

## A Day in the Life of a Victim & Witness Care Officer

### **Tell me about the role**

As a Victim & Witness Care Officer (VWCO) I work with victims of crime who have been referred to Lighthouse by police officers because they are entitled to an enhanced service. I also complete safeguarding referrals for vulnerable children and adults.

Firstly, I will review their incident and complete any relevant background checks. I then contact the victim by phone to talk things through, complete a needs assessment and to also establish what support they may already have in place. With their consent, I will refer them to the appropriate service who will then get in touch to put support in place.

Throughout the process I will be the main point of contact for any questions the victim may have and they are given my contact details to be able to get straight back in touch if they need to. If their case goes to court, then every attempt is made to ensure that the same VWCO supports them throughout this process. I am also the main point of contact for any witnesses in the court case and will make sure that they have the support that they need to attend court if they are called to give evidence.

### **What is a typical day like?**

Busy! I usually start by checking the court system and my emails to make sure that there are no urgent actions for my cases that are due in court that day. Once I have completed those then I will call victims and witnesses with any urgent updates or requests for information. If I am covering for a colleague that day (we do this to cover for leave, sickness or training) I also check their cases too. I then move on to reviewing the cases that have been assigned to me for that day from police officers and complete the checks, contact attempts and referrals. I then catch up on my other court tasks and make sure I review what I have scheduled for the following day.

### **What are the qualities needed to be a VWCO?**

You need to be calm under pressure and enjoy being busy. Priorities can change very quickly and you need to be able to respond to this and adapt your day accordingly. Good time management, confident decision making and being able to use your initiative are also very important. Ultimately though, this job is about people and so being a good listener, being empathetic and wanting to do your very best to help people and to make a positive difference to their circumstances is key.

### **What are the challenges?**

The job can be stressful due to the volume of work that we have. We regularly have thousands of cases referred to us across our three hubs and we must respond to these in a timely fashion in line with the Victim Code of Practice. As an enhanced service the crimes that are referred to us are serious in their nature and the conversations that we need to have with victims can be difficult. Speaking to people when they are in an emotional state – angry, upset, frightened – is challenging and it is hard not to be affected by some of the things that you deal with.

### **What are the best things about your job?**

The job is really varied and there is always something new to learn. There are lots of training opportunities including the chance to visit the courts and sit in on hearings where possible plus presentations or visits to the support services that we refer into.

We have a really great team and, as well as supporting victims and witnesses, we also support each other. There are regular opportunities to share ideas and experiences or to simply check in with each other over a cup of tea and an informal catch up. The positive feedback we get from victims and witnesses makes the challenging times worthwhile and Lighthouse has led the way in changing victims experience of the criminal justice system for the better. I am proud to be a part of that.

**Would you recommend being a VWCO?**

If you would like a fast-paced and challenging role that gives you the chance to make a real difference to people's lives on a daily basis then this is the job for you!