

Victim Support has been awarded the contract to manage Safe Spaces, a joint Church of England/Church in Wales and Catholic Church in England and Wales (CCEW) project to provide a vital support service for survivors of church-related abuse.

This leading national charity, well known for its specialist services and work with people affected by crime, abuse and traumatic events, was awarded the contract following a competitive process.

The decision by the Safe Spaces Management Board was taken in partnership with survivor representatives from across both Churches (CCEW, Church of England, Church in Wales). Their knowledge, skill and personal experience in shaping the model for Safe Spaces alongside their commitment and support during the procurement process was integral to finding the right organisation to deliver the project.

The proposed model for Safe Spaces to be developed by Victim Support and which will run for an initial two-year period, is:

- A central hub helpline with skilled first response advocates trained in trauma informed advocacy support and advice
- The development of a "Safe Spaces" website to provide information and advice to survivors, families and professionals
- Up to 10 community-based survivor led therapeutic support groups (both faith-based and secular)

**Diana Fawcett, Chief Executive of Victim Support, said:**

*"The importance of specialist services for victims of faith-based abuse cannot be understated. Those affected by sexual, physical or psychological abuse face increased risk of mental health problems, and are often denied justice.*

*Where trauma is compounded by disbelief, it is vital that victims can access specialist services completely anonymously and independently from the police or any faith-based institution. We welcome the introduction of this much-needed specialist service, and recognise the importance of input from survivors in the design and delivery of trauma-informed support."*

**The Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, current chair of the Safe Spaces Management Board\* said:**

*"We are delighted that Victim Support will be running Safe Spaces, their vast experience of working with victims and survivors will be invaluable, and this is at the heart of this project. We know that for some this project has not come quickly enough and as we have previously said this is a matter of regret which the Church of England acknowledges and apologises for. But it is good news that we now have a charity with proven experience of putting survivors first."*

**The Bishop of Leeds, Marcus Stock, vice-chair of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission and vice-chair of the Safe Spaces Management Board\* said,**

*It is crucial that the Catholic Church constantly seeks to enhance and improve the pastoral response and services provided to victims and survivors of abuse. The appointment of Victim Support as the independent provider for the Safe Spaces project marks an important step forward in this endeavour. Our work though must be guided and advised by the needs which survivors themselves have identified. As a leading independent charity with considerable experience in supporting people affected by different forms of abuse, Victim Support will be well placed to this joint project forward.*

**The Bishop of Southampton, Debbie Sellin, deputy lead bishop coordinating support for survivors, said:**

*I am very much looking forward to working with Victim Support as Safe Spaces develops providing vital support and advice to survivors.*

Bishop Debbie will represent the Church of England as a trustee on the board of the new company to be set up to oversee the project.

## **Notes**

\*The Safe Spaces Management Board will be replaced by a new company led by an independent chair, representatives from both Churches will be trustees.

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