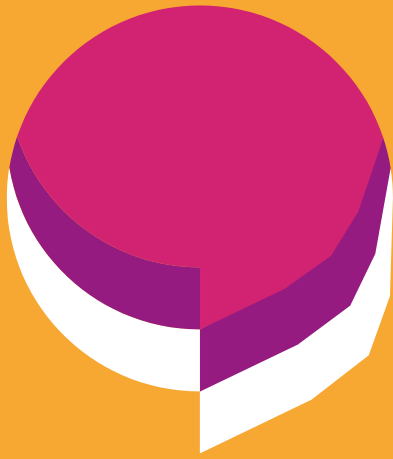




Victim Information Schemes



Department of
Justice
www.justice-ni.gov.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

PRISON

SERVICE

VICTIM STORIES



Introduction

One of the top priorities of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) is to stop people becoming victims of crime. We do this by challenging offending behaviour, and by confronting the impact of crime on victims.

Victims have told us that they need regular communication which contains relevant, timely, and accurate information about their case.

The PBNI Victim Information Unit manages three Victim Information Schemes to help with this communication. We provide information about the Criminal Justice System and key stages of the sentence of the person who has offended, in a manner which is accessible, understandable, and supportive.

The three Victim Information Schemes available are:

- f** PBNI Victim Information Scheme – for cases where the person who has offended has been given a Probation Supervised sentence
- f** Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme (PRVIS) – for cases where the person who has offended has been sentenced to time in prison
- f** Mentally Disordered Offenders Victim Information Scheme – for cases where the person who has offended has been given a Hospital Restriction Order or a Supervision and Treatment Order.

In all three cases, it is the responsibility of the victim to register for the appropriate scheme. Details on how to register for the schemes can be found on page 10 of this document.

There is certain information that victims are entitled to through the three schemes and this includes:

- f** Information about the sentence served and supervision of order / licence;
- f** The month and year in which a prisoner is expected to be released from custody and the conditions of release;
- f** Any breaches of those conditions which might result in the prisoner's return to custody;
- f** As a registered victim you will be informed by the Department of Justice if your case is to be referred to the Parole Commissioners or a Mental Health Review Tribunal. You will be offered the opportunity to submit a victim report or your own written representations for consideration by the parole panel or, in line with Tribunal rules, to the Tribunal. You can also receive a summary of the reasons underpinning the final determination of the Parole Commissioners on conclusion of the Parole Review; and
- f** As a registered victim you also have an opportunity to be involved in direct or indirect restorative contact with the person who has offended if this would help address issues resulting from the offence.

You can find out what further information you are entitled to at www.pbni.org.uk

Victim Liaison Officer Viewpoint

One of the Victim Liaison Officer's (VLO) has worked in the PBNI Victim's Unit since July 2021. The role of a VLO is to empower victims of crime and contribute to community safety by providing relevant information about Probation Supervised sentences to registered victims. The VLO outlines below their experience of working in the Unit to date.

"I have been struck by how appreciative victims have been for someone taking the time, and sometimes a significant period of time, to listen to their experiences and ongoing concerns/fears. Whilst the service is primarily an information giving service, the role can also include involvement in Restorative Justice options where the victim/s are willing to explore such and the signposting to other appropriate/ relevant services.

The registration with one of our Victim Information Schemes is voluntary and many are surprised and pleased to know that they do have the right to certain information. Some want a VLO to keep in touch with them, and some choose not to have ongoing contact. Others wish to defer their decision of contact to a later stage, and as involvement is voluntary, they may at any point change their mind about ongoing contact.

From my experience, victims are sometimes reluctant to take up the offer of services for a number of reasons, which may include lack of knowledge about available services; not wanting, or believing, they do not need victim services; lack of access to services; or fear of re-victimization, re-traumatization, or blame by service providers. Of those victims who do choose to have contact, many are anxious to know more about the supervision of service users subject to community based orders, and the custodial process in respect to those

service users subject to sentences that involve custodial sentences that include future Licence supervision.

I have found, understandably, that when contacting victims to inform them about the Parole Review process, regarding the release of prisoners, this can generate a good deal of anxiety and concern for registered victims. As a VLO I attempt to work through their legitimate fears and concerns by explaining that they can have some voice in the process and the right to put forward views about the suitability of the prisoner for release. Also that they can suggest conditions and restrictions that could be placed on the prisoner when he/she is being released. Conditions may include preventing contact with the victim and/or excluding them from entering a specified area.

My experience so far is that victims are, in the main, thankful for the contact, information, and reassurance that they do have a voice in the process. Registering with the Scheme is hopefully helping them to have their concerns and fears taken into account, particularly in relation to potential custodial releases of the person who caused the harm."

This booklet will demonstrate how the Schemes have helped the victims who have registered.

CASE STORIES

The following are some testimonials from victims who have registered with the Victim Information Schemes.

They explain how the Schemes have supported them.

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

"This scheme has been of great benefit to me in negotiating a very difficult time in my life. It has both provided me with practical information and advice and helped me understand the circumstances in which I find myself."

