



Ministry
of Justice



Helping disabled adults who have survived sexual abuse or violence



EasyRead version

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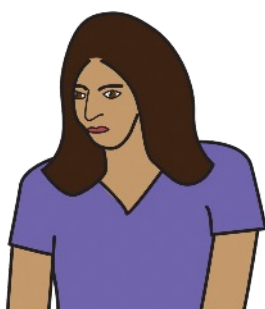
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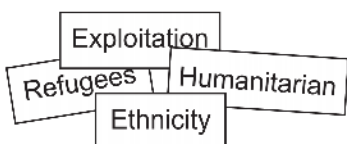
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About this report



This report was written by three people:

- Dr Andrea Hollomotz
- Dr Leah Burch
- Ruth Bashall.



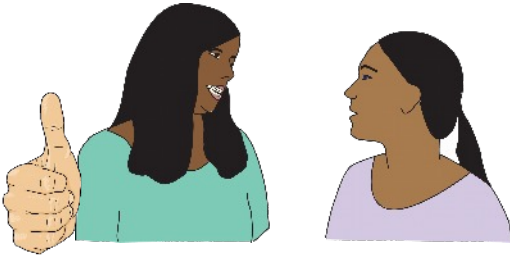
They work at the University of Leeds, Liverpool Hope University, and Stay Safe East.



The Ministry of Justice wants to be sure it is giving the best help possible to all people who have experienced sexual abuse or violence.



This easy read document is shorter than the whole report and picks out the important parts.



We will use what we found out to make sexual abuse or violence support work better.



The **Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund** pays for services that help victims of sexual abuse or violence.

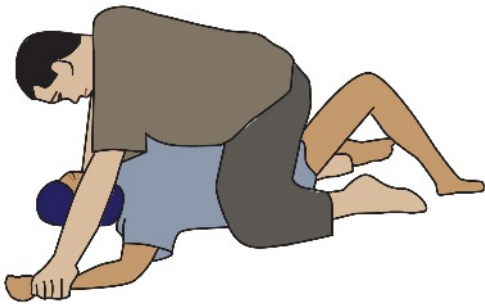


The services help people get better and move on with their lives.

How we went about getting information



We spoke with 39 disabled adults in England and Wales who had survived sexual abuse or violence. We call these people **victim-survivors** because they have been:



- the **victim** which means the person hurt by sexual abuse or violence

and



- they have **survived** which means they have (or are trying to) move on with their lives.



We spoke to people in different ways:

- We spoke directly to the person



- Using a video link



- In groups.

Questions we asked people



Question 1

What do disabled sexual abuse or violence victim-survivors want from **victim support services**?



Victim support services include:

- Emotional support



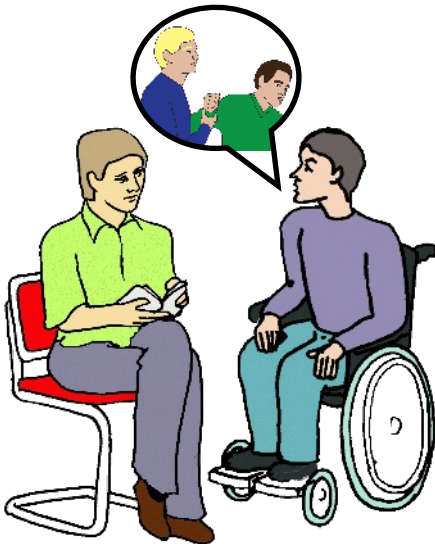
- Counselling



- Finding somewhere safe to stay



- Finding someone to help you speak up and get the help you need



- Specialist support for crimes, including domestic abuse and sexual abuse or violence.

Question 2

What helps disabled sexual abuse or violence victim-survivors:



- to engage with the criminal justice process

and



- cope and recover from the crime.

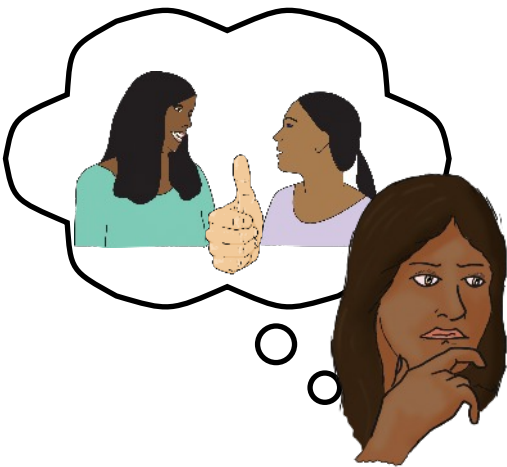
Question 3



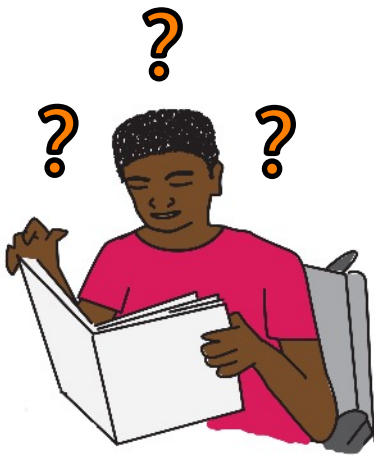
How can sexual abuse or violence victim support services become more **inclusive**?

