



**June, 2020**

## supporting victims of crime during the Covid-19 pandemic



Getting the best for the public from the police and supporting others to keep communities safe across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly



**PCC**  
Office of the Police and  
Crime Commissioner  
Devon and Cornwall





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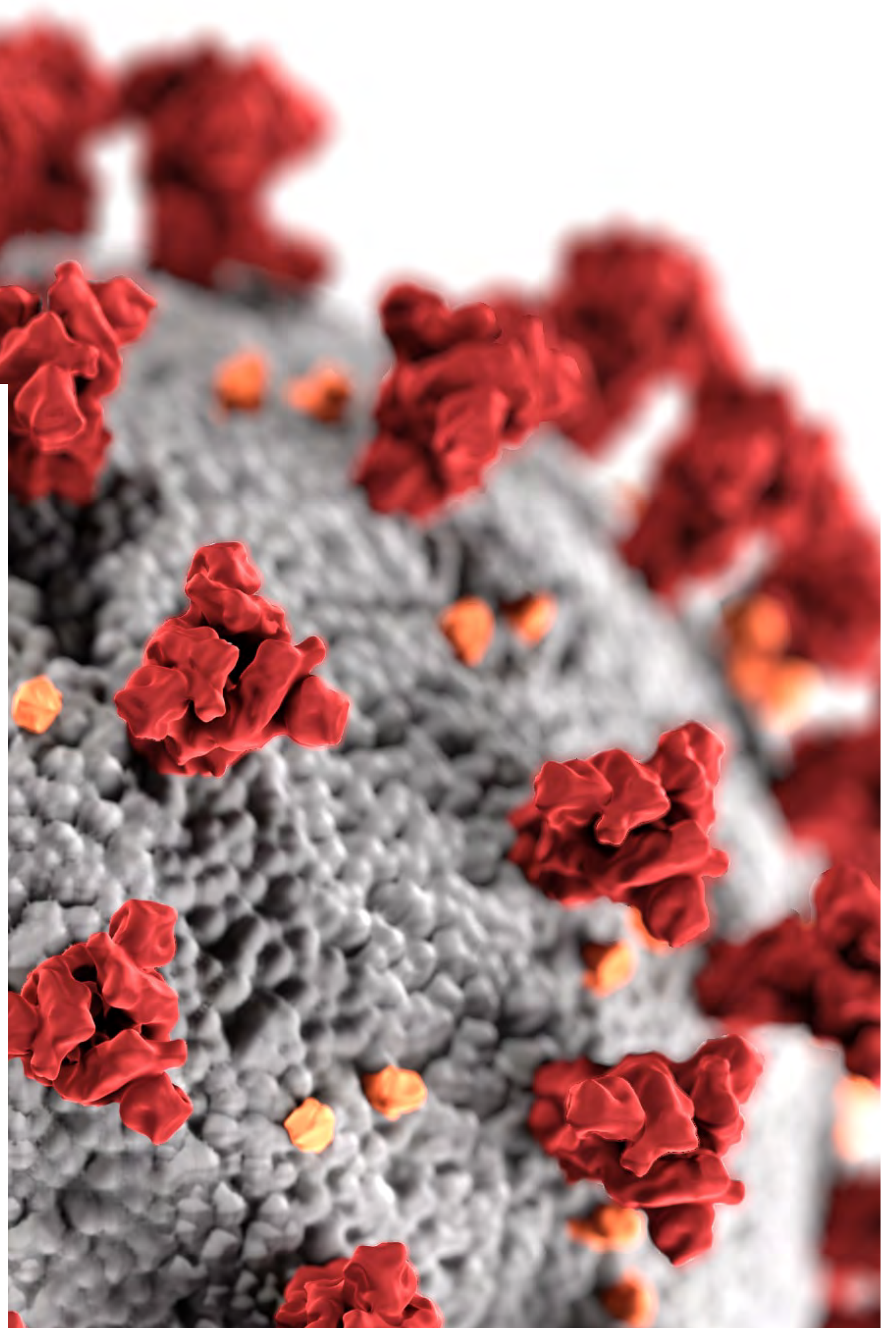
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Hearing the frontline

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# How the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has helped support victim services during the Covid 19 pandemic



**Alison Hernandez the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has a statutory duty to commission victim services and therefore an obligation to support them during the pandemic.**

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) has commissioning relationships with 77 organisations who support: people affected by crime, those responsible for crime, their families and communities . The range of services the OPCC funds are incredibly broad and includes 46 charities and community groups all of different sizes.

