

# Victims' Commissioner News

April 2017/May 2017



## Thought for the day:

"Thoughts have great power, they are like seeds you plant in your mind"

## Victims of terrorist atrocities

My heart goes out to the families and friends who have lost loved ones and those who have been injured in the horrific terrorist attacks in the centre of Manchester and at London Bridge.

It is important that victims and their families receive the emotional support that they need as they struggle with their unimaginable grief and trauma. For those looking for information and support I recommend that you use the following government links:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manchester-attack-may-2017-support-for-people-affected>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/london-bridge-and-borough-market-attacks-june-2017-support-for-people-affected>

## Unfortunately General Election purdah prevented me from supporting National Stalking Awareness Week and from raising awareness of this pernicious crime.

Stalking can have a profound impact on the lives of victims, leaving lasting psychological scars. I welcome Government action to tackle this crime, including the proposed "Stalking Protection Orders". But too many victims suffer in silence.

We need to understand the reasons for their reticence. They include: fear – the victim is too scared to come forward; lack of awareness - the victim does not realise that stalking is a crime; and resignation – the victim thinks there is nothing we can do to help them.

When victims do come forward, it is vital that they are given the respect and empathy they deserve. Those who investigate allegations of stalking must be trained to understand what they are looking for. Victims need to know that the law is on their side and there are measures to protect them.



## Visit to Refuge

In May, I had the privilege to visit the headquarters of the charity, Refuge. Refuge has been providing a commendable source of support for women and children, as victims of domestic abuse since 1971.

I learnt about the work that goes on behind the scenes, in helping to support and assist victims who have fled domestic abuse situations. I also had the opportunity to listen to the advice that staff gave to callers to the National Domestic Violence Helpline. I have arranged a further visit where I can learn more about the training of helpline staff and find out more about the practical and emotional support offered to victims to help them escape or recover from the violence they are suffering.



## Contact us:



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**Modern Slavery “....the great human rights issue of our time”.**

**I was delighted to be invited to attend a meeting of the Human Trafficking Foundation on 8 May, together with 90 organisations and charities involved in supporting victims of this pernicious crime.** The Modern Slavery Act 2015 sent a clear message that in the UK, modern slavery and exploitation will not be tolerated. More victims are coming forward, but too few cases end in a successful prosecution, with some victims suffering destitution and others feeling compelled to return to their enslavers.

For those who remain in contact with the authorities, their road to recovery is not always clear. Recovery must start from the point at which a victim comes forward. Every victim has a different story to tell, which means a “one size fits all” approach to providing support cannot work. There needs to be a systematic approach to supporting victims – providing a package of support that meets the needs of the individual.

It is not just government who can offer solutions. Recently my office was in touch with the Co-op group, discussing their ‘Bright Future’ project. This offers “a pathway to paid employment and a route to wider integration into society for victims of modern slavery” - an induction into the workplace, followed by a paid work placement, with support throughout. The Co-op is encouraging other firms to follow its example. Projects like this offer long term hope to victims. For me, seeing projects being initiated by private companies is positive and something that I am keen to encourage.

### **Are Victims Satisfied?**

**How are criminal justice agencies measuring victim satisfaction with their services?** How do they use the findings to make improvements?

These are the questions I have been asking and in July I will be publishing Part 1 of a two part review on my findings. Part 1 looks at how police forces measure satisfaction. Part 2 covers all other agencies, including PCCs and will be published in the autumn.

### **A Decency Pledge**

There is a piece of work that I want to initiate across Government and the criminal justice system, **which identifies how behaviours of staff can improve the victim experience of the criminal justice system.**

My team have been busy working on how this might take shape, but now I need your help! I’m looking for a small group of volunteers, both victims and practitioners, who would be willing to share their ideas.

If you are interested in being involved in this piece of work, please contact my office using the email address above.

**I will be revamping my website ...** in order to make it more accessible to victims and to provide more information to practitioners.

I particularly want to be sure that it is providing the information that victims need to help them through their criminal justice journey.

Our experts will be consulting victims and practitioners to find out their views. I hope you will feel able to help them so that we provide a website that is user friendly and informative.

### **Upcoming Dates**

- Speaking at the National Victim Association 20<sup>th</sup> annual conference on 17 June
- Attending the Survivor ambassador Panel Launch organised by Karma Nirvana on 19<sup>th</sup> June



### **Contact us:**



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