therefore sensitivity, care and consideration by the police is a necessity.

Victim Support should be able to be a liaising and co-ordinating organisation for the support for both the victim and the providers. Knowledge of where support centres are and what they specialise in is important. It is vital for the victim that they are provided with the most convenient and specialist organisation.

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Victims may have multiple care needs and victim support services should be ensuring all are met.

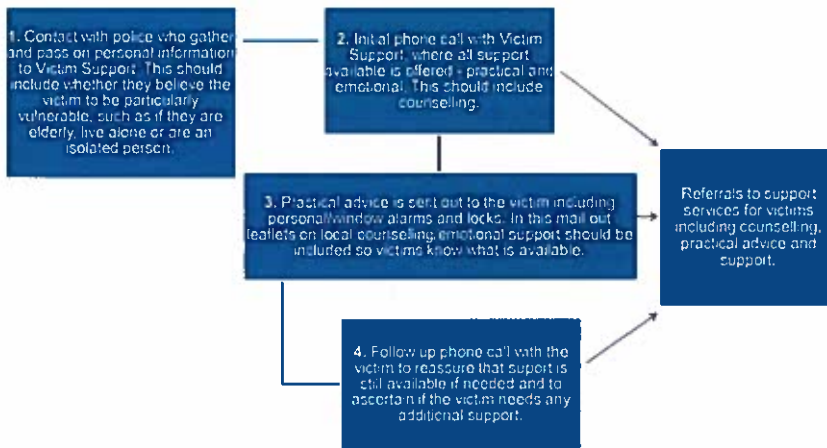
5.1 How support services should work for victims of burglary/theft

Victims overall were very positive about the support they were offered. Although most did not request additional support and were happy with just the practical steps offered such as the alarms and locks, most did not recognise the benefits to them of counselling.

Support for after effects, such as fear of noises in the night, suspicion of people and being scared of returning home were not typically addressed by Victim Support.

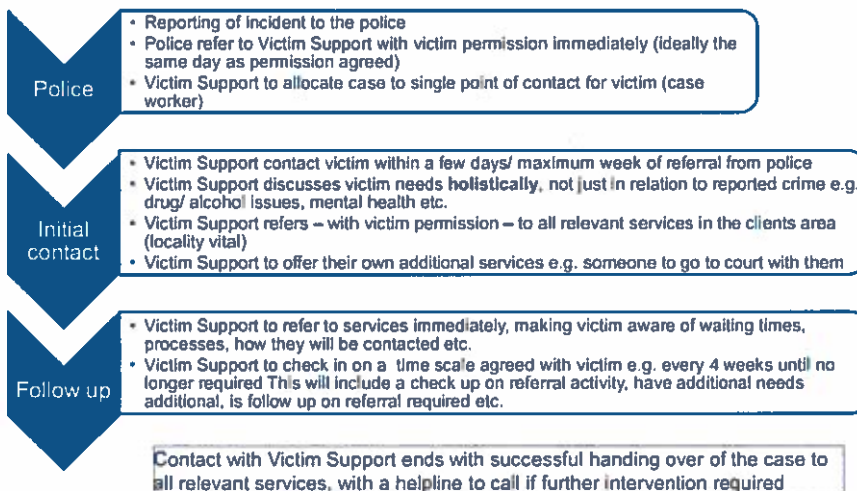
Although victims cannot be made to accept additional support, the support on offer could be "sold" to them in a better way. For example one victim of burglary went along to a counselling session after their partner said to go

along: "what harm could it do". They found it very useful to have someone to talk to and go over the incident with someone who was outside of the family and friends network.



5.2 Victims of sexual assault or rape have a lot of needs and support for many problems

Sexual assault victims engaging in the research were subject to historic rape or sexual assault with a gap between incident occurring and reporting to the police or authorities. Since the incident many other needs had emerged relating to the sexual assault. Most victims experienced their incident when they were young often at the hands of a family member. Most of those interviewed were victims of repeated abuse from the perpetrators. The crimes either went unreported or were dismissed out of hand. As such there are several key aspects of the ideal service they would like to receive.