Inclusive services meet the needs of all people who want to take part. For example, they have physical access, such as ramps. They ask people what they need. If the service does not have what the person needs, for example easy read, then they make sure they get this in place for that person.

What we found out and ideas about what should happen next

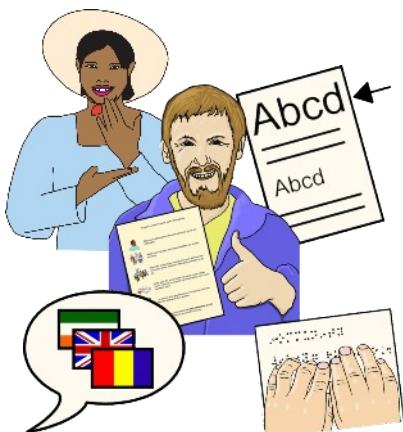


We listened to people's answer to our questions. We thought about how what they told us can help make victim support services better. We sorted people's answers to our questions into 5 steps.



The steps show how we try to help a victim-survivor.

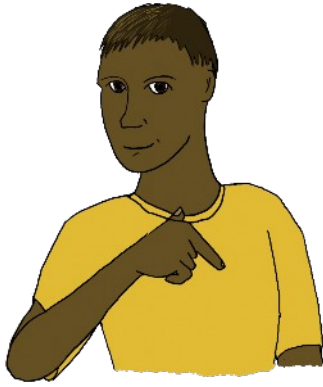
1. How to find a support service when you are the victim of sexual abuse or violence.



2. First contact: how we learn about your support needs.



3. Make sure services are prepared for disabled service users.



4. Person-centred victim support services.



5. Work together with disabled victim-survivors.

1. How to find a support service when you are the victim of sexual abuse or violence

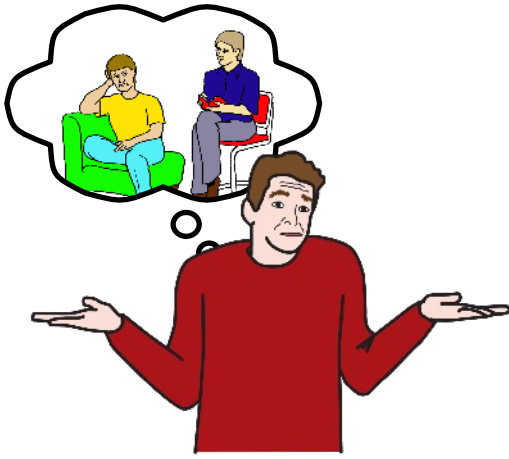


The first step is about getting help when someone has hurt you.



This is what people told us

1. Many disabled victim-survivors did not know there were services to help them.



2. Some people thought support services may not know how to help a disabled person.



3. Many disabled victim-survivors did not use the wide range of services available in the community.



4. People living in group homes did not see an **ISVA**.

ISVA means Independent Sexual Violence Adviser. ISVAs give you information and can help with your feelings.



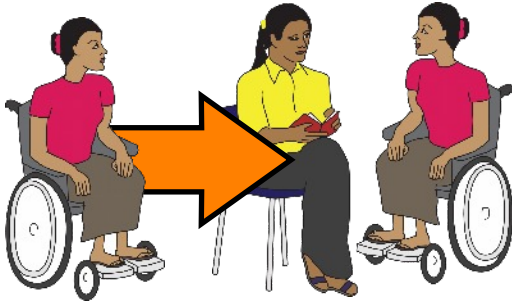
5. Three people told us they were hurt by a paid carer who kept on working where they could hurt other people.



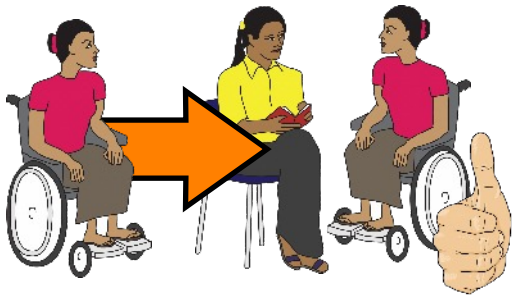
6. When you have been hurt, you can:

- Get information about places to go for help

or



- Be linked with a service.



People said it was better to be linked directly with a service. This means getting help to make contact and go to the service.



This is what we think should happen next

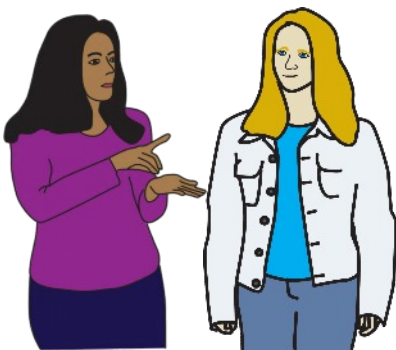
1. Make sure the police and other agencies know that it is important for disabled victim-survivors to access the same victim support services as other victim-survivors.



