**Supporting victims and witnesses in Cambridgeshire – sharing best practice (August 2018)**

In Cambridgeshire, the Police and Crime Commissioner funds two Victim and Witness Care Co-ordinators dedicated to supporting victims of modern day slavery and human trafficking.

The post is job-shared by a Lithuanian and a Romanian-speaking member of staff. This enables the wider Victim and Witness Hub to support both nationalities in their native language and many others through common languages. In 2017/18 a total of 252 victims accessed support.

Whilst the role is based in the Victim and Witness Hub, as part of the integrated model of support services for victims and witnesses of crime, outreach is key to its success.

The staff will join officers and multi-agency colleagues on police operations and checks on houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs). Their input has changed the way these visits are approached; treating people as victims first, not criminals, educating them of their rights and supporting them to seek help.

This can involve facilitating liaison between agencies and service providers, including the National Referral Mechanism, on the victim’s behalf and/or onward signposting or referral to locally commissioned services. This could include the Mental Health Nurses in the Victim and Witness Hub, Substance Misuse Services, housing or financial management. Victims have also been helped to return to their home country.

The staff say that being able to speak to a potential victim in their own language often leads to better engagement and a chance to develop a relationship of trust. In turn this increases the likelihood of the victim engaging with any future criminal justice processes and accessing support for their needs.

Throughout the whole support relationship the post holder advocates on their victim’s behalf in a manner which empowers them to make their own choices.

The post holders also act as the professional leads on the provision of specialist expertise to police officers and staff and colleagues from partner agencies to ensure migrant victims of trafficking are dealt with sensitively and supportively.

The benefits of this approach are significant:

* increased victim engagement with agencies supporting their recovery in particular their health and wellbeing
* victims are better informed and feel empowered to make their own choices and access basic rights.
* increased victim engagement with CJ processes – the post holders will attend court with victims and maintain contact while they wait for court dates

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