Funded services support people of all age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity. The services we provide are for people affected by all offence types including murder, sexual offences, domestic abuse, violent offences, all deception and dishonesty offences – amongst many others.

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## 3612

The number of people affected by crime which have been supported by this network of grant funded victim services in the last 12 months

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# ADAPTING TO CHANGE

## Case study: Young Devon

"Young Devon is the largest young people's charity in the south west. Our vision is to make Devon a better place for all young people by reducing disadvantage and improving opportunity. Each year we work with over 2000 young people building quality relationships to help them thrive. Young Devon offers 4 core services; helping young people with accommodation, wellbeing, skills and voice.

Young Devon have been commissioned by the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner since 2016 to support young people (8-25) who have experienced a crime. We lead a partnership with Young People Cornwall and Kooth to provide a range of face to face and online support. This creative service was a finalist for the Children and Young People Now Awards 2019.

In March 2020 Covid 19 and the government lockdown meant that we needed to respond quickly to meet the needs of young people who were working with us at the time but also the wider population of Devon and Cornwall. All face to face work started to be done remotely using a mixture of Zoom and telephone. We were able to use the experience of our wider organisations to give staff the appropriate training and support to make this change and ensure that young people had the same quality and depth of service during this time.

Young People Cornwall launched a webchat that young people could use to access any of its services including young victims of crime. Young Devon, through its Wellbeing service, produced a range of resources for young people and parents that were shared widely through the Victim Care Network and Early Help settings, as well focussing our social media on tips for young people on supporting their wellbeing during lockdown".

"Kooth provides a wide range of online information, advice, forums and online counselling, as well as targeted information and support options for young victims of crime. Kooth produced a range of articles and support options specifically around Covid 19 and coping with Lockdown. Young people have continued to receive support and the partnership has been able to respond to the changes in demand around this time.

The partnership have created new ways of meeting and building relationships with young people, increased our skills and expertise in working remotely and have worked to impact our wider community through creation of resources and use of social media. These are lessons which will add new options of support that young people can access in the future.

As a partnership we have learnt a great deal and changed our whole service model to ensure that we continue to provide valuable and high quality support to young people. The following quotes demonstrate the crucial impact the service has had for young people during the lockdown period."





**13 yr old male – sexual offences – 6 sessions**

“Young Devon helped me to realise that everyone has their own thoughts and those thoughts can trigger different reactions and emotions. They helped me find a safe place in my mind where thoughts can pass freely, they taught me to let go of thoughts and emotions that weren’t necessary.

Overall they helped me put my mind in a better and safer place in Lockdown, and have helped me feel better and stronger mentally at this current state of the world.”

# LISTENING TO THOSE WHO KNOW

**Case study: Young Devon**

**Parent of 16 yr old – bullying**

“'A' suffers with ADHD and anxiety and gets very worried about certain situations. When I was initially talking about Marie with 'A', he was quite worried and didn’t really want to speak to her. But once reassured and I was with him on the first initial zoom chat, 'A' relaxed and found it not too bad after all.

Marie was very warm and she made 'A' feel very settled and 'A' enjoyed his chats on a weekly basis.”

**Worker comments**

“I have been surprised at how readily young men have taken to working together online (via Zoom) and how easily our conversations have flowed. We have been able to share the screen and, thus, look at flip charts, surveys and mind star charts without any problem.

I feel privileged to be able to offer significant support, which seems to often lead to the young person having an insightful shift in how they see their experience of their world - something I would have loved to have experienced when I was a teenager!!”





# LISTENING AND RESPONDING

**We know that people affected by crime during the pandemic want clear, accurate and up to date information so that they can make their own choices. We also know that due to the lockdown and social distancing, they may need to access that information in a different way.**

How we have responded:

## **Implementation of new services**

- The pandemic has affected how all services are delivered and how services are accessed. It has also meant there is a need to adapt and innovate.
- In the first week we implemented a new 24/7 Live Web Chat from Victim Support. The live webchat enables people affected by crime to talk to someone at victim support anytime they need to where they will be offered onward referrals to victim services in our area.
- We supported the implementation of a new Teacher Helpline from Operation Encompass to make sure that teachers were able to get advice and guidance about how to support school pupils who had been affected by domestic abuse.
- We have enabled people affected by crime to access self-help resources and wellness programs through Silver Cloud and our victim care website.

## **Team Work**

The value of having a significant network of victim services working together to help victims cope and recover from crime is that organisations can work together, share resources and support each other. The OPCC is helping organisations to do this by:

- The implementation of a weekly cascade of information, which shares useful resources and lets everyone know how each organisation is doing.
- Making tools and resources available that support the wellbeing of people working in our victim services to enable them to give their best during this difficult time.
- Understanding our network and how we can support the movement of human resources between organisations.
- We have carried out 'welfare checks' by phone to all the services we commission to see how they and their staff are coping.