2. Make sure the police and other agencies have information about where to send victim-survivors who have extra support needs.



3. Make sure that ISVAs can be accessed by people who live in group homes.



The ISVAs will:

- know how to help disabled victim-survivors



- have time to guide the victim-survivor to build their criminal justice case.



This will give them the chance for a fair trial.

2. First contact: how we learn about your support needs



This is what people told us

1. Police and victim support services do not always ask if a victim-survivor has access needs such as needing help with understanding things.

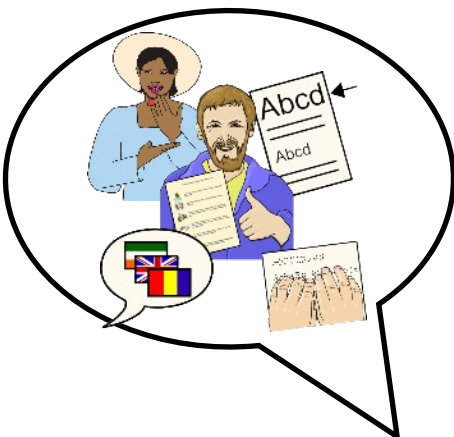
2. An **intermediary** can help.



An **intermediary** is a person who knows how to help people with communication needs to speak to the police and the court. The intermediary can explain the person's communication needs to the police and the courts.

This is what we think should happen next

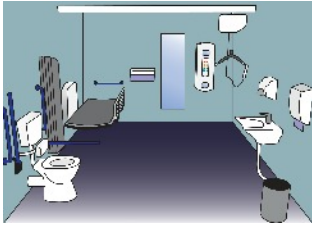
1. We want sexual abuse or violence support services to ask ALL victim-survivors about access needs.



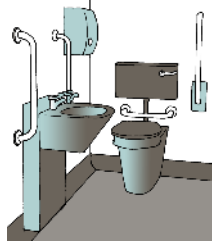


This can include:

- Wheelchair access



- Changing places



- Accessible toilets



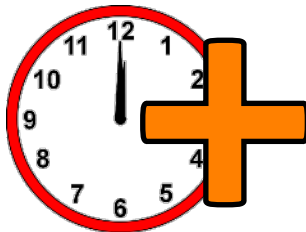
- Sign language



- Braille



- Easy read



- Extra time



- Help with getting to the service



- Help with explaining any other needs.

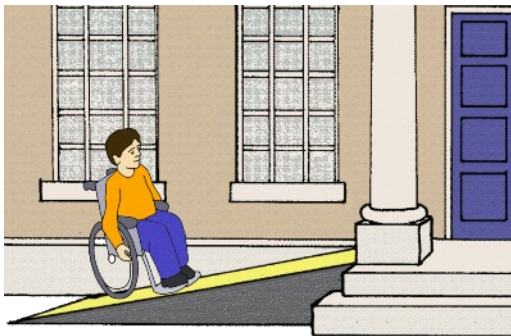


2. ISVAs and advocates must ask for an intermediary if they think a person needs help with communicating about what has happened to them to the police and the courts.

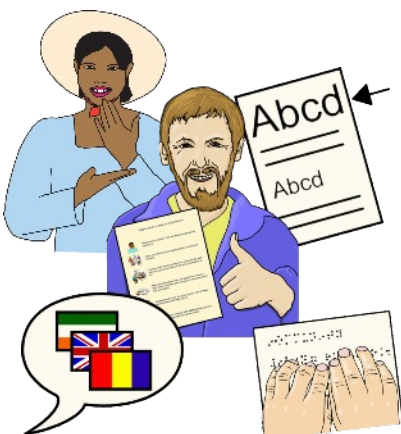
3. Make sure services are prepared for disabled service users

This is what people told us

There are many ways to make a service accessible to a victim-survivor, including:



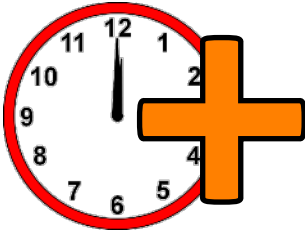
- The building's accessibility



- Communication support



- Staff who understand how to treat everyone equally



- Allowing extra time for people who need it



- A choice to meet a counsellor face to face or online



- 24-hour helpline.



2. Some people said they felt very alone while they were waiting for support.



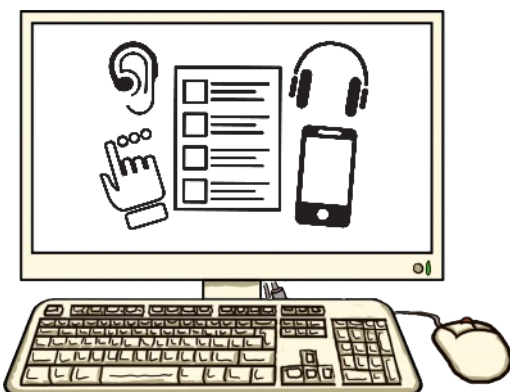
3. Some people accessed support groups while they were waiting. These were helpful and got really positive feedback.

