



Victim Support NI

Annual Report 2022/2023



Office Contact Details

CENTRAL OFFICE

1st Floor, Albany House, 73-75 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7AF

COMMUNITY HUBS

Belfast 028 9024 3133
Foyle 028 7137 0086

WITNESS SERVICE OFFICES

The Witness Service is available in all criminal courts in Northern Ireland.

Call 028 9024 4039 for more information.

Funded by the Department of Justice

Behind The Scenes

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Janice Bunting (September 2022-present)
Geraldine Hanna (Resigned June 2022)

BOARD MEMBERS:

Larry Cheshire (Chair)
Niamh Kelpie (Treasurer)
Barry Connolly
Katrina Hinfey
Tracey Lavery
Sinead Lynch
Roscha McDonald
Eamonn McNally
Kevin Smith
Rachel Toner
Sheena Mahaffey (Resigned March 2023)
Rhyannon Blythe (Resigned March 2023)



Our Impact

4,746
pre-trial court
familiarisation visits
given to witnesses ahead of trial

43,211
victims
referred to our
Community Service

1,400
victims
assisted to apply for criminal
injuries compensation

10,995
volunteer hours

2128
hours
of CORE training delivered
to staff and volunteers

£3,410,069
compensation
awarded to victims injured
as a result of violent crime

100%
of eligible referrals
offered support
within 5 days



99%
of witnesses referred
to us before their trial
were given support



280
victims helped with
the preparation of their
victim personal
statements

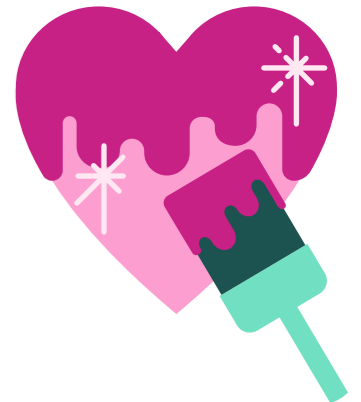


In the words of our clients:

“The team supported my best friends and myself during a trial, which was the worst time in our lives. We really appreciated the kindness of the team during this time. The people in your organisation are amazing and deserve all the good things in life. We could never repay what they helped us through and the support they gave.”

“I did not have the strength to fight to get my voice heard, you have done this for me and I am so thankful. After all these years I can finally see some light at the end of the tunnel.”

“Thank you for your support it means a lot, thank you for believing me and thank you for making me feel like a human.”





“Victim Support have been there, supported me, listened and helped lift me up. I cannot thank you enough for all you have done.”

“I am truly grateful for all your help. I am overwhelmed by the help and support I have received from all involved in my case.”



“My sessions with Victim Support NI have given me strength, they have allowed me to find me again.”

Advocacy

Hate Crime Advocacy Service (HCAS)

During the year 2022-23, the Hate Crime Advocacy Service received 969 hate crime referrals and successfully supported 719 victims through their criminal justice journey.

This resulted in an 89.14% satisfaction rate of victims utilising their support service.

HCAS developed new partnerships with community and public sector organisations, greatly enhancing the advocacy they, and the wider sector, can provide to victims of hate crime. This includes increased support for victims to work through trauma, and strengthened practical support with things like housing. We have been pleased to see an increasing number of victims' cases reaching the courts.

Sexual Offences Legal Advisors (SOLA)

The SOLAs service received 936 referrals over the past year. The SOLAs provide legal support and advocacy to adults across Northern Ireland who have experienced a serious sexual offence. Of those referred to the service, 86% engaged with and benefitted from this very unique legal support, which is the first of its kind in the UK.

100% of clients taking part in our survey reported that the experience with the SOLA allowed them to feel that they had a voice in the criminal justice process and 75% reported improved confidence in the criminal justice system as a result of the SOLA support.

Child Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ChISVA)

The ChISVA helps children and young people understand and access their criminal justice rights and enables them to have their voices heard. Over the past year the ChISVA service received 498 direct referrals for support.