Betty's Story

Betty's* husband was viciously murdered by three men just over 20 years ago. The case went to trial as two of the people who had offended pleaded not guilty. All three were convicted for their involvement in the murder and one is still serving his prison sentence. Betty was eligible to register with the Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme (PRVIS) as the victim representative, after the men were sentenced. Below is her experience of the Victim Information Schemes.

I was emotionally drained after the trial and found it all very unsettling as it brought back a lot of memories of that awful night. Soon after the men were sentenced the Victim's Information Unit contacted me providing detail about the PRVIS and how I could go about registering. I decided quite quickly, despite all the trauma I had been through since my husband's murder two years previously, to register.

I immediately felt at ease with the Victim Liaison Officer (VLO). It felt like someone else had some understanding of what I was going through and what I was thinking. My son didn't want me to join the Scheme as he thought I wouldn't be able to move on. I told him the memories would always be with me anyway and I felt that joining the Scheme would provide me with more knowledge about the systems and give some power back to me as the person who had been harmed.

It was very useful to have a single point of contact to discuss my case and I knew I could pick up the phone to my VLO at any time with any worries I had. I was always reassured if I had any issues or didn't understand the process.

When it was time for the Parole Commissioners to review the sentences relating to the potential release of those who had offended, I was grateful for the opportunity to express my concerns through the Victims Report. My VLO was excellent in helping me prepare the report. It was a difficult process but I felt that my voice was heard and the concerns that I identified in relation to the conditions of release were taken on board.

I can understand that some people may feel that the process is all about the person who has offended and this stops them from registering, but from my experience this is not the case. As one of those convicted of my husband's murder is still in prison I continue to be in contact with the VLO. This relationship with the Unit has been ongoing for nearly 20 years and the support I have received through the Schemes has been invaluable to me.

*Not her real name

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

"I could not praise your staff enough. Having been let down by other organisations over the years - your staff are to be commended on the job they do in not so nice circumstances. Keep up the good work."

Natasha's Story

Natasha's* teenager was sexually abused by an older male after being groomed for nearly 2 years. He was convicted and sentenced to 7.5 years in prison and was released on licence after 3 years. Below is her experience of the Victim Information Schemes.

“ I was made aware, through a letter sent to me by the Victim Information Unit, that there would be a service in place to support victims and survivors after sentencing. I think it is important to use this terminology because despite the horrendous experience my teenager went through I strongly believe that they are a survivor.

I don't think people realise that the Probation Board offer this service. They possibly assume that the focus is on the people who offend, but I can assure them that supporting victims and survivors is a priority.

I and my teenager have been supported by the Victim Liaison Officer (VLO) over the past 3.5 years. This service had not ended. I, on a personal level as a mother of a child who experienced significant trauma and sexual abuse from an adult male, have had difficult conversations with the VLO. She has been honest, empathetic and professional. I have sought her advice many times as has my teenager more recently. I have found her to be always available for my calls and insightful. It is not an easy job, but honestly I would have been lost without her advice and support.

She helped me write a Victim's Report which was submitted to the Parole Commissioners as part of the process to review his sentence and potential release. I was adamant that he should not be allowed to live in certain areas near my home and I believe that this condition was met. I felt that I had a voice and that my concerns were addressed.

It is important to get the message out there about these Schemes and how they can help victims and survivors and I would encourage anyone who is eligible to register.”

*Not her real name.

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

“To be able to speak to someone about this incident was very helpful and helped me relax a little about what we were going through.”

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

“The Victim Liaison Officer who dealt with me was brilliant - a very good listener. They provided me with any information I needed (within reason) and sent any relevant help leaflets etc. out to me. Also offered to meet but I declined.”

Julie's Story

Julie* was tied up and attacked by her ex-partner in her own home with their 8 month old daughter present. Thankfully her Mother-in-Law had pre-arranged to pick up her granddaughter and arrived after an hour which gave Julie an opportunity to escape, with the knowledge that her daughter would be safe. She called the police from a neighbour's house and within two hours her ex-partner was arrested. He was subsequently charged and sentenced to 7 years in prison. He was recently released after serving 5 years and 9 months but while on license he committed more offences and was returned to prison to finish the remainder of his sentence. Julie explains how the Victim's Information Scheme has helped her cope with the trauma she experienced.

“ The Victim Information Unit has stayed in touch with me throughout my ex-partner's time in prison. The VLO helped me write statements on my feelings and write letters with reference to his release. I wouldn't have known I was 'allowed' to do this if I hadn't registered for the Scheme! Meeting and speaking with the VLO helped me see and feel that I wasn't alone as it all felt so abnormal!

Getting the opportunity to have my say in relation to the conditions of release of my ex-partner, through submitting a report to the Parole Commissioners, has really helped. I was nervous at the start but it was so worth it as I know that the concerns I raised were addressed. I feel very strongly that he should be tried for the other offences he committed when he was on out license, and I will be putting those views in another victim report when the time comes. Knowing I can do this makes me feel empowered and more in control of my life.

