

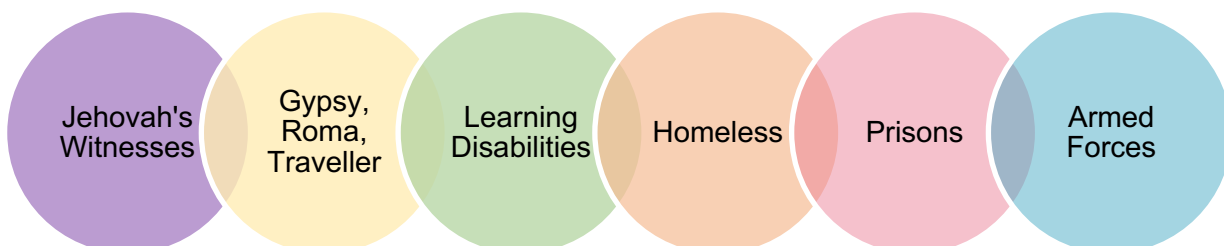
National ISVA Co-ordinator Service - Stakeholder Briefing: April 2023

Background

1. The Hydrant Programme commissioned LimeCulture to deliver the National ISVA Co-ordinator (NISVAC) Service between September 2020 and March 2023. The initiative aimed to provide victims/survivors of sexual violence who are 'seldom-heard' with a pathway into support from an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) service and/or access to the criminal justice system, in recognition of additional barriers they may face.
2. The NISVAC Service was established to be independent from the Police. The Hydrant Programme and LimeCulture were keen to ensure that those victims/survivors who choose not to report to the police are able to access support services that meet their needs.
3. The project sought to achieve the following objectives:
 - To raise awareness of ISVA services among professionals/advocates, including by enabling referral pathways
 - To upskill ISVA services to respond to victims from seldom-heard groups, including through focused resources and practice-sharing
 - To enable victims to access ISVA services.
4. A National ISVA Advice Line was established to provide information to victims/survivors about local ISVA support, facilitate referrals to ISVA services, and provide information on Police reporting (if and where requested).

Seldom-heard client groups

5. The NISVAC worked with community advocates, grassroots organisations, national and local charities, academics, government and ISVA services to identify the challenges and barriers to support and reporting for victims/survivors from six seldom-heard groups:



6. In general, and as a point of commonality across all these different groups, there was often little known about ISVA service support despite pathways of sexual violence support existing in all parts of the country. ISVA services were often under-utilised by professionals and organisations, even where they were established third sector agencies. Many of the barriers to accessing support that were experienced by the groups we worked with related to awareness of the services that were available for victims/survivors, confidence in the ability of those services to cater to their needs, levels of cultural competence on the part of professionals in engaging with a diverse range of individuals and local communities, and the strength and depth of partnership working across a local area.

Specific barriers to support and engagement

7. Different engagement strategies were pursued by the NISVAC for each of the three groups to tailor adaptations and responses to the needs, barriers and challenges for each identified client group. These strategies reflected clear distinctions between working with so-called closed groups (such as JW and GTR communities), and those who were part of a group defined by a particular protected characteristic (i.e. disability), or circumstance.
8. **The Jehovah's Witnesses community:** Due to the closed nature of this group, information and knowledge of the Jehovah's Witnesses community was obtained via 19 advocates, which included solicitors, campaigners and bloggers, many of whom were ex-Jehovah Witnesses. The key barriers identified for this group in accessing support were identified thematically as beliefs and closed community, role of religious leaders, access to information, isolation, internal processes and seeking forgiveness. Additionally, 'spiritually strong' members of the community have the most to lose from leaving the organisation they may be extremely difficult for external services to reach and engage.
9. **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities:** Initial contact was made with 45 advocates who were predominantly from GRT grass roots organisations, and academics. The key barriers to accessing support for this group were identified thematically as discrimination and mistrust, exclusion and isolation, culture and moral codes, education, literacy and language, and risks and repercussions within the GRT communities. In addition, Police reporting is considered a cultural and social taboo and victims/survivors are less likely to seek support or ask for help as they both fear prejudice and are often unaware of services and/or how to access support.
10. **Victims/survivors with learning disabilities:** The NISVAC engaged with several national learning disability organisations and conducted a literature review that revealed that although individuals with learning disabilities are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, offenders are less likely to be brought to justice, and victims less likely to access support. Limited education around sex and relationships can lead to people with learning disabilities engaging in unsafe sexual practices, and lack of awareness of how to report sexual abuse and where to access support. Furthermore, there existed an assumption among many professionals that ISVA services would be unable to meet the needs of people with learning

disabilities, which results in a lack of specialist sexual violence support being made available to victims/survivors with learning disabilities.

