

Newsletter

Edition March 2022

£12 p.a. subscription for non-members
or organisations

free for SURVIVORs
who are Members
of CIS'ters

Charity registration:
1184857
(previously 1123125)



www.cisters.org.uk

CIS'ters IS NOT a therapy group: it is a small registered charity, run by survivors
“we might be victim/survivors, but this is not all that we are, or can be”

2022 = Rebuilding

So..... are we ok.....yes and/or no ?

.....
Email: helpme@cisters.org.uk

Phone: 023 80 338080 (answer phone)
.....

FIRST OFF – huge apologies for the delay of this newsletter. It has been an incredibly stressful few months – with major challenges as we take steps to rebuild our small team and services on offer.

International Women's Day which took place on the 8th March 2022, was a timely reminder of the level of violence and abuse that women and girls experience during their lifetime.

At a time when I was struggling to manage my anxiety linked to the current emotional stresses of life (let alone the issue of the increased cost of living) I turned on the television and witnessed the horrendous situation of those living in Ukraine.



It is impossible to ignore the plight of the millions escaping and standing their ground in war zones and the hardship they currently face including their obvious vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. In common with others who have spoken about this topic I feel inspired by how communities are coming together to show solidarity.

Gillian, Founder of CIS'ters

One Step At A Time

“It's been 3 years since my move to Cornwall. They unfortunately don't have a good support group here and I so wish I was able to continue accessing **CIS'ters** meetings. Even though I attended Core Group and the Drop-In sessions for a short space of time prior to my move out of Hampshire, it's been the only really helpful resource so far and a real safe space for survivors.

As I am still a member, I am able to access emotional support from **CIS'ters** even though I live so far away. Maybe one day I will be brave enough to start my own support group in Cornwall. I just wanted to let you know that the newsletters have been very invaluable for me.

I have really come so far in my recovery. From not being able to talk without crying when we met to being able to share my story with a counsellor this year and come off my anti-depressants after 13 years of use. I finally feel able to share my experience with close friends and family and am even thinking about writing a book to help release and share some of the trauma (one step at a time though).

Member name withheld (1314)

Do I Feel Stronger ?

So I've done counselling once a week for a year. Do I feel stronger? Yes, I do.

Am I fixed and wholly healed ? Not at all.

Yet my parents expect me to be. My dad thinks that because he has paid for the majority of my counselling that it gives him the right to presume. And when my mum told me she was moving my abuser in because he would be homeless otherwise. My dad asked “did you ever think that this might be what's best for them”. I replied with “and what about me?!”

I feel like this type of sexual abuse is so much more taboo than any other. The shame and disgust you feel clings on for dear life. Triggers hide and lurk in places where you don't expect them, even when you know the positive coping mechanisms you need. It's incredibly difficult to find a way through without hitting the burnout phase.

I just want you, the other survivors of this horrible thing that happened to you in the past to know, you are worthy. You will find a way through the darkest days to find a brighter future. I know it's not fair that you are having to put in the hard work day after day to try and undo the damage that has been done to you.

I've only recently been trying out affirmations, because any time I tried it previously it felt odd and wrong. I felt like a loser trying to big myself up. I thought out my affirmations for a long time and I said them to myself in the shower. I cried out of nowhere and it felt beautiful.

My affirmations are:

I am safe

I am in control of my life

I am beautiful

I love my body despite its scars

I am loved

I am a good mum.

What are yours ? **Amy (1581)**

I Am Trying To Be More Positive, from Maria (520)

Good afternoon Gillian, Cathie and Kate I hope you are all keeping as well as you can and thank you for your email which I got when I awoke from my siesta.

Yes, I definitely feel I am changing in other ways about stuff and looking at how the mask I wear when it slips reveals quite a lot about me but I know that I replace it when things get on top of me and the old me comes back up as then I go to pieces but I am trying to feel more positive but it is hard as you know.

I was diagnosed with vestibular migraine which is severe dizziness and nauseous headache but mine is mainly balance which is why I saw the neurologist in October 2021 but he said unfortunately there is no miracle cure. I have to try to get my balance even and I have to make another appointment to see my GP to discuss medications for me to take as he feels that's what I need. I don't want that as I am on warfarin for a blood clot but since the 1st one I had in 2001, I got another one in September 2021. The locum GP gave me pain relief for my calf muscle pain but it clashed with my warfarin and that's when I developed another blood clot but because I am on warfarin it dissolved in my blood stream. But I have a bad leg in my good leg, if you get me. I will see what the GP says about meds for this vestibular migraine.