# LISTENING AND RESPONDING

## Listening to how people in our criminal justice system are affected by the pandemic so we can do what is right

We recognise the importance of hearing directly from people affected by crime to support our decision making and we have done this by;



- Working with our organisations to ensure that we ask people affected by crime what they need during the pandemic.
- Ensuring that we look at the data being given to us by our service providers to support our decision making.
- Sharing our local intelligence and victim experience with senior leaders attending national response meetings for people affected by crime.

## Offering Leadership

To support our services it is important that the OPCC offers leadership. We have done this by;



- The implementation and management of a Victim Service Contingency Plan.
- The creation and management of a domestic abuse and sexual violence service sustainability group.
- Working in partnership with our commissioned Victim Care Unit which has included the temporary secondment of staff from the OPCC into the unit to support resilience, partnership working and the effective sharing of data.

## Ensuring financial sustainability

The OPCC is also committed to ensuring that victim services have access to the funds they need to continue offering victim services. We have done this by:



- Making available a small grant scheme through Devon and Cornwall Community Foundation for small community organisations.
- Bidding with our statutory partners for funding to support the recovery of victim services.





# LISTENING AND RESPONDING

## Communications

Enabling our community to know and understand that victim services are available to support them has been key to responding to the pandemic.

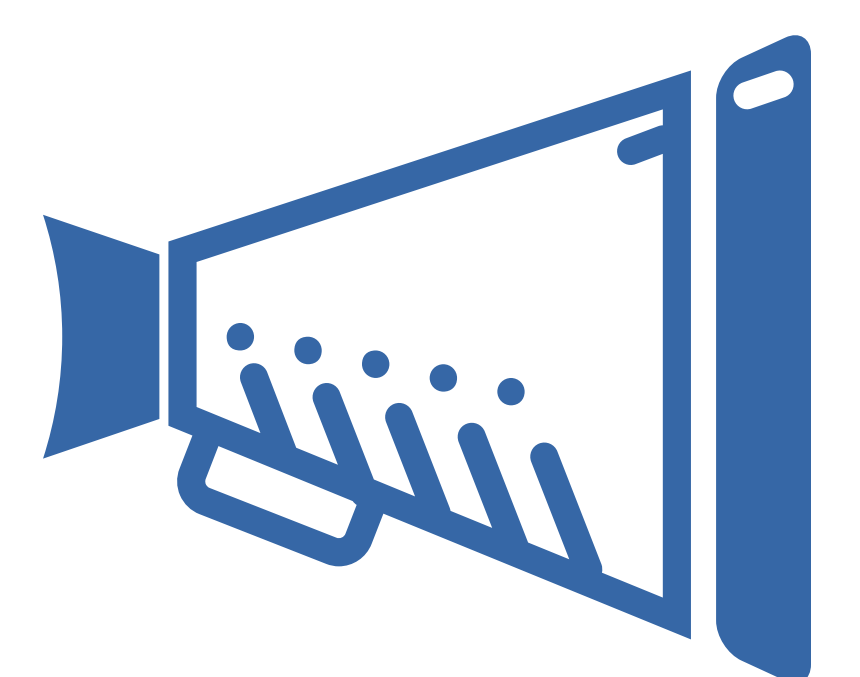
- We have supported a peninsula wide campaign to ensure people affected by domestic abuse know where they can get help
- We have promoted our services and helped people know where they can get support
- We have significantly updated and improved our victim care website, so people can get the information they need



## Lobbying

The pace of change and the need for a coordinated response to the pandemic has resulted in the OPCC lobbying Government and commissioners for the following provision for people affected by crime:

- A commitment to enabling the availability of appropriate accommodation
- Utilise the current hearings of the Domestic Abuse Bill to enable appropriate support services to be implemented and maintained
- Make available perpetrator programs and support services so that when people recognise it is time to change, they can



## Learning and reflection

Now more than ever we have the opportunity to understand what is working and what is not so that we can ensure victim services are not only sustained, but are able to recover from the pandemic. We are learning together through:

- Welfare checks
- Ensuring that we access relevant data from each other
- Implementing webinars across the network
- Committing to reflective practice
- Using evidence based practice in our decision making





# supporting innovation



## OPERATION ENCOMPASS TEACHERS HELPLINE

**The amount provided by the police and crime commissioner to support the creation of a new helpline specifically for teachers who may be worried about the welfare of a vulnerable child following a domestic abuse incident during the pandemic.**

# £10,000

The helpline is run by the charity Operation Encompass and whilst many schools have been closed the helpline has been providing specialist support to those teachers who have been working at 'hub schools'. Hub schools have remained open during the pandemic for the children of key workers, along with vulnerable children who have been identified by local authorities and headteachers.