Our ChISVA provides advocacy support to children and young people throughout Northern Ireland, including referrals for specialist counselling through organisations like Nexus and for support at court through NSPCC Young Witness service.

Our ChISVA helps facilitate the presence of registered intermediaries when giving statements, accesses updates on case progression within the PSNI, and requests reviews on PPS decisions around prosecution. As a result of ChISVA support 92% of clients reported feeling safer.



Phoenix Youth

The Phoenix Youth project provides creative therapeutic support for children and young people in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust who have been directly impacted by one or more of the accepted definitions of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Our children and young people are supported by our qualified Creative Arts Therapists who, over the course of a year, lead them through their healing journey by using a range of creative art therapeutic interventions.

In 2022-23 the Phoenix Project directly supported 37 children and young people, referred to us by the Northern Health & Social Care Trust, Social Services, other charity organisations and self-referrals. This support was delivered through 455 therapeutic sessions.

100% of the completed evaluations demonstrate a vast improvement in their social and emotional development thanks to the therapeutic support they received. Additionally, the project arranged 6 workshop sessions for parents and guardians of children and young people affected by trauma.

After Court Support Service

Launched in 2022 this innovative new service is now well established and focuses on enabling the recovery of vulnerable victims from the impact and trauma of serious crimes. It deals primarily with victims of serious sexual and physical violence and employs an evidence-based approach to build resilience.

Many clients come to this service significantly impacted by the crime they experienced and by the criminal justice process itself. The service helps them to accept the hard things that have happened and to move forward with their lives again with hope and aspiration.



Restorative Justice

In addition to working with partners to develop the new strategy for adult restorative justice in Northern Ireland, Victim Support NI continued to deliver and build on our expertise in facilitating restorative justice for victims of serious sexual violence.

This year also saw us delivering our accredited restorative justice training courses to over 60 professionals from across the UK. These courses were attended by probation staff, police, voluntary agencies, academics and Victim Support NI staff, learning together in preparation for the launch of the strategy.



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The Highlights

Highlights 22-23

Appointment of new CEO and DCEO

In June 2022, our Chief Executive Officer Geraldine Hanna left Victim Support NI to take up the position of the first Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate for Northern Ireland.

Geraldine worked for Victim Support NI for 16 years, initially working in the Witness Service. She had been in the role of CEO for seven years prior to her appointment.

Staff and volunteers gathered together at Hillsborough Castle Gardens to bid farewell to Geraldine and thank her for her dedication and loyalty to the organisation during her tenure.



Following a competitive and rigorous recruitment campaign, Janice Bunting was appointed as Chief Executive Officer in September 2022.

The former Deputy Chief Executive of Victim Support NI, Janice has over 30 years' experience working in the private, public, voluntary and community sectors over half of which have been in senior management roles.

Since joining Victim Support NI in 2017, Janice was instrumental in expanding dedicated services to children and young people, including the groundbreaking Child Independent Sexual Violence service (CHISVA) and Phoenix Youth (formerly ART).



In March 2023, Nichola Greene was appointed to the role of Deputy Chief Executive. Nichola is an experienced leader with over 15 years professional experience co-producing, governing, and delivering innovative clinical and non-clinical services throughout Northern Ireland.

Within Victim Support NI, Nichola is responsible for the primary operational functions of the organisation and supports the CEO in the development of strategic plans and initiatives.

Annual Conference

‘What Next for Victim Rights?’

Our annual conference took place online on Victims of Crime Day (February 22nd 2023) Titled ‘What Next For Victim Rights?’ the conference examined victims’ rights within the NI context with our excellent speakers sharing their experiences of victims’ rights in other areas of the world.

Topics included the participatory rights of victims, the right to a trauma-informed practice, the right to redress, and privacy rights.

During the conference, the Victim of Crime Commissioner Designate Geraldine Hanna, spoke about the privacy rights of victims and voiced concern that seven years on from the introduction of the Victim Charter in NI, that victims’ rights remain an afterthought.

