

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VICTIM SU

Victim Support is the national charity which helps people affected by crime and witnesses attending court. It provides free and confidential practical and emotional support to help people cope with their experiences. As part of our regular feature about Justice sector workers, we spoke to Mandy Davies of Victim Support Gwent.

After raising a family, Mandy was particularly keen to find a role that would involve helping people. She went to college, taking a diploma in social science and counselling. After successfully completing the course she started volunteering for Victim Support Gwent.

That was ten years ago. Since then, Mandy has worked her way up, getting to know the organisation inside out, and is now Senior Manager of the Blaenau Gwent branch, which is based within Ebbw Vale Police Station.



Her role is varied, but a typical day usually starts with Mandy checking for referrals from the police, which come through a computer printout. She works closely with the police, liaising with the officer in charge of a particular case, or in some circumstances with the domestic violence unit.

Mandy's admin assistant, the only other paid member of staff in the branch, puts any referrals on to a database which automatically generates a letter inviting victims of crime to make contact with Victim Support. It explains their services, which include providing emotional support, information and practical help.

Mandy gives an example:

“If I were visiting a victim of assault, I would talk to them about their experience, and try to get them to examine their own needs. If necessary I would signpost or encourage them to contact other specialist organisations.”

Often this will be through GP referral, but there are other organisations that can help, such as Cruse if the problem is coping with bereavement, or Shelter if there is a housing issue. Mandy says:

“I believe voluntary organisations shouldn't work in isolation. We're all working for the same cause, and towards the same goal.”

During a visit, which can take place at Victim Support's premises or in the victim's home, Mandy will advise on compensation issues where appropriate, helping them with paperwork and representing them as needed.

She can also convey information about policing or court procedures and will refer them to her colleagues in the Witness Service to provide additional support including pre-trial visits, explaining court procedures in more depth, and even go into the courtroom to support the witness. The Witness Service have their own room at court so that witnesses have somewhere to sit away from the defendant and their family.

Much of Mandy's time is spent overseeing the branch itself. There are currently nine volunteers working for the Blaenau Gwent branch, but these numbers vary. They have monthly one-to-one sessions, and Mandy also gets involved in recruiting new volunteers and co-ordinating their training programme.

SUPPORT MANAGER



Community links are vitally important to Victim Support as an organisation. Blaenau Gwent is one of only two Victim Support branches in the area that are still based in police stations. As part of a strategy to bring the organisation closer to the community, the other branches have been relocated to the high street. A programme of outreach work has also begun, helping people who live miles away from their local branch to get in touch and utilise Victim Support's services. A pilot has taken place in Blaina, and Mandy is hoping that the service will be rolled out across the area.

To Mandy, the desire she had more than ten years ago, to have a job that helps people and touches their lives, has been more than fulfilled:

“Helping people to cope with the effects of crime is such a satisfying job. I also love seeing the volunteers develop in the role – growing in confidence and self esteem. It’s extremely gratifying.”

Procedures are in place to ensure the suitability of any new recruits. First, an interview will take place, which is primarily about gauging attitudes. Equality and diversity is of utmost importance, and volunteers need to show that they understand and embrace these values, as well as being non-judgemental and able to listen and communicate. It's also particularly important that volunteers reflect the make up of the communities they serve, and understand local differences and needs.

If the interview is successful, and the resulting security checks are satisfactory, new recruits then undergo core training, which covers the impact of crime, equality and diversity issues, and training on the different services Victim Support offers. After this, they will shadow Mandy or an experienced volunteer until they feel confident and knowledgeable enough to see victims alone.

New recruits also undergo an assessment of competency. In addition, Victim Support offers serious crime training covering homicide, race crime and sexual violence, as well as NVQs in community justice. Mandy is currently training as an NVQ assessor.

Mandy also oversees the work of the other branch managers in the area – four in total. Most Victim Support offices are based in towns, although some are in rural areas.



For more information about the work of Victim Support, visit www.victimsupport.org.uk