Launched in 2011, Operation Encompass reports to schools before 9 am on a school day following cases when police have attended an incident where a child or young person has been present during, or exposed to, domestic abuse. This work enables children to receive the right support and care when they go into school the next day.

The introduction of this new and additional helpline now offers teachers guidance, information and support along with the opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have, as they prepare for a child coming in to a hub school following a report of domestic abuse during the pandemic.

The helpline enables a child and educational psychologist and clinical psychologist to offer advice to teachers on an anonymous and confidential basis.

The Operation Encompass teachers helpline is now a **national scheme** funded by the home office.

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**Quick fact: The OPCC budget for Victim Services comes from a £2 million grant from government which must be spent on helping people to cope and recover from crime.**

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# MAXIMISING OPPORTUNITIES

The pandemic has created huge challenges for individuals, families, communities and organisations, and the OPCC has had to be swift and agile in its ability to respond to any new opportunities.

As part of our pandemic response we have maximised opportunities to secure funding by managing and submitting a £3 million assessment of need to the Ministry of Justice to support our victim services. This resulted in £595,000 being made available to fund domestic abuse and sexual violence services (Extraordinary Covid-19 Victim Fund).

## £595,000

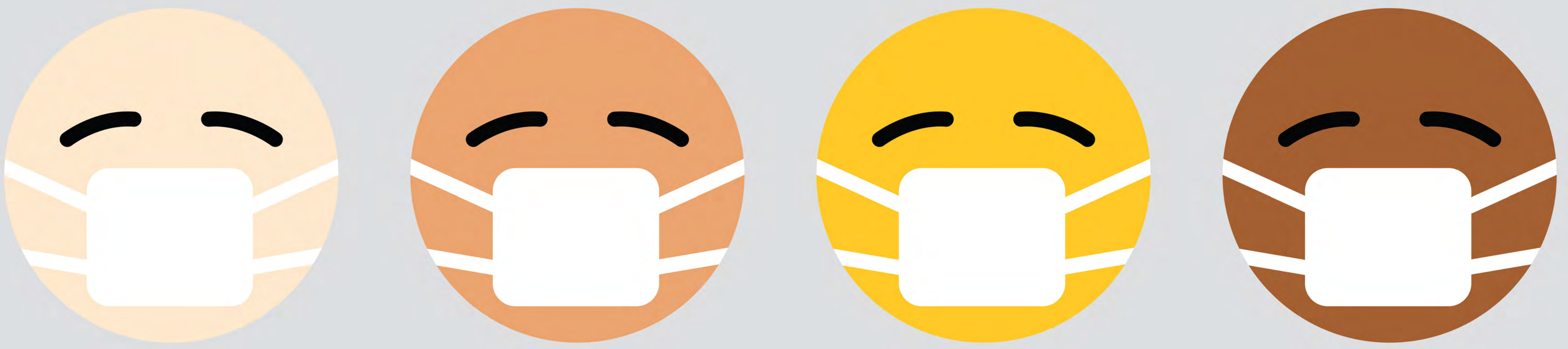
The amount of new emergency funding secured by the OPCC from the Ministry of Justice to support victims during the pandemic



We have also maximised a range of opportunities to improve communication about services for those affected by crime during the pandemic. This has included listening to services, hearing concerns and responding appropriately. For example we recently used our new service cascade to raise awareness that any individual who has experienced sexual violence can access help and support without fear of receiving a fine from the police, if what happened to them occurred during a breach of lockdown regulations.

We have also worked with OnlyMums a not for profit social enterprise founded in 2012 which aims to support families through separation. In April 2020 we were contacted by OnlyMums to ask if we would write an article for them, for inclusion on their website and in the second edition of their book '101 Questions Answered About Separating With Children'. The brief for the article was to provide detailed information about what those experiencing domestic abuse during the pandemic could expect to experience if they called the police to seek help.





# ADAPTING TO CHANGE

## Case study: New Commissioning Arrangements with Victim Support

In immediate response to the pandemic the Criminal Justice, Partnerships and Commissioning Team implemented a new service in Devon and Cornwall. Implemented within 4 working days, the 24/7 live webchat administered by Victim Support was used twice in the first 24 hours and 17 times over the first two weeks and in total 38 times in the first month.