I also have borderline personality disorder as well, brought on by my childhood trauma but I am grateful to MIND who give me telephone counselling every Tuesday for an hour which is due to end soon.

Without **CIS'ters** I don't know where I would be so thanking you to Gillian, Cathie and Kate for your care and kindness and listening, plus the newsletter – that is all priceless 😊

Wishing everybody love always, peace of mind spirit and hugs, because we all need hugs. No matter what time of the day it is we need hugs. May you all stay healthy strong positive and safe. Sending you all many blessings,

Basic Medical Care List – from Sally (151)

Hi Gillian, following on from our recent conversation. This is my basic medical care list, I can add bits, depending on the procedure. I keep a copy on my laptop, so I can print it off and don't even have to think about it.

- I live with complex PTSD, severe anxiety and agoraphobia.
- I have been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia.
- I have a medical/ dental phobia= I feel overwhelmed, panicked and get agitated if I have to wait too long. I have been known to do a runner. So early morning appointments/ surgery is a must.
- When stressed I am prone to experience anxiety and dissociation, so I can find it difficult to communicate my needs/ or fully understand what is being said. Just because I look ok and can answer questions, I will not always be fully present.
- I prefer not to know too many details of the surgery until after.
- I need someone with me when I come round, to explain where I am.
- If possible I prefer numbing cream for the cannula, my veins seem to shrink when I am under stress.
- I'm not prone to excessive bleeding and rarely bruise, so blood tests can be difficult. Use a baby needle.
- I have been known to fight through sedation. But have no fear of and respond well to anaesthetics. But I need a space blanket as I always feel cold after an operation.
- I need to sit upright before I come round, I panic if I'm laid flat.
- I need to wear pants, I am a sexual abuse/ assault survivor.
- Please make sure I don't wake up in pain. It is disorientating and can trigger PTSD/ panic. I can cope with pain when I'm fully awake.

Memories.....from Rosemary (1484)

Sometimes I lay there looking at the clock at night.
Hoping to myself, soon my past will leave me and I'll be alright!
But some memories stay with you, no matter how hard you try.
Many years and many more tears, I have cried!
But even with all our emotions,
We, sisters have to stay strong,
For it was not our fault when the shit went on!
It was not you but the person who hurts you – that was wrong
It's time to cry one more last time,
Then get on with your life, for you did not do the crime
Memories of pain don't deserve your time
I know it sounds harsh of what I say,
But think about it – you are a beautiful person and deserve to enjoy life every day.
So let's all hold on to hope,
Do whatever it takes so you CAN COPE!
Things now are not so bad,
We have each other and know how it feels to be sad
Remember when you feel weak – stay strong!
Because no matter what sisters;
We all belong.
I love every one of you, stay strong sisters!



So..... are you ok ?

We think we ought to be ok and yet, some of us still have ongoing feelings of fragility, vulnerability, and these can sometimes be linked to the ongoing covid-19 situation – or completely unrelated.

Resilience is something increasingly talked about, but it can be something that is hard to define. Does it mean that we are 'better' and have no other issues linked to the past; or does it mean that 'today' we feel more resilient than we did yesterday, and that is ok. It might mean we have to work on this every day, and accept that some days we are more or less resilient than the day before.

We might have to accept that, in common with the general public, we will always face unexpected traumas and dramas – and our level of resilience is how we survive some of these, or all of them, or none of them.

Podcasts feedback from *Member name withheld* (1497)

I listened to the podcast on female perpetrators. It helped and thanks for including this.

I am deeply affected by what happened at hands of a female particularly the very person who should have been nurturing me. The podcast / talk made sense. Thanks very much.

Restorative Justice – have you heard of it ?

One of our Members recently wanted to know about Restorative Justice (RJ).

We found a website <https://restorativejustice.org.uk/about-restorative-justice> which describes RJ as giving victims the chance to meet or communicate with their offender to explain the real impact of the crime. Their stated aim is to empower victims by giving them a voice. RJ also holds offenders to account for what they have done and helps them to take responsibility and make amends. RJ often involves a conference, where a victim meets their offender face to face. Sometimes, when a face to face meeting is not the best way forward, the victim and offender may communicate via letters, recorded interviews or video.