Registering with the Scheme has opened lots of other doors for me. The VLO recommended that I get in touch with Women's Aid for additional support and through this contact I received counselling for 18 months which has been invaluable in coming to terms with what has been a very traumatic experience. This included mental health support for my daughter who has suffered psychologically from this horrendous situation. Getting in contact with Parenting NI also helped me cope with day to day life.

I can honestly say that everyone I came into contact with through the Victim Information Scheme had time for me and that was such a relief at the start.

I know some people who are eligible to register for the Scheme might think it would be too difficult to go down that road as it would continue to cause them pain. I am living proof that trying to forget about a very harmful experience doesn't work. The support I received through the Victim Information Unit has been invaluable in helping me rebuild my life and provide better support for my daughter. Overall I have a lot to be thankful for to the Scheme.”

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

“Everyone I have dealt with has been very professional, kind and helpful. I cannot thank them enough for all the support and advice they gave me.”

*Not her real name

June's Story

June's* brother was killed by his son, an only child, nearly 10 years ago. His wife was also seriously injured in the attack which took place in the family home. June's nephew suffered from serious mental health issues and following this terrible tragedy received a hospital order with restrictions. He continues to reside in a secure mental health facility in Northern Ireland. June explains why she and her family registered with the Mentally Disordered Offenders Victim Information Scheme.

“ My brother was a devoted husband and father and much loved member of our family. He was retired just over a year when the attack happened. This horrific incident has deeply affected our family and I personally found the first couple of years extremely difficult to cope with. It left me feeling very frightened and vulnerable and for a long time I felt unsafe in my own home. Attending the inquest was particularly harrowing and hearing the horrific details about how my brother was killed further traumatised us. Thankfully we are a very close family and continue to support each other. You can't change what has happened and whether we like it or not my nephew is still part of our family, and we have to accept that. I have a very strong faith and to be honest I don't know how I would have coped without it.

When my nephew was given a hospital order, we were provided with information about a scheme we could register with for victims of people who have committed offences due to serious mental health issues. As a family we agreed to sign up and I became the main contact for the Victim Liaison Officer (VLO). The VLO has visited my home on several occasions over the years, and it has been really helpful to be able to talk to someone about this terrible situation we have found ourselves in. I felt the scheme gave us an opportunity to have our voices heard when it came to reviewing my nephew's hospital order and allowed us to contribute to reports and raise any concerns. Through the scheme we were also able to meet with a Doctor who was very familiar with the case and it definitely helped to get a medical opinion. You really do need information and support from people who know and understand the process and as a family we were thankful for that.

I feel that registering with the Scheme has helped us to cope better with this horrendous experience. My greatest concern has always been that he would be released into the community again. While I can't control that at least through the Scheme we will always be kept informed of how the order is progressing. It has been nearly 10 years since my brother's brutal death, and I continue to talk to the VLO on a regular basis. I wouldn't wish what we have been through as a family on anyone but at least there is support out there, such as this Victim Information Scheme, to help us through and give us a better understanding about the process.”

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

“Thank you to the Victim Liaison Officer for being so caring and explaining things clearly to me. She helped ease the stress of everything.”

*Not her real name

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

"Thank you for this information as this gives me time to prepare for any encounters that occur due to the proximity of where I live, and where he will settle outside prison, because I know he is a dangerous man."

FEEDBACK FROM A REGISTERED VICTIM

"No improvement required. We were very happy for having this service. Was a troubling time and to everyone involved my wife and myself would like to thank you. A very vital service and job well done. Thank you."

How do I apply to any of the Schemes?

You can apply to register with any of the Schemes by completing the **online form here** or

Complete and return the form in the **Victim Information Scheme leaflet (PDF) here**.

If you are downloading this leaflet and filling in the form you can either post it to the Victims Unit (address provided in the leaflet) or contact the office on T:0300 123 3269 for a prepaid envelope which will be sent out to you.

Contact us:

Victim Information Unit
41-43 Waring Street
Belfast BT1 2DY



0300 123 3269



victiminfo@probation-ni.gov.uk

How we use your information

Please read the **Victim Information Scheme Privacy Notice here**. All personal information that you provide us with will be held securely and confidentially and will be used in accordance with the requirements of data protection law.

Useful Contact Numbers

NI Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme

 03001 233269

 www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/victim-information-schemes

Victim Support Northern Ireland

 028 9024 4039

 www.victimsupportni.co.uk

Police Service of Northern Ireland

 101 - ask for local police

 www.psni.police.uk

Women's Aid Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline

 0808 8021 414

 www.womensaidni.org

NEXUS (survivors of sexual abuse)

 028 9032 6803

Men's Advisory Project

 028 9024 1929

 www.mapni.co.uk

NSPCC

 028 9035 1135

 www.nspcc.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care NI

 0844 477 9400

 www.cruse.org.uk

The Witness Care Unit

 028 9026 4690



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