Data from the first four weeks showed that of the people contacting the service, the **most common victim experience was domestic abuse, followed equally by child sexual abuse, rape and stalking.** This is indicative of the service being useful for offences of the most serious type, with victims possibly preferring the confidential, private and anonymous nature of the service offered.

Reassuringly, most victims used the service for between 20 and 40 minutes with some victims chatting for longer than this. Few contacts were under 5 minutes, indicating that the service is long enough to hold a suitable support conversation.

From an impact perspective there was evidence in most cases that onward referrals to both national and local services were offered to those on webchat. This is reassuring to know that a national service is making local referrals where necessary.

In respect of impact here are some of the positive comments made and good outcomes;

- 'I feel relaxed and ready for sleep now – thank you'
- Safety planning implemented
- Chatter felt happy with the service offered

In respect of whether or not this was the right service to be immediately implemented in light of the Covid 19 pandemic, 18 out of the 38 victims talked about how Covid 19 was affecting them. Many of the comments provided indicated that the harm was escalating, the victim was more frightened or the situation more problematic because of the pandemic.

"I'm not sure how long I can talk for, I need some advice because I need to leave my boyfriend's house.

Do you think they will be okay if I leave tomorrow because I know they have told everyone to stay where they are. I don't think I can stay here for 3 weeks"



A photograph of a woman with reddish hair, seen from the side, looking up towards a bright sun. She is wearing a light-colored jacket over a red and white striped shirt. The image is partially obscured by a blue vertical bar on the left.

# ADAPTING TO CHANGE

## **Case study: Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVA)**

"It has been very challenging for everyone to work in a completely different way since the arrival of the pandemic. Our immediate action was to move the entire organisation to work remotely from home, this was achieved within 48 hours. First Light and our IT/Telecoms services pulled together to ensure that staff had the right telephone and IT equipment to continue to offer a service to victims, albeit remotely. All clients were informed about the immediate changes in how they will be supported by their ISVA during lockdown. For a service which primarily provides face to face meetings this has been challenging not only for the client, but also for the ISVA. Contact is mainly made via telephone, with other clients choosing contact via text, e-mail, Skype or Zoom.

During this period we have supported a vulnerable 17 year old client who was raped whilst in supported housing. An Achieving Best Evidence statement had been arranged prior to lockdown, but unfortunately this did not go ahead as planned. The ISVA requested that a new date was set as a priority but the client did not want to attend without the support of her ISVA. With full lockdown measures in place by this time, First Light had to act fast to ensure that we fully supported the client to give her ABE statement and avoid any further delay.

We carried out a full risk assessment of the process, the client was fully made aware of the social distancing steps the ISVA had to take, as well as both client and ISVA wearing gloves and a mask for the appointment. With the support from the ISVA, the client felt able to attend her ABE appointment and the police are now able to undertake an investigation into the incident."





# HEARING THE FRONTLINE

## Some comments from the Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs)

"Young people are finding it particularly difficult to talk on phone and will only engage via text or WhatsApp. They are concerned about having a safe space to talk and being overheard by parents/guardians so are reticent to use Skype/Zoom. This is particularly evident for new referrals who have not yet established a relationship with their new ISVA."

"Adult clients are also facing the same issues with regards to not having a private space at home to have a conversation with the ISVA. In addition, they do not always have the IT expertise to use Skype/Zoom. Adult clients prefer to use their phone but at set times each week due to having childcare and wanting contact when children are not around."

Ordinarily the ISVAs would work between 09.00 – 17.00, however, throughout lockdown contact has been extended beyond this time to allow for clients to have a confidential space once their children are in bed."

"Across the service in general clients are presenting with increased complex needs and our staff are having to manage this within the confines of their own homes, often with children in the home."

This is having an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of staff as the boundaries of work are becoming blurred with their home lives, as they are not able to leave their work at the 'office door' instead clients complexities are invading their homes."

This is not an issue exclusive to us but is affecting the lives of a number of key workers working from home."

"Caseloads have increased as less cases are getting to court due to adjournment of trials. Caseload sizes were already a concern for the ISVAs and with the anticipated increase in demand on services once lockdown is fully eased and all children are back in school this will only get worse."

"There has been a rise in mental health issues across the ISVA caseload due to the enforced lockdown. Concerns centre around isolation, fear of CE repercussions and delays in court cases. ISVAs are using a variety of techniques and organisations both locally and nationally that have online resources."

However, clients (particularly younger clients) say waiting lists for mental health support are too long and are not prepared to wait for support, which then pushes the onus back to the ISVAs to maintain support. First Light are now recording any suicidal ideation or attempted suicides which have been reported to the ISVAs during this time."