5.3 Parents of child abuse have similar needs to those of sexual assault or rape but with some specific issues

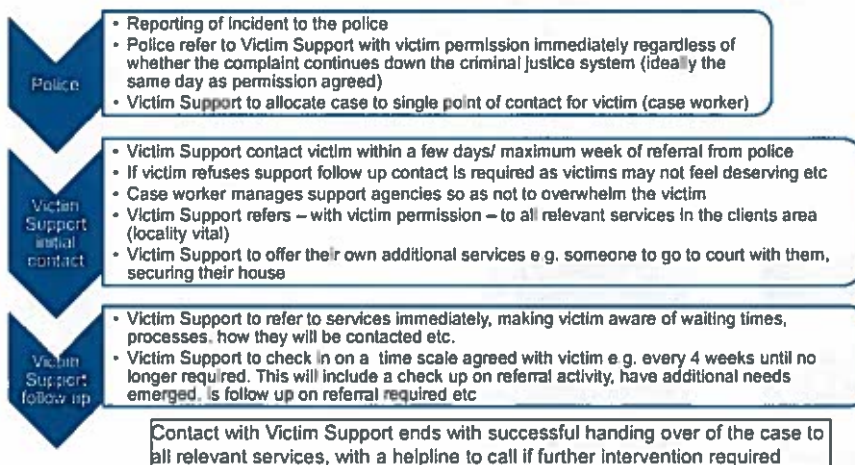
Parents needed counselling and support and felt that this was vital, it was felt that it was really important that they are as equally supported as the actual victim themselves. A sense of immediacy to receiving the support was expressed too.

The parents should be contacted by support service the day after the crime is reported, referral should be done regardless of whether social services have become involved in the case or not. Practical advice was also felt to be needed throughout the criminal justice process; parents said that they needed information on the court processes for this sort of crime and how long procedures take. Some of those interviewed felt that they needed the support meetings to happen in an external place not the home.

The support needs to be separate and integrated to the support that is offered to the victim of child abuse, this may be through joint and separate sessions.

5.4 How support services should work for victims of domestic abuse

Victims of domestic violence had similar ideas how an ideal support system would work to victims of sexual assault or rape. However there were some clear differences; victims of domestic abuse may experience feelings of being unworthy or not being ready for the support. This should not be a barrier to Victim Support, who should accommodate and monitor the situation for the victim with the ideal outcome being the victim continuing down the support pathway.



Victim of domestic abuse case study

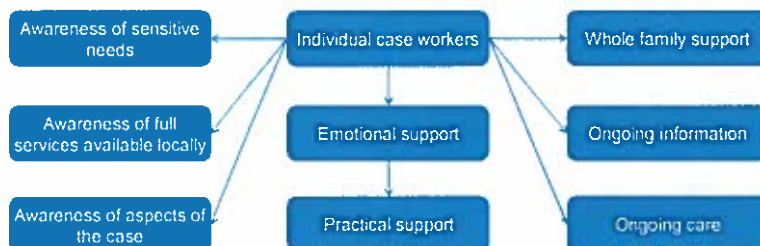
Over the last few years Kate has experienced harassment from her ex-partner. Kate took out a restraining order against him but he continued to violate this. Kate's ex-partner was imprisoned several times for breaking into her premises and threatening her with violence. However, every time he was released he continued to harass Kate. Kate was provided with a special police phone, so if her ex-partner broke into her home she would have a direct line to the police and they could assist her immediately.

Shortly after the first incident Kate was contacted by Victim Support. Kate's experience of Victim Support has been "brilliant" and they really helped her to get through these incidents. Once Victim support had made first contact, Kate was provided with a key supporter worker, who she built a trusting relationship with and who contacted her after each incident took place. When her ex-partners restraining order expired Victim Support ensured that a new order was put in place immediately. Kate also recalled being passed several other support numbers by Victim Support but she decided that she did not need to access these services. Victim support equally updated Kate on the court cases that she did not need to attend. to ensure that she knew the outcome of the case. Kate had a very good experience with Victim Support and she felt that they had done a "really, really good job" and supported her "all the way through".

5.5 Families of murder victims ideal support system

Families of murder victims need joined-up care for the whole family, not just focussed on the parents and children of the victim. Siblings and wider family are affected. The emotional and counselling care offered needs to feel personal and local. A single case worker is recommended as many victims will not want to have to explain details of the crime repetitively. The families also tend to bond with their case worker and trust them. A long term relationship is needed.

Ongoing support is needed especially if there is information to do with the case, such as parole hearings or release conditions.



6 Summary of findings across crime types

Overall the provision of victim services in Essex is perceived to be working well. The majority of experiences are positive – victims are grateful for the support they have received. The gaps in support tended to be about routes to support rather than the quality or content of the support offered.

A few practical solutions could improve the effectiveness of access to support – these include quicker referrals, better signposting and comprehensive central knowledge of local and specialist help.

It is clear that a number of organisations are involved in influencing the victim's perception of support. A more joined-up approach from the police, Victim Support and the support providers would ease the provision of support to those most in need.