This is what we think should happen next



1. Ministry of Justice or commissioners should develop a list of things a service needs to check to make sure they are accessible.

Services to check their accessibility against this list.

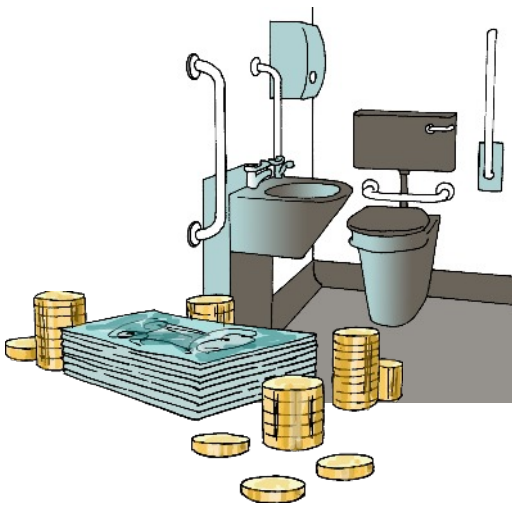


2. Services to advertise information about their accessibility on their websites.



3. Staff need to be trained to help disabled people. This includes **reception staff**.

Reception staff are people who welcome you into a building or office.



4. Funding to help services make their buildings and information accessible.

4. Person-centred victim support services

This is what people told us

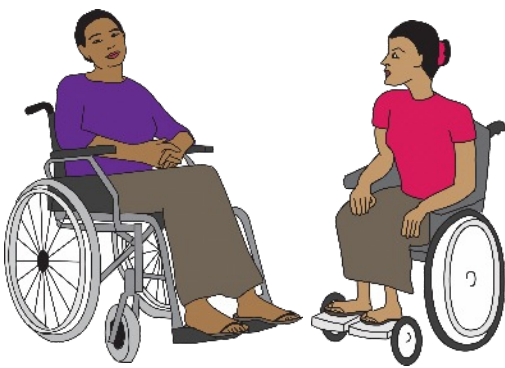
1. Staff must remember disabled victim-survivors may have experienced:

- A history of being hurt many times





- Discrimination because of their age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic group.



2. Many people said they wanted help from people like themselves.

For example, other disabled people, people who have experienced sexual abuse or violence or people with a similar cultural background.



3. Some people were happy with the victim support service they received. They felt they were at the centre of their service delivery.



They had trained advocates and ISVAs who helped them at the right time.

This is what we think should happen next

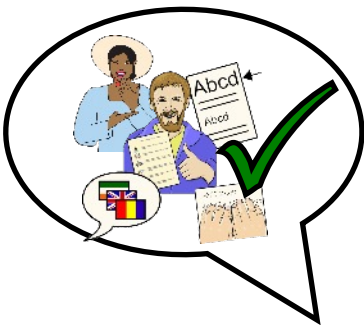


1. Services will:

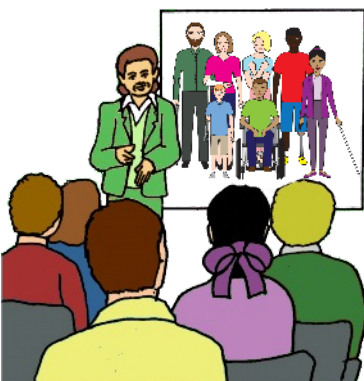
- Check they are treating people equally



- Try to employ people from a range of backgrounds, including disabled staff



- Tell other services about good ways they help victim-survivors



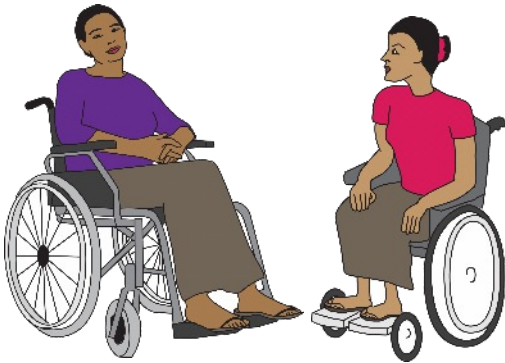
- Train staff to help disabled victim-survivors and victim-survivors with other needs.



- ### 2. Funding for more specialist ISVAs to work with disabled victim-survivors.

5. Work together with disabled victim-survivors

This is what people told us



1. Half of the victim-survivors we spoke to said they would like to be supported by another disabled person.



2. They said they felt comfortable around other disabled people.



3. They liked the idea of services that involved disabled people in how they were run.

4. They wanted to get involved in **by and for services**.



By and for services involve people who use them in planning and delivering those services. This means a service by disabled victim-survivors for disabled victim-survivors.

