



1. Victim Support Scotland (VSS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Supporting Disabled Children, Young People and their Families Resource* consultation. VSS is the largest charity supporting people affected by crime across Scotland - including disabled children, young people and their families - through the provision of practical help, emotional support and essential information.
2. VSS supports the intention to create a primarily digital resource which is underpinned by a commitment to communicate the content in ways that are inclusive (easy to read and understand) and accessible (such as in Easy Read).
3. We suggest a website format for the resource would be preferable, since this format would be easy to change when necessary and make improvements and is the most easily accessible for most. Alternative formats should however be provided to ensure maximum accessibility.
4. VSS is in favour of the vision for this resource, which is to provide clear, accessible information on national policies, entitlements, rights and the different options for support available and to promote best practice in doing so. A fairer society is one that includes all young people irrespective of disability and is why we are currently drafting our own internal equality and inclusion action plan to streamline and drive up the standard of support our organisation provides.
5. One of the core aims of the resource is to provide information on the support available to the families of disabled children and young people. This section is intended to be a starting point for the families of disabled children and young people to find out about the kinds of support available to them, to empower individuals, and communities, and to promote a fairer Scotland for all. As such, VSS believes we should be explicitly included as an organisation that is available to provide advice and support within the '*Safety and Justice*' section. A number of excellent organisations and services are included in this section already, such as respectme, Keep Safe and I Am Me Scotland. The inclusion of VSS would strengthen this part of the resource as we are available to support disabled people who are victims of crime (whether hate crime or any other form of crime), give assistance throughout the criminal justice process and provide emotional and practical support to all victims of crime.

6. The 'Safety and Justice' section also includes disability hate crime. VSS is involved in work to tackle Hate Crime in Scotland. We were involved in Lord Bracadale's recent independent review on hate crime and sit on The Scottish Alliance against Prejudice and Hate Crime group. As an organisation we comprehend the unique nature of disability hate crime and the harmful impact of hate crime on victims, including physical and psychological harms, but also potential housing, employment and financial issues, impact on sense of identity, life outcomes, restriction of movement and the social isolation which can occur. We also recognise that the impact of hate crimes on disabled people can result in the aggravation of existing conditions, particularly for those with mental health conditions and learning disabilities. We can provide practical and emotional advice and support for victims and witnesses, including support throughout every stage of the criminal justice process.
7. VSS aims to ensure a truly victim centred approach to hate crime in order to ensure effective support is provided which meets the needs of victims. Research has shown that victims of hate crime may not know where to go for support or may feel suitable support is not available to them. In particular, research has found disability-related harassment can be so commonplace that many victims come to accept it as inevitable. Many disabled victims also do not report they have been a victim of hate crime. If left unaddressed, 'petty' criminal situations have the potential to escalate into more extreme behaviour. As such, we reiterate it would be beneficial to include us as an organisation that is available to provide support within the 'Safety and Justice' section so that disabled victims of crime are aware we are here to support them and so they feel empowered to approach our services.
8. Many hate crimes go unreported, and disability hate crimes are believed to be particularly underreported in comparison to other forms of hate crime and conviction rates are also lower than for other forms of hate crime. We are committed to doing what we can to help improve reporting rates for hate crime. We recognise that disability hate crimes are thought to be underreported because there is often a relationship between the victim and the offender and the fear of losing the connection can deter the victim from reporting. The victim may also be dependent on the perpetrator for day to day support which can make them afraid of losing their limited independence if they report the perpetrator. This shapes the way disabled victims of hate crime experience hate crime and creates difficulties with reporting hate crime or accessing support.
9. VSS also operates Third Party Reporting Centres. Therefore, it would be helpful for those using the resource if this was also highlighted in the relevant section on Third Party Reporting on page 43.

**ENDS**