Whilst not being sure if RJ ‘has a place’ for victims of sexual crimes, it would be an error to dismiss it without knowing more. Choice is something we didn’t have as children, but now as adults it is important that we are able to know more about what is available and make personal decisions on pathways.

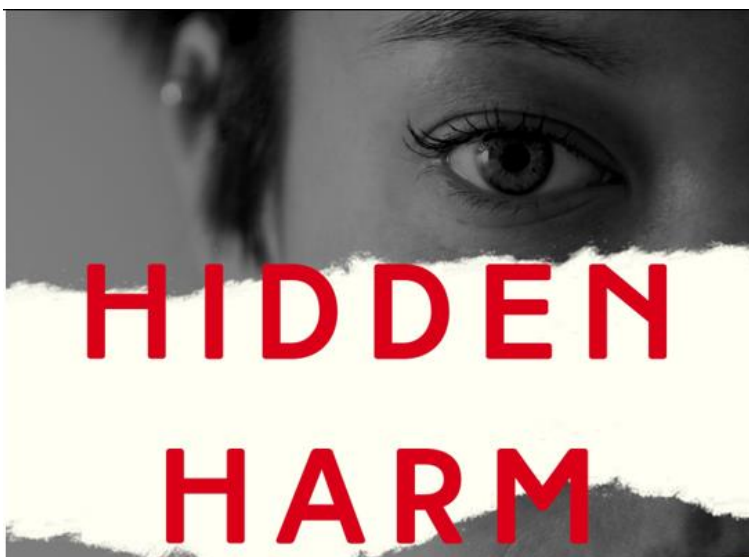
In recent months we contacted Hampshire Restorative Justice and had a very interesting and helpful meeting with two of their key workers. As would be expected, the vast majority of victims who access RJ have not experienced sexual crimes, but that some did. Hampshire RJ provided the following quote from an individual who suffered sexual abuse during childhood and accessed RJ pathway:

“I was most surprised by the amount of time the practitioners put into preparing and delivering the case. The communication was really good as well, I always knew what was happening on the case. It was a safe process and I knew I was in control of the whole thing. I was nervous on the day but having control, knowing where everyone was sitting and having a space to leave if I needed to made it feel safe for me. The main benefit is that I can never doubt myself again because he admitted it. I would definitely recommend RJ as a positive thing to do. Just being able to be open and honest with the practitioners is helpful, and means they get to know me and my reasons for wanting to take part.”

Within **CIS’ters** we are very aware that RJ is not going to be a route that our Members are likely to choose, but it is clear, from the quote above, that some individuals are accessing RJ. So, we wanted to let you know about it.

If you are a Member and would like to know more about RJ to see if it is something that could help you personally let us know either by emailing us or leaving a clear message on our helpline 023 80 338080.

HIDDEN HARM – CIS’ters PODCAST CHANNEL



So far we have published 29 podcasts with more in the pipeline. A list can be found at: <https://cisters.org.uk/podcastsnewsletterssurvivors-voices/the-hidden-harm-podcasts/> and our latest is a revised recording of an earlier edition where the sound quality was unacceptable.

Edition 14 “*Through the Eyes of a Midwife*” is a conversation with Kathryn Gutteridge, a past President of the Royal College of Midwives.

You can also access this important podcast via <https://directory.libsyn.com/episode/index/id/22381961>

It's my tiME!

Thanks to Louise (615) who found this in a magazine and thought others might like it too.....

Anxiety	Hope
Alone	Together
Their time	My time
Controlled	Free
Negative	Positive
Stressed	Relaxed
Risk	Reward
One-day	Today

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE – we have produced a short animation on our website

We mentioned this in our last edition – and also signposted several websites. We can now let you know that we have produced a short animation which is available via <https://cisters.org.uk/the-impact/the-window-of-tolerance/> - it is our first published short animation, so feels like a major leap forward (especially considering the challenges we have been facing). More are planned.



MEMBER WEEKEND WORKSHOP - May 2022

Since 1999 we have held an annual weekend workshop, accessible only to our Members. Workshops in 2020 and 2021 were cancelled, but we are now proceeding with plans for our 2022 event which is fast filling up.