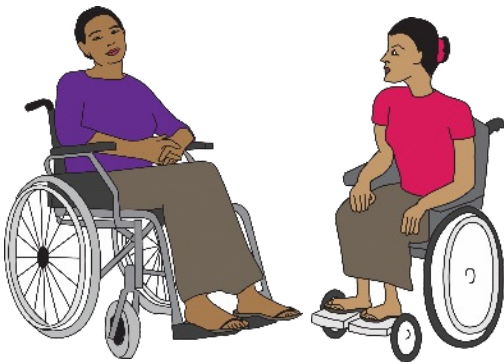
This is what we think should happen next



1. We think disabled victim-survivors and their organisations or networks can work together on making the ideas above in 1, 2, 3 and 4 happen.



2. Help and train disabled victim-survivors to become peer supporters, working with or attached to support services.



3. Help to make more services by disabled people for disabled victim-survivors.

Case studies



Here are some **case studies**.

A **case study** tells a story about a real person.



We have used different names to look after the privacy of the people who shared their stories.



Lucy's story

Lucy is deaf.



When Lucy experienced sexual violence, she texted 999.



The police came quickly and took her to the sexual assault referral centre (SARC).



At the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

A crisis worker stayed with Lucy to help her and explain what was happening.

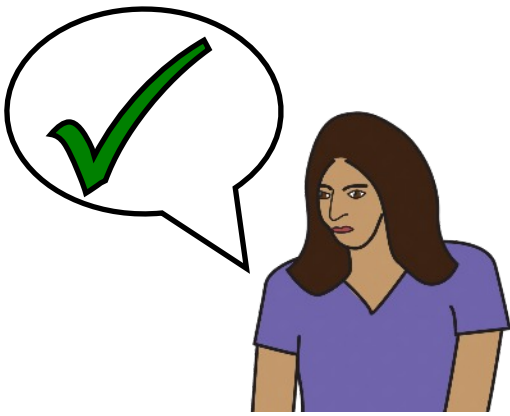


Lucy needed a medical examination.

Lucy can lip read but the person who examined Lucy wore a face mask.



The crisis worker had to repeat instructions so Lucy could understand what was happening.



Lucy said people tried to make the experience as positive as it could be.



The person who hurt Lucy was charged and then released on bail until the trial.



He was told to stay away from Lucy but she still felt scared and unsafe.



The ISVA

A month after she experienced sexual violence, she saw an IVSA or independent sexual violence adviser.



The ISVA asked Lucy about the best ways to help her.



Lucy told her she liked to be contacted through texts and emails or with face to face talking.



Lucy told us the ISVA came to see her every week. She comforted Lucy and gave Lucy practical help.

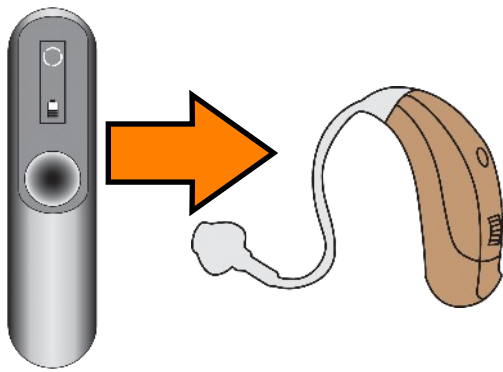


Going to court

The rules say that police should have assessed Lucy's needs at the first visit.



When the court understands a person's needs they can help meet these needs. The court did not understand Lucy's needs.



Lucy wanted to use a special microphone in the court so she could hear what people said.



The court did not understand how the microphone worked so the ISVA had to get a medical letter that explained why Lucy needed to use the microphone.



The ISVA helped Lucy be strong so she could go through with her court case.



The person who hurt Lucy was convicted.



Lucy was happy that people helped her.



But she wished the court had understood using the microphone was Lucy's right.



Olivia

When Olivia told a friend about her sexual abuse it made her feel lonely.



She was cross with herself and blamed herself for what happened.



When Olivia needed help, she called a crisis help line.



She felt they did not listen to her.



Olivia became friends with a church minister and told the minister about what happened to her.



But the minister told the police without asking for Olivia's permission.



She was very upset and left the church. Olivia pretended the sexual abuse did not happen.



A year later Olivia spoke with the police but she said the building was not disability friendly.

For example, the front desk was too high for Olivia and the place was noisy.



Olivia did not feel comfortable even though the police officer was nice. She left the meeting.



6 months later Olivia went to GP counselling.



There was no ramp so she had to wait outside in the rain.



When she met the counsellor, she found it hard to speak openly. The counsellor told her that the counselling would not work if Olivia did not trust her. Olivia did not attend again.



Getting help that made things better

Things got better for Olivia when she paid for a private counsellor.

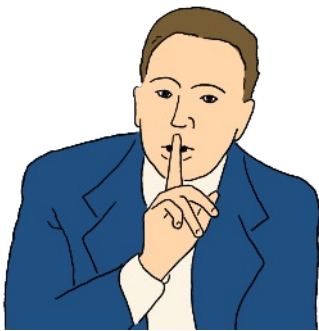


The counsellor's website said she specialised in both disability and sexual abuse or violence.

