

National Advocacy Project - Briefing

The Rape Crisis Scotland National Advocacy Project was launched in February 2016 and comprised of 15 advocacy workers based in local Rape Crisis Centres. With an increase in funding secured in 2018 there are now 23 advocacy workers within the rape crisis network. The National Advocacy Project provides dedicated advocacy support for survivors of sexual violence who have reported or are considering reporting the offences to the police. The National Advocacy Project has three broad aims:

- 1) To improve the support available to survivors of rape and serious sexual crime
- 2) To improve the experience of the criminal justice process for survivors of rape and serious sexual crime; and
- 3) The development of a better understanding of survivors' motivations to proceed or not to proceed with the criminal justice process and the difference advocacy support makes to this decision.

Advocacy workers provide support and information through all stages of the Criminal Justice System, from before a statement is made through to the resolution of a court case. Advocacy workers can support survivors with the process of giving a statement if they are referred early enough in the process. They are able to attend appointments and meetings with survivors which are related to the criminal justice process such as precognition. Advocacy workers can support survivors to get updates regarding the progress of their cases, provide information about special measures, attend court with survivors and can act as in-court supporters if requested as well as provide general emotional support throughout the process and after court is finished.

In the first 18 months of the National Advocacy Project, workers supported 991 survivors. As part of the evaluation of the first 18 months of the National Advocacy Project, interviews were completed with a number of survivors who used the project which highlighted the impact of access to an advocacy worker:

Bethany: *to me it's turned my life around, like, completely...*

Isobel: *I found it just invaluable.*

Kerry: *And having that reassurance and someone to speak to when you've had your voice kicked out of you how many times, the difference it can make to you is phenomenal.*

Jane: *...with Rape Crisis, I never, kind of, felt they were trying to push me in to doing anything ...at any point I needed a question answered, or I wanted to talk about something, they were just there ... you, kind of, feel like there isn't anybody on your side. And they are.*

Harleigh: *... it's like having an army, you know, somebody's got your back and it gives you a bit of courage.*

A number of the survivors interviewed spoke specifically about the importance of having an Advocacy Worker to help them make sense of the criminal justice process which often feels impenetrable for survivors:

Jane: *... it's like somebody between a friend and a lawyer, I suppose ... just filling in all the gaps between all the different bits of the system where I think ... you just become another number on the list.*

Isobel: *[the criminal justice system] ... it's almost like a fortress that you can't get through.*

Dee: *She [AW] was able to explain a lot of court terms and jargon that me and [family member] didn't understand, like indictments and just a lot of the words, because me and*

[family member] sat in the first diet and we sat looking at each other like, what the hell are they going on about? We were sitting there and we couldn't even make sense of our own court case because it was too much political words and all these fancy terms. We asked [AW] and she went through it with us and made it so much easier to understand what was going to happen, and when and why.

Linzey: *...just being informed I think is really, really important at every stage. It just allows you to feel a bit more in control, I guess, because everything's been out of control for so long.*

Olivia: *I don't think anybody can get through a court case without these [Advocacy Workers], you know, if it's that type of court case, you know....she actually kept steering us in the right way ... and I knew more of my rights than what I did beforehand. So by the time I got to court, I was quite able for it, you know. Because me suffering with anorexia doesn't help, you know, because I'd taken weight off with nerves, and it was getting closer, you know ... Because when she first met me, honestly, I could hardly talk, and I was crying, and I was like that, I just need your help 'cause I don't know what to do. And she just knew everything to say to me, and I was like that, this is definitely the person I need to get, is her, you know... I had dropped down to five stone ... I really was stressed at the time, I was like that, 'I don't think we're gonna be able to get any further than we have'. Because my doctor was talking about me being not fit enough for court. (In this instance, Olivia's case went ahead, she was able to give evidence, and the accused was found guilty of rape and sentenced to eleven years in prison.)*

A number of survivors interviewed had support from an Advocacy Worker present with them at court and spoke about the benefit of this to evaluators:

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Olivia: *when you go to court, you know you're on your own, and she [AW] made sure I didn't feel that way, I didn't feel alone.*
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Dee: *I just found [AW] ...especially as she's able to sit in with us when we're giving evidence in court. That was such a great help ...because we had group sessions before. I thought that really helped ... because I knew her face and she was so familiar, and she was so helpful. Having her even just sitting next to us, she obviously wasn't allowed to say anything in court, but just having her there was such a great help ... It was amazing to have her there... It made me more confident, especially how experienced... [AW], she is so clued up with the ways of the court ... it made me more confident going back if I had to ... At the start, I was like, oh, the thought of it just filled me with dread, just the thought of it made me sick, but now I do feel more confident.*
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Fiona: *[AW] was there for whenever there was breaks in evidence, and, you know, obviously, the screen used to cut out when I went into full blown panic attacks, and she was there to try and help me get, you know, focus on the breathing, and deep breaths, et cetera. And just there for, kind of, like, reassurance type things. With the flashbacks, obviously, it's like you're getting, it's like, happening again. You know, like, right there. Especially at that point. And she was able, for the reassurance, et cetera, which was really invaluable. Because I would not have managed five days of that, and the majority of that was by his horrible solicitor. That would have just took things*

too far, completely, really, too far, completely. It was just...[AW] was there, so she was a brilliant support.
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Isobel: *... the Advocacy Worker was with me all through the court proceedings, and she sat with me as well while I gave evidence. It was really, really useful. Because they've got a background in abuse, unlike the people in the court who don't understand the wider picture. So they had more empathy and more understanding of what it was like for me.*

The evaluation of the National Advocacy Project made a number of recommendations for the future development of the project. One of these was the securing of dedicated funding to allow national co-ordination of the project which has been implemented with the recruitment of two NAP Co-ordinators. Other key recommendations focus on the development of further training and support networks for advocacy workers as well as enhanced partnership working and embedding mechanisms for communication and early referrals to the project. Of the survivors supported during the first 18-months of the NAP 69% of survivors came into contact with the project after they had made a report to the police. Almost all of the survivors interviewed for the evaluation stated they wished they had accessed the support earlier or would recommend taking up advocacy at the earliest opportunity.

The full evaluation of the NAP can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/2Il9xzv>