A special event, with members travelling from far and wide to attend. If you are a Member and want more information, contact us either by phone or email.

I CAN'T REMEMBER WHO SENT IN THE PICTURE BELOW BUT IT IS SO TRUE !

I do believe in the word 'healing' because healing is like the scar I now have where my pacemaker was implanted. I am less likely to use the word 'recovery' as prefer the description 'resilience'. That's because I can never, ever, be the person I was meant to be before all the crap happened in my life. The scar is visible, but not disfiguring and a reminder of something that is helping me to be the person I am today, and an indicator of my resilience.

However much I might try I am unable to expunge my past, to ignore that it ever existed – and sometimes it will intrude more into my today than I might want or expect.

Some days (especially family linked) will always have a degree of pain and regret and a sense of loss. Some years it will hurt more than others. Yes, **some days hurt a little more**

As always, best wishes from Gillian (00)





CPS are updating:

- the procedures for 'pre-trial therapy'
- and also updated their Rape Strategy

On 22nd February 2022, CPS issued a statement that said "Victims should prioritise their well-being and not hesitate in receiving therapy for any reason connected with a police investigation or prosecution" they went on to say that "Ahead of full updated guidance being published later this year, the fundamental principles on pre-trial therapy has been released to help knock down the common misconception that accessing counselling can damage a prosecution case."

Charlotte Caulton-Scott, from a specialist rape prosecution unit based at CPS East Midlands said: "It is vital that victims know they can access therapy at any time and that doing so is entirely their decision - their wellbeing is paramount. This is a sensitive issue to navigate and one we don't take lightly. These principles set out the clear steps prosecutors, investigators and therapists need to take to balance supporting victims, protecting their right to privacy, and ensuring the defendants' right to a fair trial."

The fundamental principles can be found in CPS prosecution guidance, entitled '[Pre-Trial Therapy: Fundamental Principles](#)'.

In Feb CPS also published an update to their Rape Strategy stating that:

"Victims hearing and learning from those impacted by rape and serious sexual offences, and the groups and individuals who speak up for victims, is vital. Our continued thanks go to those individuals and organisations who work alongside us to bring about lasting improvements. We have listened to victims who tell us they have felt let down by their experience in the criminal justice system and specifically in their dealing with the CPS. Throughout this strategy update, we set out how we are seeking to improve the support we provide at this most difficult time. Underpinning our work is a commitment to trauma-informed communication with victims. We have launched a new commitment to rape victims, published a new framework for working with Independent Sexual Violence Advisers, and created a guide for victims to explain the process of a criminal trial."

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/rape-strategy-update>

●●● INDEPENDENT INQUIRY
●●● CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WWW.IICSA.ORG.UK

1st March 2022

Schools reluctant to report child sexual abuse by staff and pupils, report finds

A new Inquiry report highlights shocking and horrific instances of child sexual abuse in residential schools, with some teachers exploiting their positions of trust to groom and abuse children across all types of educational settings.

The report says schools are not as safe for children as they should be and children's interests do not always come first when allegations of sexual abuse are made.

Despite numerous changes and improvements to safeguarding over the past two decades, the report says that some children continue to experience sexual abuse and sexual harassment in schools.

The Inquiry heard evidence about ineffective safeguarding in schools during the past twenty years.

<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/residential-schools>

Through The Looking Glass from Kay (A118)

Re-triggering is a deeply unpleasant experience. I always thought of myself as brave. As strong. Capable. But having been recently re-triggered, I suddenly had to face a version of myself that didn't appear to be any of these things.

We live in a society that looks at results as proof of abilities. How are you strong, brave and capable when your world shrinks and you're afraid, exhausted and suddenly unable to do something as simple as opening your mail? Paradoxically, this was when I began to realise that learning to accept yourself as you are now, requires courage. That enduring is no small feat of strength. That doing the best you can IS being capable.

Sure, it's not the glittering life of success I hoped I would have achieved by now.

I am not as wealthy or as influential as Oprah, yet. But I'm still here and I'm still trying. And that counts for a lot.

Saved by Knitting from Nicola (1125)



I was bored of myself and my life. I didn't want to get up in the mornings, as I knew I wouldn't have anything to do. I went to bed early to stave off the boredom too!