Prof. Anthony Pemberton shared insights on the EU Directive on Victims’ Rights and Prof. Connor O’Mahony spoke about the FYDO project which trains support dogs at court.

“The system is failing to deliver what is promised to victims. Far too often, their needs are an afterthought rather than being seen as an obligation enshrined in our law.”



Noted Victimologist and Victim Advocate Michael O’Connell, who is the former Victims’ Commissioner for South Australia, addressed the importance of participatory rights for victims.

The conference also heard powerful personal testimony from childhood sexual abuse victim Amanda Brown, who spoke passionately about the need for improved relationship and sexuality education for children in Northern Ireland. She told the attendees we need to give children the tools to prevent abuse happening.

One of our SOLAs also presented to the attendees during the conference. Peter Lockhart spoke about the impact of the groundbreaking project and said that victims of serious sexual assault now feel that they have someone in their corner.



Campaigning & Lobbying

During 2022-23 we responded to the following public consultations:



In addition, we participated in roundtable discussions on support for DV victims in contact with the Family Court and The Executive Office consultation on Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy. We also contributed to Inspections undertaken by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate including File Quality, Older People and the updated Care & Treatment of Witnesses.

Our colleagues in the Hate Crime Advocacy Service attended a range of events highlighting the role of the Hate Crime advocates and the support available to victims of hate crime and encouraged communities to stand together against hate crime. These included Belfast Pride, Foyle Pride and Belfast Mela, as well as taking part in public events for Good Relations Week.

We welcomed a student intern from Tilburg University in the Netherlands from January-March who conducted follow up research on our previously published “Bearing Witness” Court Observer Project of 2018-19. This research, though not as wide in scope as the original project, enabled us to examine the extent to which changes have been made in handling sexual offence cases in Crown Court.

We are active members of the Scamwise NI partnership and use our platform to spread information about scams, scam prevention and the support available to victims of fraud.



We are also diligent promoters of the rights of victims outlined in the Victim Charter.

In March we hosted, for the second time, a delegation of Japanese Prosecutors who were visiting Northern Ireland to learn more about our legal system and who reciprocated by sharing with members of our team how their legal system operates.

Our Volunteers

We simply couldn't do what we do to support victims and witnesses of crime without our loyal and dedicated volunteers.

Our volunteers delivered **10,995** hours of direct service to clients over the year.

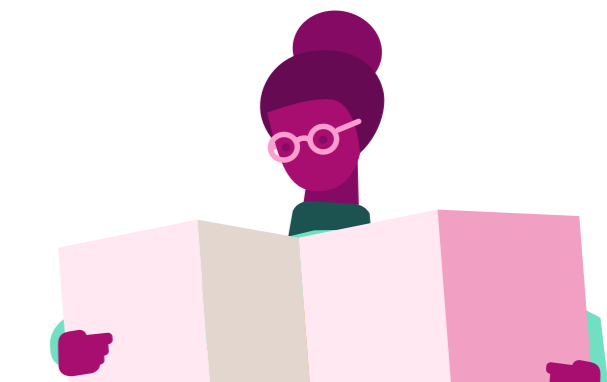
We continue to focus on recruiting new volunteers and retaining current volunteers.

This year we celebrated **Volunteers Week** with a trip to the beautiful Hillsborough Castle Gardens and enjoyed a sumptuous afternoon tea.

Throughout the year, some volunteers also enjoyed group activities such as pottery and wreath making and many of our volunteers got together to celebrate the festive season by going out for lunch or dinner.



A number of volunteers were recognised for their lengthy service, with some of them dedicating over **20 years** to supporting victims of crime.



