



Press Release

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A little card is a big hand for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses

A credit card sized guide for police officers is set to make a big difference to the lives of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and victims. The pocket guide gives frontline officers information on how to identify and help those witnesses and victims who need extra assistance in giving evidence. It is the result of a unique partnership between the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and three learning disability charities – VOICE UK, Respond and the Ann Craft Trust.

“Some witnesses and victims are particularly vulnerable. They can have trouble making themselves understood and find giving evidence distressing” explains Deborah Kitson, Director of the Ann Craft Trust. “Extra help is available to them in police interviews and in court through special measures like video-link evidence and intermediaries. It’s easy to see that a child victim needs this help, but it can be harder to identify the adult with learning disabilities, a mental health problem, dementia or other disability who needs extra assistance to give their best evidence.”

A Home Office report found that police officers had difficulty identifying those who could benefit from special measures, with less than half of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses being identified.

“If vulnerable and intimidated witnesses aren’t identified at an early stage, they are not going to get help from special measures and so are not going to give the best evidence they can. This makes it harder for officers to gather quality evidence and for the CPS to present a good case in court” says Kathryn Stone, Chief Executive of VOICE UK.

“The Police Vulnerable Witness Pocket Guide addresses this issue by telling officers how to identify vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, what the law says and where they can get assistance” says Richard Curen, Director of Respond. “This will make for stronger prosecutions and increase the chances of vulnerable people getting justice. It’s a small card that will have a big impact.”

Richard Crompton, ACPO lead on the Vulnerable Witness Pocket Guide and Deputy Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police: “ACPO is committed to ensuring that the service does everything possible to give vulnerable victims and witnesses access to the criminal justice system and appropriate specialist support.

“For police officers this small card is ideal for carrying with their pocket book and serves as a reminder to consider issues of vulnerability when dealing with witnesses and victims. Although the provision of special measures has been available for a number of years, a significant proportion of those who are eligible for special measures are still not being identified. If officers can use this card to help them identify the vulnerable then we can start ensuring people get access to the support networks in place.”

170,000 Police Vulnerable Witness Pocket Guides have been produced and distributed to every frontline police officer in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The guides were produced with the kind support of national charity for people with learning disabilities, HFT, and the University of Derby.

“HFT is pleased to support this innovative joint venture initiative. The versatile information card provides police officers with valuable and easily accessible information which will assist them in identifying vulnerable witnesses in order for them to be offered appropriate support” stated Phil Madden, Director of Service Development at HFT.

The Police Vulnerable Witness Pocket Guide will be formally launched at Derby Magistrates Court on 2 May 2007 by:

- Nigel Hallam, Clerk to the Justices and winner of a Justice Award for Outstanding Commitment to Diversity;
- Richard Crompton, Deputy Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Constabulary and ACPO lead on Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses
- Daniel Hardy, Equal Access to Justice Project Worker, VOICE UK.

The launch starts at 10:30am and is followed by a networking lunch at VOICE UK's headquarters. Journalists are encouraged to attend.

Notes to Editors

- The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is an independent, professionally led strategic body. In the public interest and, in equal and active partnership with Government and the Association of Police Authorities, ACPO leads and co-ordinates the direction and development of the police service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In times of national need ACPO, on behalf of all chief officers, coordinates the strategic policing response. ACPO's 341 members are police officers of Assistant Chief Constable rank (Commanders in the Metropolitan Police and City of London Police) and above, and senior police staff managers, in the 44 forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and other forces such as British Transport Police and States of Jersey Police.
- VOICE UK supports people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups who have experienced crime or abuse. We also support their families, carers and professional workers. We offer a range of training courses that provide professionals with a positive, practical approach to adult protection. www.voiceuk.org.uk.
- The Ann Craft Trust works with staff in the statutory, independent and voluntary sectors to protect people with learning disabilities who may be at risk from abuse. We also provide advice and information to parents and carers who may have concerns about someone they are supporting. www.anncrafttrust.org.
- Respond offers a range of services which provide emotional and psychological support to victims and perpetrators of abuse who have learning disabilities. It also provides training and support to professionals and carers working with them. www.respond.org.uk.

Contacts:

Robin Van den Hende
Policy and Campaigns Officer, VOICE UK, Ann Craft Trust, Respond
020 7874 5486 (office hours)

Lou Bloomfield
ACPO Press Office
020 7084 8948 (office hours)