I did the Linden Centre activity Centre programme, to be told I needed an 'all consuming' hobby. This just made me feel inadequate because I didn't have one.

Once I phoned my dad to tell him I was suicidal. He said 'you are the only person I know who has not got a hobby. You are boring!' This was also a resounding thought in my head and I was feeling very bad towards myself. Then my partner bought me 'You will be able to knit by the end of this book' by Rosie Fletcher.

I once knitted my Dad a scarf for his cuddly toy. I seem to remember it was small but perfect, but no-one told me what an achievement that was at age 11.

My sister was a child prodigy. She was knitting Dr Who scarfs for the whole family at 15 (as well as getting A's at A level when she was 17) and I thought I would leave the knitting to her. She is now doing the most intricate of lacy knitting, 40 years later.

My Partner told me that hobbies were to enjoy, not necessarily to be good at, and the challenge was to enjoy it. Tonight, the penny dropped and I managed to knit 15 inches by 2 inches of knit and purl, with few mistakes in it.

I have been knitting continuously for 4 days, to get to this point ! And it has been totally absorbing.

I think at last I have found my hobby !

CIS'ters Review of Police websites – in England (as at 2nd Feb 2022)

Although approx. 50% of our members live in Hampshire, IoW, and the unitary authorities of Portsmouth and Southampton, we also have many others who live much further away. It means that at various times there may be similarity in feedback from Members and opportunities to provide an insight into issues that might affect more than one area, county, region or the country as a whole. This feedback might be about issues such as accessing mental health services, or waiting lists for counselling.....and on occasion, issues with police and criminal justice processes.

In terms of police, one of the aspects we had been looking at was how user friendly the content was on our local police website, which had sub-menus for victims of rape and sexual assault. As adult victim/survivors of sexual abuse during childhood we tend not, initially at least, to see ourselves as victims of rape or sexual assault – nor do such descriptions acknowledge the often passive way that children are sexually abused i.e. non-violent.

For a number of years, we had raised the issue of gaps in their website – but informally. So, in September 2021 we raised our concerns in writing, with no success, and again in early in 2022. We were this time, clearly and without question, knocked back again by the local OPCC. Our response was to then look at a small number of other police websites, so that we could demonstrate to our local force that what we were asking for was available elsewhere. There are 39 police forces in England, each with their own website. We initially aimed to compare 2 or 3 but ended up doing all.

Something that we anticipated would take a few hours and provide the evidence we needed locally, ended taking up nearly a week as we ploughed across 39 websites. Our approach was to use their internal search engines inputting words such as rape, adult survivors, sexual abuse and so forth. The results were impactful and more revealing than we could ever have anticipated.

At a time when the Home Secretary, the Ministry of Justice, the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) are highlighting the low numbers of victim reporting and of reaching court, we found that:

Only 9 out of the 39 websites explained how to find a local ISVA (independent sexual violence adviser/advocate) and many gave a limited description of their (hugely important) role to provide emotional support to victim/survivors.

Only 19 out of the 39 websites provided a link to their local SARC (which is a forensic centre where you can self-refer following a recent sexual assault for an examination, health screening and they have crisis workers).

Only 7 out of the 39 websites provided an easy to find mention of adult survivors and most importantly pathways to emotional help and support.

Only 6 out of 39 websites provided a link to www.thesurvivorstrust.org which is a national umbrella organisation for specialist services in our sector. We considered this to be the most critical gap in information and detrimental to any victim/survivor of sexual crimes seeking support services if searching via a police website.

We have copied the analysis to key officials at a national level and discussions are now taking place between us.

CIS'ters – A PICTURE PROJECT

We are asking members if they would like to take part in a picture project. Send us two or three photos (with a short explanation) that represent (for you as an individual) something that:

- (a) shows what others don't understand, or perhaps a situation you might avoid and why
- (b) shows 'where you are currently' in yourself, or your journey, or what someone has done to demonstrate they care
- (c) shows your aim for your future

We have provided some examples below:

All too often others might say 'forget it, and that it happened a long time ago'. But for me it feels like yesterday sometimes & time has stood still.



I can't tolerate the smell of whisky as it reminds me of him



I came home one day and found my partner had painted the garage door purple – which they knew was my favourite colour !



