

A day in the life of...

A Victim and Witness Safeguarding Officer

8am/10:00am (start of shift)

At the start of the shift I check my voicemails, e-mail and check the pre and post charge computer systems to review my daily workload and to help me prioritise my work for the day. Here I will decide what tasks will take priority. This could be that I prioritise a high risk domestic abuse pre-charge case for working on first, or perhaps I will witness that have not turned up for trial that morning which I have to chase as priority.

8:30/10:30am

Today I see that I have 3 pre-charge cases; a high risk domestic violence case, a hate crime and an anti-social behaviour case. Due to the risks to the victim, I begin performing background checks on the high risk domestic abuse case first. I will research the history between the victim and suspects on my pre-charge cases in order to inform my care and support for the victim, as well identifying any safeguarding concerns that may need to be addressed in relation to the victim, suspect and any children involved. I use a variety of police systems to do this and I update the information I find on the pre-charge system so that officers and other LSU members can see this information when required.

While I am researching the police systems to do my checks I take an urgent incoming call; the prosecutor at court has called to let me know an essential witness has not yet turned up at court to give evidence. I check the court case system and confirm they have definitely confirmed they will attend and agree to make contact with them to find out where they are. I make a quick call to the witness and they let me know they have been caught in traffic, but are almost at court. I let the prosecutor know the situation and give them an estimated time of arrival for the witness.

Once I have completed my research and checks, I call the victim and complete a Common Needs Assessment. Here I have conversation to check their welfare while asking a set of essential questions in order to explore the type of support they may require. For example, if talking to a domestic abuse victim we may discuss specialist domestic abuse support with an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, getting their home secured by the police carpenters and even check to see if social services could be of help with the children.

I am sensitive, non-judgemental and empathetic during the call and I will tailor the support to the victim according to their needs, what they feel comfortable with and will agree any on-ward referrals with them. Sometimes the victim will decline any onward referral but still feel the benefit of a supportive and friendly ear. We keep any victims we have previously contacted, so we build up a rapport and are able to better understand their needs.

On my high risk domestic abuse case I notice a safeguarding concern in relation to the children; the children were present when one of their parents physically attacked the other. I can also see that social services have worked with the family in the past. I then complete a Safeguarding Action Plan and refer this across to Child Services so they can assess and act accordingly. If I need any clarification or have any queries about the safeguarding concern on the case, I am also able to speak with an LSU Safeguarding Officer or Practitioner for additional guidance.

After completing a Support Action Plan and adding it to the cases following my calls, I then complete any relevant referrals and add my referral e-mails to the cases to log my actions. My second case is a hate crime and the victim would like to be referred to SARI, who are a hate crime specialist service. My third case is an anti-social behaviour case and I can't get hold of the victim so I make note to try again the next day.

13:00/14:30pm

Lunch time

1:30/15:15pm

When I return from lunch check the post charge court system for the automatic generated tasks for the day which involve different actions. I find I have some communicate hearing outcome task that require me to check for results from the previous day's hearings and call any enhanced victims with outcomes within 24hrs of receiving the results to keep in line with the Victims Code of Practice Legislation. If appropriate I will send letters to witnesses with court outcomes and what may be happening next. As well as updating victims and witnesses I email the officer in the case as well as any other important parties such as an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor or Family Liaison Officer.

I find that the Crown Prosecution Service has sent a communication to me through the court system alerting me to the fact that a defendant has entered a last minute guilty plea so the trial will not be going ahead in two days' time. I then call the victim and any civilian witnesses who were due to attend and let them know they no longer need to attend. I contact any officers who were required and also their resource team, completing an official form notifying them they do not need to attend. The victim was quite vulnerable so I also let the Witness Service Outreach worker know by e-mail that the trial is not going ahead. This ensures no witnesses are inconvenienced by taking time out of their week to go to court when they no longer need to.

One case has been adjourned to a trial at Crown Court so I must warn witnesses required by Crown Prosecution Service. I call the victim and then follow up with court warning letters. An officer is also required so I complete a form and send this to them and their resources team so this can be updated on their work rota. I make a "front sheet" for my trial folder so I can easily see which witnesses are warned for a case and any important details.

I check my personal calendar and see I have scheduled in another call to a victim I need to warn for another trial. I call them and get hold of them this time. I warn them for the trial. They are at first reluctant as they are worried about the defendant intimidating them by

glaring at them. I talk to them about applying for screen to block the defendant from view and they agree this will help and agree to attend. I complete a short needs assessment with them, basically checking if there is anything I can help them with to make their attendance as easy as possible. As the trial is just four weeks away I also go through all the information they may need for the day. I discuss expenses with them and also try and relieve any anxieties about the court process and giving evidence. We work closely with the Witness Service so I make referral this vulnerable victim so on the day they can be met by a volunteer and have someone to sit with before entering court. The victim would also like to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) about how the crime impacted on them in various ways, including emotionally and physically. I agree a day and time to call them back to complete this and ask them to write a few notes about the impact on them meanwhile. I write up my call and then complete my Witness Service referral, complete a special measures form on niche requesting screens and diarise my VPS call.

3:00pm/5:30pm

I respond to call from witnesses or victims who are calling in to find out their results after hearing my voicemail. I see on the calendar there is a domestic violence case in at a first hearing today so I check the live court system and court case system to see if the result is in. It is so I contact the victim to let them know the details and I also e-mail the officer in the case. This is going for sentencing on another date, so I then make a note in the main calendar so that this vulnerable victim can get updated as soon as possible on the day.

I respond to calls from CPS/Witness Service confirming any trials or any queries regarding upcoming trials and cases discussing witness difficulties or clarification on results as well as updating the systems with any conversations or information. This is vital so that other team members could pick up where you left the case if needed. I then make call backs and second attempts to call my pre-charge vulnerable victims and if appropriate send a support letter and relevant leaflets if there is still no answer.

3:30/6:00pm

The day is almost coming to a close so I make sure I print out and send letters, respond to any emails and make a to do list ready for the next day.

4pm/6:30pm

Its finally home time and I can log off my systems knowing I have made a difference to victims of crime by providing support, practical guidance and making sure safeguarding is in place. The LSU team and our other colleagues we work with closely with the office are a great team that always support one another and we always help each other out with our different experiences and approaches. Back in tomorrow to see what is in store!