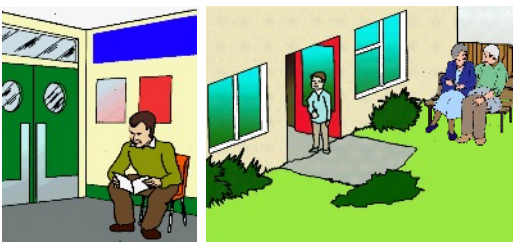


These were the things Olivia liked:

- There was a ramp and wide doorway to go into the building



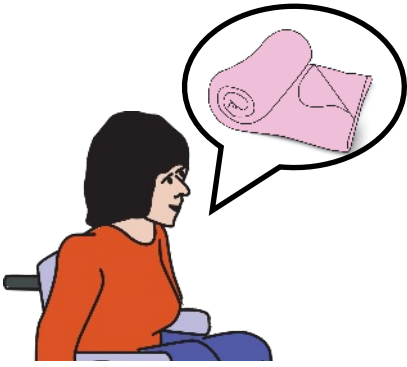
- The place was quiet



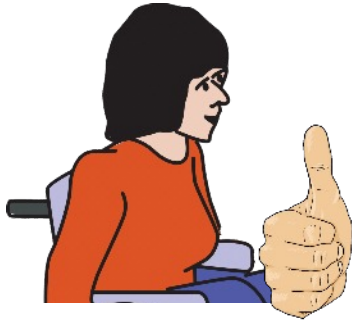
- There were inside and outside sitting areas



- The counsellor asked Olivia about her needs



- Olivia said she would like a soft blanket to hold while they were talking. The counsellor provided it



- Olivia said she felt she could just be herself



- It was okay to say nothing



- The counsellor was calm and made Olivia feel like an equal. They made all decisions together.



The counselling worked and Olivia started to feel better about herself.



Olivia now works with a charity that helps women.



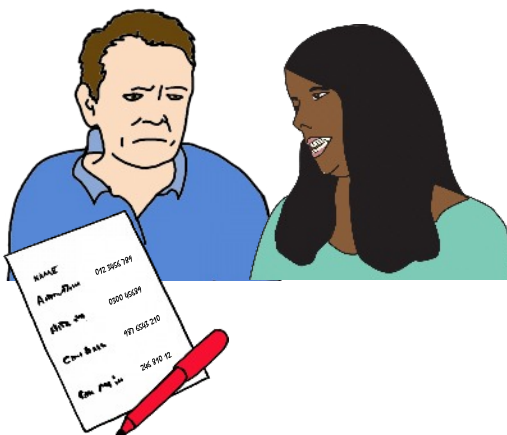
She is happy she took part in our study because she wants to help make victim support services better at meeting the needs of disabled people.



Sean

Like Olivia, Sean experienced barriers.

He said it was hard to get people to understand what his needs were.



Sean experienced communication barriers. He needs to see people's lips moving to understand what they are saying, but people only gave him phone numbers. Sean asked for a therapist without a strong accent, as accents make it harder to hear.



Sean tried to get counselling through his GP. The counsellor had a beard so Sean could not see his lips moving when he spoke. The therapist had a strong accent and the captions on the screen did not work so Sean could not understand the counsellor.



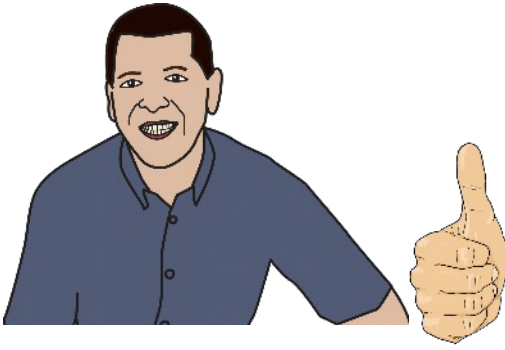
Sean said the counselling services were not set up to help people like him.



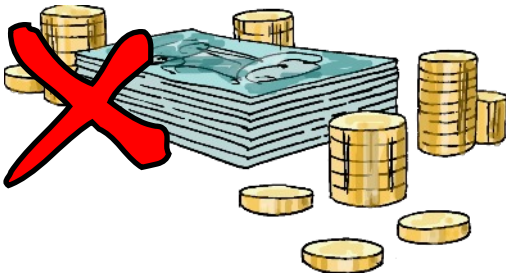
After a long search Sean found deaf aware counselling. This was private, so he had to pay for this.



He found a service which was trained in deaf inclusive communication and had captioning on the screen for online counselling sessions.



Sean said his counsellor was absolutely brilliant.



Sean said similar services should be available free of charge for everyone.

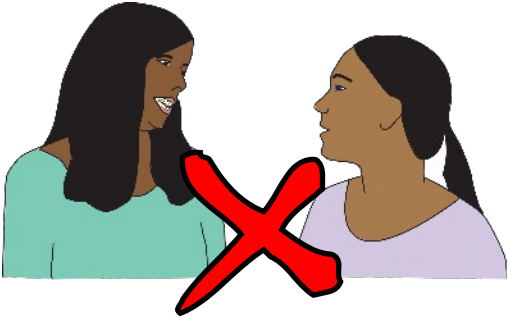


All counsellors should be trained in deaf inclusive communication skills.