My vision of the future is that I will be surrounded by friends and know what it means to be loved and be joyful



USING YOUR PHONE OR PICTURES FROM YOUR PHOTO ALBUM

Send us three pictures and describe what they mean to you in terms of (a), (b) and (c)

Peer Support Sessions – Booked Phone Calls, for Members

These sessions were introduced in September 2021 and are increasingly popular. The volunteer team are all members of CIS'ters ie with lived experience and have reached a point in their personal lives where they are now able to offer emotional support via a booked phone call, to other members.

Here is a quote from one of our small team: *"We are NOT counsellors or therapists. We don't pretend to have the answers but we do know what it is like to have experienced sexual abuse during childhood (within a family) and the impact that this had on our lives growing up and thereafter. Our approach is to listen to the person on the other end of the phone call and offer appropriate insights when that might be helpful."*

If you are a member and think a session would be helpful, please either email the office or leave a message on the helpline.

ME written by Maria (520)

Don't try and laugh at me
Don't you see how I am
Can't you see the pain etched on my face,
Tears in my eyes, a scream on my lips.
But silence of your hand upon my cheek
It stops me from crying, I give in.
You've gone now back to bed with mother,
Couldn't she see or discover you'd
Disappeared but no she slept on.
When you go I sit in the bath, with bleach on
my skin,
Make me clean, wash him away
But instead it's made me sore and red
My thighs are raw my vagina on fire
But I don't care the pain makes me feel good.
Today is another day for me. I wear
A mask of smiles like a clown.
You can pull it away and see who I am.
A little girl yes but a woman you
Made me.

I won't suffer no more I'll rise up

And be strong you haven't won,
My smile will be real not false or fake.
I'll smile for me and my inner child

We face the world together.

I'll love her make her happy just
You see.

So don't laugh at me, laugh with me
Make me feel better about who I am.
I'M MARIA who wouldn't die

I'M the SURVIVOUR.

Who AM I ? by anon member

I am a child
Who has known great pain.
I am the adult
Who bore the guilt and shame.
I am the victim,
With a purple ribbon to wear.
I am a survivor
Who faces the lion in its lair.
I am the witness
To unbearable violence.
I am the loud voice
In the night, refusing to be silenced.
I am someone's daughter
That he chose to abuse.
I am vengeance personified
And I will not lose.
I am sometimes weak
In the darkness of light
I am also so strong
That I continue to fight.
I have many faces
But one day I'll be free
To once again be a child,
And proud to be me.

FREE



SENDING YOU HUGS

Mothers Day is on 27th March 2022

This is a day, like so many in the annual calendar, that you either love and are excited to welcome into your life. Or you hate it as it brings back either painful memories of a loved one lost, or triggering due to the loss of the mother we ought to have had.

The impact on us as individuals is unique and should never be assumed.

FUND RAISING – new online platform

Many assume that a charity that relies on volunteers doesn't need money to keep going – but in truth we do. Rent for office space, phone calls, internet is to name but a few of the areas we need to cover costs. In an average year we it cost about £45,000 to keep **CIS'ters** going.

In prior years we have used Virgin Money Giving as our online fund raising platform and had a link on our website. VMG have now withdrawn from the sector and in common with 1000s of other charities we have had to the time to identify a suitable replacement. As a small team, time is under pressure.

We had to research and analyse the many alternative online funding platform providers and we have now chosen one, though have yet to add the 'click' button on our website. Several of our members have asked us how they can donate to help CIS'ters survival financially, and we know that we have a number who already make regular donations via their banks direct into ours. Thank you so much.

<https://www.giveasyoulive.com/> is our chosen online platform. If you look at their website, you will see that there are many ways in which an individual can raise funds including when making purchases and travel.