11. **Victims/survivors experiencing homelessness:** The NISVAC engaged with national homeless charities and local projects, and conducted a review of existing academic research. This affirmed that issues of domestic and sexual abuse, adequate and stable housing, and homelessness are strongly interlinked. The common barriers to accessing support were identified thematically as stigma and shame, multiple and complex needs, male-orientated services, confidence and trust in services, and individuals' ability to engage. Additionally, it became clear that the role of the ISVA was unfamiliar to and under-utilised by homelessness professionals.
12. **Victims/survivors in Prison:** The NISVAC engaged with professionals within HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), specialist prison projects and ISVA services to identify barriers to support for victims/survivors in prison. These included challenges such as limited or inconsistent support services within (or connected to) custodial settings, limited ability to communicate with external services, confidentiality, so-called "toxic" masculinity, shame, repercussions from within the prison community, and movement between estates. It is also important to note that due to the variation between different prison estates (such as gender, security, ownership, commissioning priorities and the scope of internal support provision), the barriers to support and reporting often differed considerably from one estate to the next. Furthermore, it was clear from this and wider research that the secure prison environment imposes significant limitations on prisoners in terms access to support. Victims/survivors who are unable to access support from family, friends, helplines or external services/professionals (i.e. ISVAs and counselling) depend on internal support provision – this differs considerably from estate to estate (there is no core offer) and often depends on the ability/capacity/willingness of prison staff to respond to prisoners' needs, monitor risk and co-ordinate support.
13. **Victims/survivors in the Armed Forces:** The NISVAC conducted a literature review and consulted with the Ministry of Defence (MoD), serving personnel, charity professionals, academics, support organisations and ISVA services to explore the barriers to accessing support and reporting for service personnel. Barriers were identified as an existing toxic culture and a "closing ranks" mentality, stigma and shame, career repercussions, a lack of information/guidance on the support available, and concerns about confidentiality. Both our literature review and anecdotal evidence from ISVA services suggested external specialist sexual violence support, such as support from an ISVA, is infrequently accessed by victim/survivors in the Forces.

Support for frontline services

14. In addition to identifying barriers to support and reporting for each of the six identified client groups, LimeCulture explored what was needed from both professionals and sexual violence services to ensure that victims/survivors are enabled and empowered to access sexual violence support such as ISVAs, and to engage with the criminal justice system.
15. Sharing the learning from the NISVAC project with ISVA services and other connected professionals was critical, especially as information in relation to these client groups and sexual violence specifically is often extremely limited.

Two professional resources



Learning Disability
Professional Network
90 members



Five ISVA lunchtime briefings



Armed Forces
paper



Presentations and
stakeholder briefings
to share NISVAC learning



Sexual Violence
e-learning package



Four ISVA Resources



ISVA Training
Supporting clients with
Learning Disabilities



16. The following resources have been created for ISVA services by the NISVAC project:
 - Working with victims and survivors from the Jehovah's Witnesses community
 - Working with victims and survivors from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
 - Working with victims and survivors who are homeless
 - The Service Justice System and working with victims and survivors in the Armed Forces.
17. Guidance has also been developed for professionals and organisations from the learning disability and homeless sectors to strengthen their own pathways into ISVA services.
18. All resources can be downloaded from the LimeCulture website free of charge at https://limeculture.co.uk/national_isva_coordinator/.
19. A dedicated Learning Disability ISVA Network has been established (and will continue to be facilitated by LimeCulture beyond the life of the NISVAC project) to enable ISVAs working with clients with learning disabilities and neurodiversity to come together to discuss challenges and share practice and resources. The NISVAC project has also enabled the collaborative development of a 2-day NCFE-accredited training package for ISVAs on supporting victims and survivors with learning disabilities and neurodiversity.
20. To ensure knowledge and learning were shared, and practice discussions supported, the NISVAC facilitated 5 lunchtime briefings for ISVAs, enabling subject matter experts, ISVAs, and victims/survivors to come together to explore how to address barriers to support for particular client groups. The total number of ISVAs reached across all five briefings was upwards of 300 ISVAs nationally.
21. The NISVAC project has also developed an e-learning package to upskill prison staff in relation to sexual violence; developed an internal paper for the Armed Forces and MoD to inform their ongoing response to victims of sexual violence; and delivered several presentations and briefings to stakeholders to share learnings from the NISVAC project and to support the strengthening of local and national ISVA support pathways.