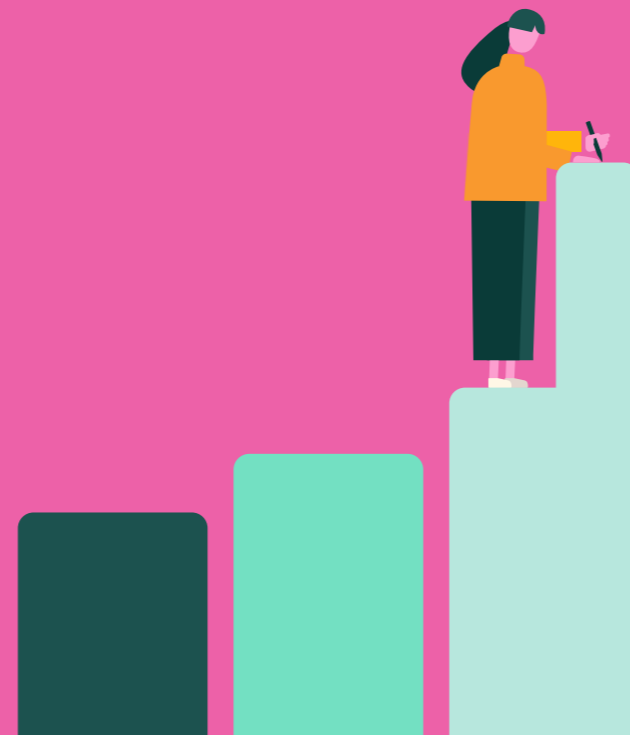
Looking Ahead

In line with our current Redress, Restore, Recover strategy, Victim Support NI's primary focus over the course of the year ahead will be to continue to deliver first class services for victims of crime whilst exploring new and innovative ways to help victims recover from the impact of crime.

The introduction and success of both our SOLA service and the After Court Service within this current strategic period have evidenced the need of victims for specialist, expert support throughout their criminal justice journey. Services like these can provide impact far beyond their immediate delivery, increasing resilience and reducing the need for medical or psychological interventions further down the recovery path. We will continue to look at points in the criminal justice journey where interventions and specialist help would be of benefit. We look forward to expanding the SOLA service to children and young people in the coming year and establishing Child SOLAs.

Planning is underway to welcome some progressive new legislative and policy changes over the course of the year, with the recent launch of the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy, the incoming Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework and Action Plan, and the new protections afforded to victims under the Justice (Sexual Offences & Trafficking Victims) Act 2022, which will be operationalised over the next 9 months. We also look forward to supporting vulnerable victims and witnesses at the Belfast Remote Evidence Centre which is scheduled to open in the 23/24 financial year and will see another of the Gillen recommendations achieved.

The year ahead however will not be without its challenges. The lack of a functioning Assembly will have a significant detrimental impact on all government departmental budgets including the Department of Justice and on the agencies which they support.



Aligned with the cost-of-living crisis continuing this will place our organisation under pressure to continue to deliver a first-rate service to our clients against this challenging backdrop. We must ensure victims and witnesses remain supported so we will continue to streamline our practices to find innovative and cost-effective ways of working. In the coming year, we will grow and evolve our Live Chat model, pilot test hybrid working and develop our Learning and Development hub to enhance learning and development opportunities for staff and volunteers and introduce a new Wellbeing Strategy. We will continue to work and grow our relationships with our colleagues in Victim Support Europe and share best practice and other opportunities as they arise.

Volunteers remain essential to the effective delivery of our service, both in the immediate aftermath of crime and at the courts. We are lucky to have very loyal and dedicated volunteers within our team, some of whom have been with us for decades. We continue to explore other avenues to increase our volunteering pool and our seeking to develop new partnerships with universities and other organisations to help with recruitment of new volunteers. We will also be focussing on retaining our Investing in Volunteers accreditation which not only shows volunteers that they are valued but also gives volunteers confidence in our abilities to provide an outstanding volunteer experience.

Finally, none of what we do could be accomplished if it were not for our dedicated staff and volunteers. Their dedication and expertise is much appreciated and remains essential to our vision of a society in which the appropriate information and support is available to all victims of crime.

With thanks to our funders:

Department of Justice NI



Department of Health NI



TNL Community Fund



Children in Need