You can also donate directly by using their search button and type the word **cisters** (example in PICTURE below)



Choose a charity to support

Enter a charity name, number, postcode or keyword

Q Search

If you are in a position to give us a small donation via our new online funding platform <https://www.giveasyoulive.com/> we would be most appreciative. *But we also know that at the moment (more than ever) everyone is finding money a challenge and personal finances are difficult – so we will understand if you can't help us..*



Donna Jones, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton is asking residents and practitioners to share their thoughts, views and experiences of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

<https://www.hampshire-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/consultations>

URGENT Consultation closes at 23:59 on 18th April 2022

Donna Jones intention, we understand, is that the views and feedback will provide the Commissioner's VAWG Task Group (*we have no idea who is on this group*) with a clear understanding of the scale and impact of these crimes across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Through this call for evidence the Task Group specifically wants to:

- hear people's experience of the reporting process
- understand support service capacity
- identify examples of best practice and what is working well locally
- learn about the current challenges in tackling VAWG and what requirements are necessary to improve

If you live or work within Hampshire, IoW, Portsmouth or Southampton – we encourage you to take part in the VAWG Task Group call for evidence by completing the most relevant online survey for you:

- Local residents: <http://s.alchemer.eu/s3/Public-VAWG-Survey-2022>
- Young people <http://s.alchemer.eu/s3/Young-People-s-VAWG-Survey>
- Professionals and experts – <http://s.alchemer.eu/s3/VAWG-Practitioner-Survey-2022>

Plus Donna Jones has announced Focus Groups and other consultations

It is important that if you are a resident of Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton you have the opportunity to talk to the local Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) about your thoughts, views and experiences on local policing, community safety and solutions to improving the life opportunities for all local residents.

Having your voice heard and seeing how you have contributed to positive change for individuals and communities is the OPCC stated aim. The OPCC also say that they want to provide consultation opportunities and focus groups on a range of themes and topics, all of which feed directly into the work of the current Commissioner and her team.

In particular they are interested if you:

- have been a victim of a (any) crime or know someone who has
- want to share your thoughts on a particular issue
- want to share your experiences on policing and community safety
- want to help shape how the OPCC communicate with residents and share opinions on campaign materials

If you are a resident living in Hampshire, Isle of Wight, or Unitary Authorities of Portsmouth or Southampton (or live elsewhere but work in the area) then **CIS'ters** are encouraging you to participate. You will need to register your interest in being a part of their focus group and consultation opportunities. The following link takes you to a registration form where you can complete your details securely and let the OPCC know the types of things you'd like to talk to them about.

Register your interest here: <https://www.surveygizmo.eu/s3/90145045/Focus-Group-and-Consultation-participant-registration>

Finally contact **CIS'ters** if you want us to let you know where your OPCC is if above doesn't apply..

COVENTRY BASED RESEARCH PROJECT – still looking for participants

We are often approached by university students and others who are undertaking research on topics related to sexual abuse during childhood and enduring impact into adulthood. In the majority of cases the theme being researched is not new and so we only engage directly where the related research topic is new or innovative.

We have become aware of some research being undertaken which focuses on the experiences of mindfulness (courses) among adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Given that many adult survivors are offered these it would be useful to know if they are as effective as might be suggested.

The researcher is, herself, an adult survivor undertaking Postgraduate Research through Coventry University.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of how adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience mindfulness, and how this experience has impacted you as a survivor.

What is the criteria to be considered as a participant ?

Individuals have to be:

- 18 years or over *and*
- a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, *who must have previously* undertaken a mindfulness **course** (e.g. 8 sessions) in person, online, or via a self-learning resource.

Important to note that 'introduction to mindfulness courses, which are much shorter in length, would not be considered at this time.

What are the benefits of taking part – if you are accepted ?

By sharing your experiences with the researchers they, and other survivors, will better understand the experience of engaging with mindfulness as an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

The study has the potential to increase understanding around an area of which there is currently little research, and therefore expand the pool of knowledge to other researchers, survivors, and mindfulness providers.

It is hoped this new knowledge will support survivors to make more informed choices around mindfulness engagement, and influence mindfulness providers to better support the wellbeing of survivors.

How to contact the researcher:

If you are a Member, and fit the criteria above, we can provide you with contact details for the researcher.

- ring our helpline 023 80 338080 and leave a message explaining you want to be considered as a research participant and leave your name and phone number; or
- email us: admin@cisters.org.uk explaining what kind of course/duration you have previously undertaken and that you wish to be considered by the researcher as a participant.

TO HOLD ON, OR NOT: THAT IS THE QUESTION

The image of a happy, loving, nurturing family and/or partner – is one that we all carry in our hearts. A wish, a desire, a want. We strive to achieve the perfect outcome, often sacrificing our own needs in the pursuit of happiness. It comes at a cost, often we pay the highest price.