Both Olivia and Sean found the help they needed because they paid for a service that met their needs. This is not fair.

Carly



Carly has never been able to find a victim support service that worked for her.



She does not have the money to pay for private counselling, like Olivia and Sean.



She said the victim support services she asked for help:

- Did not understand her autism



- Wanted Carly to have special training. They said her mental health was not stable enough for them to work with her.

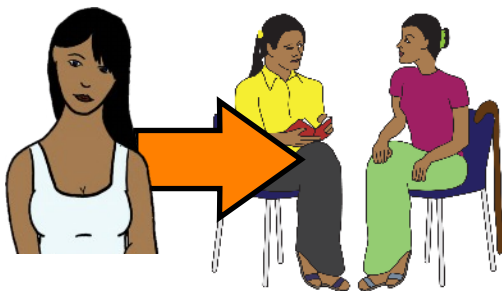


Carly felt the service blamed her for needing their help.



Carly is still looking for the right support. She said that signposting does not work for people like her:

“Often there’s talk about different helplines or organisations. You find they’re all doing the same thing and that’s not listening to people [...] it’s a signposting roundabout of nothing.”



This is why our report recommends that disabled victim-survivors get linked to the right services.



Carly needs a referral to victim support services who understand disabled victim-survivors.



Thomas

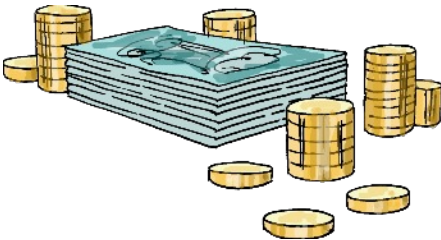
Thomas told us it was hard to find a service that would work with him.

For example, a helpline said they could listen to him but not counsel him.



They gave him the names of other services, but they could not help because:

- They only helped women
- Thomas did not live in their area
- They were very expensive
- They could not help a person with mental health conditions





- There was a long waiting period.



Thomas knew he needed help and kept asking for help.

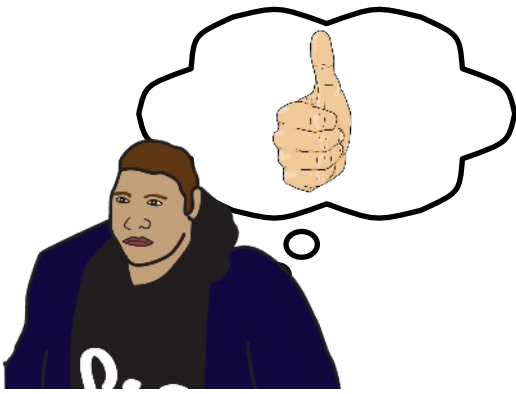
But he was sent from one service to another.



Or he was given the wrong support. For example, the counsellor at church was not trained to talk about sexual abuse or violence.



Things started to go wrong for Thomas. He then went to prison for a crime.



He knew he needed to get better.

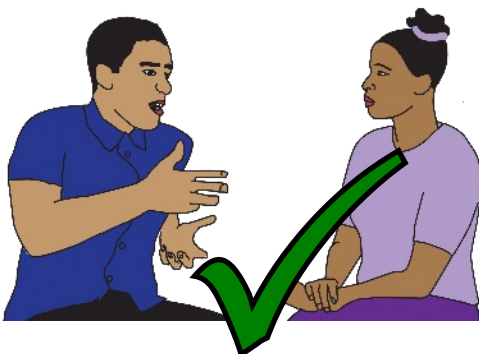


After prison Thomas accessed a specialist treatment programme with both group and individual sessions.

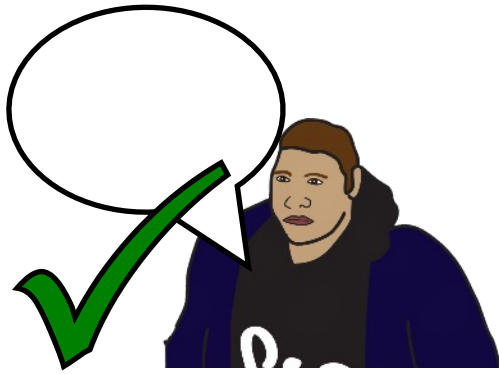


He was happy with the treatment because:

