

Sexual Violence Legal Support Scheme – Professionals Information Sheet

Women and Girls Network (WGN) is a free, independent, women-only service that supports women in London who have experienced, or are at risk of, gendered violence. Our overall aim is to promote, preserve and restore the mental health and well-being of women and girls, to empower them to make a sustainable recovery from their experiences of violence. We have been delivering specialist services since 1987.

The Legal Support Scheme pilot

WGN is running a pilot for 12 months providing legal support to survivors from one of our sexual violence lawyers. The lawyers work for WGN and are completely independent of the police or CPS or any other state agency. All legal advice is confidential and protected by legal professional privilege.

The pilot provides legal advice to self-identifying female survivors, aged 16+ who have reported a sexual offence to the police, about issues to do with the criminal justice process.



The role of a sexual violence lawyer

The lawyers can provide advice to survivors verbally and in writing, for example on police requests for personal data on mobile phones or confidential records, such as therapy records, medical, school or social services records. They can also help to draft documents, such as requests for Victims Right to Review, in some cases. They can provide legal assistance on a particular legal issue, but they will not have conduct of her case, which means they won't 'take on' a case like a solicitor at a legal firm. In certain circumstances a lawyer may contact the police and/or prosecutor on behalf of a survivor. They will not represent her in court because as a witness she does not have a right to her own legal representative in court (apart from in certain very unusual circumstances).

If the legal advice needed is not to do with the criminal justice process, for example it concerns family law, housing or immigration law, the pilot staff can try to signpost to other sources of legal advice. For emotional and practical support through the criminal justice process please refer to the Survivors Gateway.



How to access a sexual violence lawyer

You can email us on legaladvice@wgn.org.uk or call us on 07496 384915 Monday to Friday 10am - 1pm.

You can also download a referral form from our website and email it to us - to Find our web page go to the Women and Girls Network website, and Search under "our services" for the legal support scheme.

When we receive a referral, we will contact the survivor within 3 working days to assess whether the request comes within the remit of the service and let her know whether a lawyer can assist. As the pilot is small, we may not have capacity to assist everyone who contacts us, unfortunately.

If you have any questions about the Legal Support Scheme, please contact us on legaladvice@wgn.org.uk