We ask ‘what do I need to do’ to keep this person or that person in our lives. We turn ourselves inside out to meet their needs, their demands, and their image of what a perfect relationship means to them. Not us.

It feels disloyal to ask ‘what do I need from them’ and ‘are they able to give me what I need’. But if the relationship is to be built and sustain and meet the needs of both sides – then it needs to have a level of nurturing, of happiness and equality – on both sides.

It is normal for all families and personal relationships to contain times of upset and failure – but it is when the disagreements contain personal and spiteful abuse that this tips over into being disrespectful.

At times – remember when you are the giving person in the relationship – to regularly ask yourself if the (emotional or financial) price you are paying is ok, or too high. If it is ok, then your needs are being met and you ought to be feeling happy and content (most of the time). If the price is too high, then there may well be feelings of sadness, hurt and rejection – and be the time you start to question – is this enough for me.

LIVED EXPERIENCE WORKFORCE

Within **CIS'ters** our approach has always been that the majority of team members have lived-experience. Based on feedback from Members and others, this has always been one of the most helpful aspects of our service. But, choosing a workforce with lived-experience also brings with it an acknowledgement that in common with the majority of victim/survivors, individuals who have experienced sexual abuse as children may develop underlying health issues as they grow older.

Therefore, this means that our workforce has a higher than usual number of team members who have physical underlying health issues, even if the individuals present more robustly emotionally. As such, this has to be taken into account when trustees explore a timetable for resuming face to face meetings.

Trustees are meeting later in March 2022 and although the agenda has a major focus on the very stressful topic of funding, they will also be discussing the next stage of opening up physical meetings. At this stage it is by no means certain, but hoped that we will soon be able to recommence face to face meetings. How we will do this, and the start date, are to be explored together with how best to achieve this whilst continuing to offer a required health level of protection to our workforce.

As before we are continuing to provide increased emotional support to Members via email and phone calls. Feedback highlights that this is appreciated.

Thank you for your support of **CIS'ters**. As always sending love and best wishes,

Gillian (00) Founder and full-time volunteer

The current age range of our Members

Membership of CIS'ters is offered to females age 18+ who, as female children, were sexually abused by a member of their immediate or extended family or by someone outside of the family

CIS'ters was set up, by Gillian, in 1995. In the early years those that sought out the confidential space offered by CIS'ters and became 'a member' were in their 30s and 40s.

As the years have gone by the topic of 'sexual abuse' has opened up more and more in the media and society. At the same time, we observed that the ages of those making contact with us also widened.

From the outset the earliest age an individual could join CIS'ters was 18 and it took a number of years before we had a Member age 18. In the last ten years we have seen a steady stream of younger survivors (age 18+) joining.

The majority of individuals still appear to join during their 30s and 40s – which is a point (we think perhaps) in our lives when we begin to move further away (emotionally) from families of origin.

About ten years ago we started receiving more enquiries from survivors in their 50s, 60s and then 70s. Many of the survivors making contact with us (who are in their 50s, 60s) are feeling internal/external pressure to care for an older generation which often includes an abuser or other toxic family members.

There is no right or wrong age to reach out. It has to be when someone is ready. As a small group of women with lived-experience of sexual abuse as female children, we do our best to offer a listening ear and confidential space whilst offering pathways of help.

Our conversations cover so many topics: relationships, betrayal, trust, physical and emotional well-being, children, counselling. The 1001 issues linked to being a sexually abused female child, who has grown into an adult female – and all of the fragility and vulnerability that accompanies that journey.

Editorial Statement: We welcome letters from Survivors and from those who support them such as friends/allies/counsellors/social workers etc. While every effort will be made to keep contributions complete and unedited we reserve the right to make amendments when necessary, and will note it as 'edited'. Decisions about the inclusion & amendment of contributions are the responsibility of the Editorial Team, and are final. Contributions do not necessarily reflect the views & opinions of CIS'ters, members of the Trust Board, or the Editorial Team. Inclusion of any reference to an individual, book list, or organisation resource is not a recommendation.

The contents of this newsletter are for information and support purposes only.

This newsletter is not a substitute for individual therapy or professional supervision.

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CIS'ters: an experience in learning, sharing, growing – individually and together
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