Learning and reflections

22. A central factor in the successful delivery of the NISVAC Service was our consultation with community members, specialist professionals, grassroots organisations, third sector organisations, academics and ISVA services to obtain critical information in relation to barriers and best practice for engaging with specific communities and seldom-heard groups. Without the goodwill and commitment of these individuals and organisations, the outputs delivered by the NISVAC would not have been possible.
23. Also pivotal to the NISVAC's success in engaging specialist organisations and individuals has been the ability to offer opportunities for them to amplify their voices and extend their reach through the NISVAC project.
24. What was clear throughout the course of this work was that the ISVA model of support is highly adaptable to the needs of different client groups, and brings huge added value to the support already available to victims/survivors of sexual violence from other agencies. The independence of ISVA services from the Police was highlighted again and again as a fundamentally important part of the support pathway. We heard from many ISVA services about excellent local practice in building relationships with marginalised and/or seldom-heard communities, strengthening local pathways, and designing new approaches to meet the support needs of their clients.
25. Focusing on individual seldom-heard groups is necessarily time-limited in a project of this nature and, where communities are small, marginalised from mainstream services and/or closed, it is challenging for ISVA services who may not come across many, if any, clients from these groups to sustain this kind of focus. Feedback received from one ISVA manager highlighted the value of the NISVAC project in light of capacity and funding restraints and how a collaborative, national and consistent approach such as this has been immensely helpful in kickstarting further development and innovation from ISVA services in focusing on seldom-heard groups.
26. To build on the NISVAC service project's work, engagement with seldom-heard groups requires adequate funding, which is supported by a solid, sustainable infrastructure that prioritises knowledge, training, capacity and effective engagement strategies to ensure all victims and survivors of sexual violence are able to access high quality support and that ISVAs are confident in their approaches and practice. Also critical to this work is the need for strong and effective partnerships between sexual violence services and specialist charities, grassroots organisations, and community groups to ensure that local pathways of support are accessible and equitable for all victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Project impact

27. We have received an overwhelmingly positive response to the NISVAC Service project from ISVAs, professionals, academics, and members of our targeted client groups:

"It is so beneficial having information collated in this way to help us strengthen our service when we haven't always got the resources to carry out the work ourselves. It's also so much better I think, having a collected approach that takes into consideration the experiences of people and practitioners across the UK and not just in localised areas. It's also so key that ISVA services are aligned as much as they possibly can be, so that victims and survivors can expect the same level of service wherever they are in the UK."

"Thanks for the resources. As someone that was raised as a JW, this is very much needed, and I have been saying this for years so really appreciate all the effort that has gone into developing it by LimeCulture. It is a hard read in parts to be honest but very real, the barriers are absolutely already in place before we even start and before anyone even thinks about disclosing."

"Input from both speakers in the briefing was absolutely brilliant and well delivered"

"This looks brilliant. I have shared the guidance widely through my homelessness networks in Westminster. They are great pieces of work!"

"The trainers are...incredibly knowledgeable and provide real work examples which aid...my personal understanding."

"I applaud your work and understanding, so few people are willing to go to these lengths to ensure the inclusion of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. Thank you."

"The sharing of information has been incredibly helpful. I find the sessions interesting and improve my ability to support those with disabilities. I particularly enjoy other services presenting and letting us know how to get clients the support they need"

"Excellent training as always from Lime Culture. Informative, engaging and useful for ongoing practice"

Further information

28. LimeCulture has received an overwhelmingly positive response to the NISVAC service from ISVAs, professionals, academics, and members of our targeted communities who have been keen to inform and support our work. We would like to extend a special thank you to all who engaged with us and shared their knowledge and experiences.
29. As noted above, all resources produced for ISVA services and other professionals by the NISVAC project are free to access and available to download from https://limeculture.co.uk/national_isva_coordinator/

About LimeCulture

Established in 2011, LimeCulture is a leading training and consultancy organisation focusing on sexual violence and safeguarding. We work locally, nationally and internationally with frontline professionals and their organisations to improve the response to sexual violence and safeguarding through our range of training and development initiatives, research, and consultancy services. LimeCulture works extensively across a range of sectors including victim support, policing, higher education, schools and sports.