

VSS PILOT REFERENCE GROUP IN EDINBURGH, THE LoTHIANS AND BORDERS

Background

At Victim Support Scotland, we offer a multitude of ways for people affected by crime to share their feedback, input and lived experiences. One such way is via the VSS Reference Group; an optional, confidential group made up of people who have directly been affected by crime and who wish to volunteer their feedback and views in a safe environment. This feedback in turn is used to inform both internal and external projects, such as the development and implementation of new victim services, research studies, and policy changes. Members are contacted when opportunities for feedback arise, however they can also bring and raise their own topics of interest relating to the criminal justice system to the group for discussion.

Thus far, this current Reference Group covers the whole of Scotland. Victim Support Scotland is interested in establishing smaller, locality-specific reference groups by March 2022.

The Pilot

In order to ensure that locality-specific reference groups are informed by and with the communities they are aimed at supporting, VSS is aiming to implement a pilot reference group in the Edinburgh, Lothian, and Borders at the end of this month (September 2021).

The feedback from this pilot will be used to inform the launch of future regional/locality-specific reference groups that are set to be established in March 2022.

This pilot group will not function as a support group; though participants may share about their individual experiences, the purpose of the group is to show how a person's knowledge and journey can influence the criminal justice system and help others.

This being said, we recognise that some topics of discussion might have emotional or distressing connections, and that individuals might want to seek further support. A VSS support worker volunteer will be available at these sessions for this reason, and if further support of a practical or emotional nature is required by participants, Victim Support Scotland can give details of local support services.

If you ever feel like a chat would help, our helpline is 0800 160 1985, open from 8 am-8 pm Monday through Friday, and a webchat service offered at the same times but including Saturday from 9 am to 1 pm.

Please note that this pilot, much like the current national VSS Reference Group, is completely optional and participants may cease involvement at any point.

Core Personnel Involved

The groups will be made up of:

- The pilot group members
- a VSS volunteer support worker
- Leah Soweid, the VSS Service User Engagement Officer

Meeting Arrangements

The meetings will have a defined structure and schedule. Members of the pilot group will meet with the Service User Engagement Officer in a group setting over MS Teams, in order to accommodate a wide range of individuals and circumstances. A few days to a week prior to that week's session, reading may be sent out to participants to go over that relate to the upcoming session's discussion. The day before, an agenda will be sent to the pilot group members that detail the breakdown of the session.

Oral feedback on how participants found the session and the topics discussed will be requested at the end of each meeting, and a follow-up email will be sent two days afterwards to capture any additional feedback from pilot members.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an imperative part of this group. Consent forms are to be signed prior to beginning the first session, as well as a Participant Code of Conduct and a Terms of Reference form. If the session is audio recorded, permission will be asked at the beginning of each session, and alternatively, notes can be taken by the Service User Participation Officer if a participant is not comfortable with being audio-recorded.

Data protection considerations: As the pilot group will take place over a digital platform, data protection is of utmost importance. Victim Support Scotland will store all data collected securely and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. Your data rights will not be affected by participation.

If you are from Edinburgh, the Lothians and Borders and are interested in learning more about this pilot and/or being a participant, please contact the VSS Service User Engagement Officer, Leah Soweid, at Leah.Soweid@victimsupportsco.org.uk, or at 07 552 985 502.