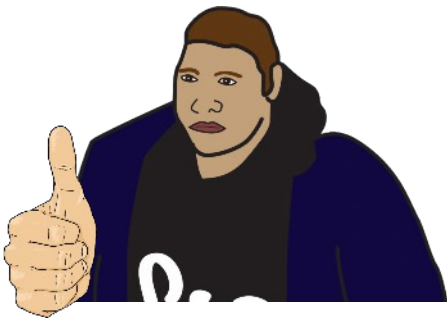
- They listened. They didn't judge



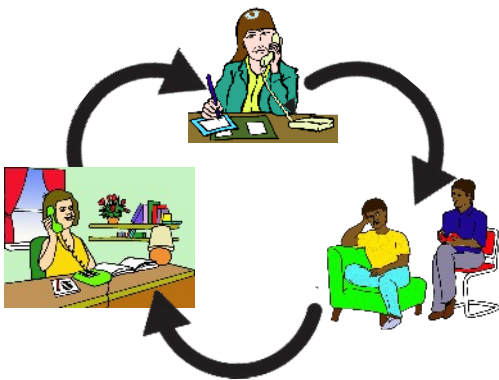
- They seemed to understand



- They helped him be more confident so he was able to say what he wanted which helped him manage his anxiety and depression.



Thomas said the help “enabled me to become the man that I am today.”

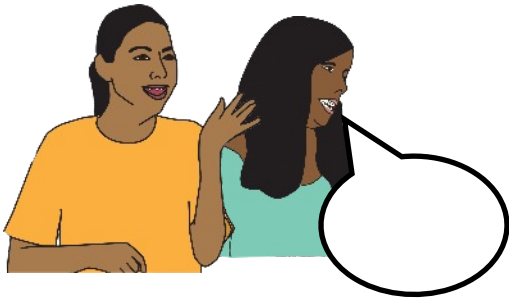


Both Carly and Thomas felt they had been bounced around lots of services.



Paula

Paula is a woman with physical impairments who does not use speech to communicate.



When we spoke to her face to face, a relative helped put what happened to Paula into words.

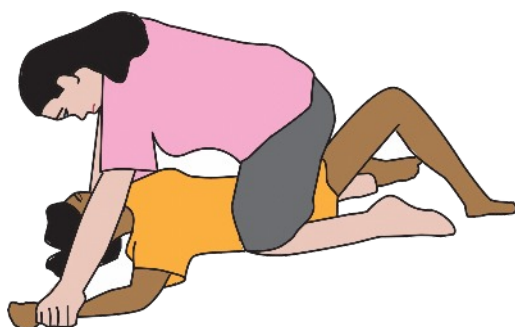


The relative watched Paula's body language.

Paula used body language to say if the relative had understood her.



Paula was trapped in her group home during lockdown with an abusive carer.



During Covid-19 lockdown and also after the carer hurt Paula.

There was sexual abuse or violence and poor care.



Paula tried to tell people what had happened to her.



But it took a long time for someone to understand what she was trying to say.



She tried to tell a relative through Zoom calls but the calls were not private.



She tried to tell a relative directly but they did not understand her.



When Paula went back to her day care place her family and carers noticed she was upset.



They helped her to go to a professional who helped people with speech impairments.



Paula explained what was happening to the professional.



They told the police but Paula did not go to a sexual abuse or violence support service, and she was not medically examined.



Paula's family kept asking the police to talk with Paula, but she had to wait 12 weeks to tell her story.



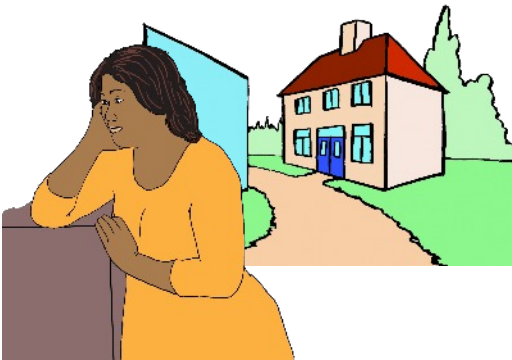
By this time, it was hard for Paula to remember all the details.



So, the police closed the matter because they did not have enough evidence.



Even though the police made a note about the worker who hurt Paula, she is still working in the same organisation.



Paula was in emergency care when she spoke to us and said she felt lonely and had no power.



Paula still wants to tell her story about what happened to her during lockdown.

What the words mean

By and for services. These are services that involve the people who use them in planning and delivering those services. This means a service by disabled victim-survivors for disabled victim-survivors.

Inclusive. Inclusive services are able to meet the needs of all people who want to take part. For example, they have physical access, such as ramps. They ask people what they need. If the service does not have what the person needs, for example easy read, then they make sure they get this in place for that person.

Intermediary. An intermediary is a person who knows how to help people with extra communication needs speak to the police and the court. This can be helpful for many people, such as deaf people, people with autism, learning disabilities and mental health conditions.

IVSA stands for **Independent Sexual Violence Adviser**. An Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) is someone who gives balanced information to the victim-survivor. They can provide emotional and practical support.

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund. The fund pays for services that help victims of sexual abuse or violence. The services help people get better and move on with their lives.

Reception staff are people who welcome you into a building or office.

Sexual abuse or violence. When we use “sexual abuse or violence” we mean all forms of rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse.

Victim-survivors. The victim is the person hurt by sexual abuse or violence. Victim-survivors have survived.

Credits



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