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Evaluation of Justice and Care's Victim Navigator Programme in Scotland

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Author Biographies

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Dr Ruth Van Dyke has been an Honorary Researcher at the Bakhita Centre on Research in Slavery, Exploitation and Abuse at St Mary's University since June 2017. In addition, she has taught on the MA in Human Trafficking, Migration and Organised Crime at St Mary's. Ruth has been undertaking research on human trafficking and modern slavery since 2009. Since 2013, Ruth's research has focused on investigating the competencies necessary for police to tackle human trafficking, the police response to modern slavery and partnership working. In addition, she began working with organisations to monitor and evaluate their programmes, for example, the work of Stop the Traffik and the Reach In programme of the Medaille Trust.

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Introduction

This report is the culmination of data collected through the evaluation of Justice and Care's Victim Navigator Programme in Scotland from March 2022 to March 2025.

Section one outlines the Scottish context and the scale of human trafficking and exploitation in Scotland, legal frameworks, and the support available to victim-survivors. The language of victims and survivors is used throughout this report, and in some cases victim-survivors, in recognition that those with lived experience may prefer one term or the other, or indeed use these terms interchangeably.

Section two describes the Victim Navigator Programme and Justice and Care's aims and outcomes, several of which the evaluation will explore in later sections.

Section three presents the evaluation team's approach to gathering data. We employed a qualitative approach that included interviews with victim-survivors, Police Scotland, stakeholders, professionals working in the field of human trafficking and modern slavery, and Victim Navigators themselves (referred to as VNs and Navigators throughout the report).

Section four presents the findings of the evaluation beginning with an outline of how the pilot Programme meets the intended outcomes. The remainder of the section includes an exploration of the respondent's understanding of the role of the Victim Navigator, the perceived value of Victim Navigators in relation to offering strategic advice, delivering training, aftercare for victims, and evidence gathering to facilitate criminal prosecution, and partnership working with other organisations. It also highlights some challenges revealed over the course of the evaluation.

The report concludes with a discussion of achievements and recommendations for the ongoing success of the Victim Navigator Programme.

We would like to say thank to all those who took part in this evaluation. We appreciate you giving up your time to talk with us and your input has been central to the research.

Section One: Context

The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act became law in 2015, defining the offences of human trafficking, forced or compulsory labour, and slavery and servitude, and detailing the sanctions for these offences. The Act also placed a legal duty on Scottish ministers to provide support and assistance to victims of human trafficking and identified the minimum support to be made available¹. Following amendments in 2018, all victims of human trafficking and exploitation should receive statutory support in Scotland².

The 2015 Act proved to be an impetus for action to tackle human trafficking and exploitation in Scotland. As part of this, the Act required the development of a human trafficking and exploitation strategy and its review on a regular basis. The Scottish Government published its Strategy in 2017 and since then has produced annual reports which monitor progress and set out planned actions.

- The Strategy comprises three key action areas:
- identify victims and support them to safety and recovery
- identify perpetrators and disrupt their activity
- address the conditions, both local and global, that foster trafficking and exploitation

There is also a child trafficking action area that sits alongside and intersects with the three named areas, with representatives from the child trafficking group sitting in the three action areas. A Strategy Implementation Group was set up, with direct action groups taking responsibility for delivering the actions in each area and feeding back to the Strategy Group. Membership ranges across Government, law enforcement, victim support, local authorities, businesses, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, NHS, NGOs, and academia.

The Human Trafficking and Exploitation Annual Reports provide information about what actions are being taken by various statutory and non-statutory actors in each of the action areas. The reports note increased awareness of human trafficking and exploitation by the public and by organisations that might have direct contact with potential victims and thus help identify and refer them for support. They also note the support being provided by NGOs, the NHS, improved awareness amongst professionals of what support is available to victims, and enhanced partnership working. The reports also highlight how criminal justice actors seek to tackle the crimes of human trafficking and exploitation and the actions taken to bring perpetrators to justice.³

The strategy is due for an update in 2025 and at the time of writing this process is in place.

¹ Brotherton V (2019) 'Class Acts: A comparative analysis of modern slavery legislation across the UK', in G Craig, A Balch, H Lewis and L Waite (eds.) The Modern Slavery Agenda: Policy, Politics and Practice, Bristol: Policy Press

² Scottish Government (2020) Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy – Third Annual Progress Report and Strategy Review

³ Scottish Government (2018; 2019; 2020; 2022) Human Trafficking Strategy Annual Progress Reports <https://www.gov.scot/policies/human-trafficking/trafficking-and-exploitation-strategy/>

While the legislative framework for prosecution and support in Scotland is located in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act (2015), UK-wide immigration legislation impacts on service provision as a reserved function for the UK government. The Scottish Government has also opted into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)⁴ – the system of identification for victims of human trafficking. The Nationalities and Borders Act 2022 has raised particular concerns around the impact of new measures on victim-survivor willingness to engage with the authorities, with implications for identification and protection, as well as for the ability of the authorities to investigate the perpetrators of trafficking offences.⁵

Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Scotland

The National Referral Mechanism is the main source of data regarding the potential numbers of victims of human trafficking. The accuracy of the statistics from the NRM has been questioned, as some adult victims do not consent to a referral to the NRM; the figures only include those victims identified by agencies and referred into the system. For those adult victims who do not consent to a referral to the NRM, there is a duty to notify (anonymously) Police Scotland under section 38 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act. While Scottish NRM data is used as the key indicator of the scale of human trafficking in Scotland, it does not necessarily indicate the full extent of trafficking.

In 2024, 920 referrals were made to the NRM from Scotland (664 adults and 256 children).⁶ The figures have shown a year-on-year increase since the NRM introduction in 2009.

Table 1: Victims of human trafficking referred from Scotland to the NRM in 2024

Age at exploitation	Overseas	UK	UK and overseas	Total
Adult (18+)	652	12	-	664
Children (17 & under)	159	82	14	255
Not specified or unknown				1

⁴ Home Office (2025) National Referral Mechanism Guidance Adult (Northern Ireland and Scotland) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms/national-referral-mechanism-guidance-adult-northern-ireland-and-scotland>

⁵ Magugliani D, Trajer J, Gauci JP (2024) Assessing the Modern Slavery Impacts of the Nationality and Borders Act: One Year On https://www.biiicl.org/documents/183_naba_report_biiicl_branding_final.pdf

⁶ Home Office (2025) Modern slavery: NRM and DtN statistics, end of year summary 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2024>

Support Available to Victims of Human Trafficking and Exploitation

The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 placed an obligation on the Scottish Government to provide support to potential victims of trafficking. The Scottish Government made a strong commitment to support victims when it set the relevant period for post-identification support at 90 days. The Scottish Government has funded two services to support adult victims of human trafficking: TARA and Migrant Help. TARA supports women who have experienced human trafficking for sexual exploitation and Migrant Help supports other victims. With the increasing number of referrals, the Government increased statutory funding to these two services by 26% and 40% respectively.⁷ In addition, the Scottish Government funds specialist psychological support from the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Psychological Trauma Service (The Anchor). The Anchor has provided psychological assessment, treatment, and legal reports for adult victims, alongside regular consultation with TARA and Migrant Help. In addition, the Scottish Government funds JustRight Scotland which provides direct legal advice and representation to child and adult survivors of trafficking and exploitation.

SOHTIS (Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland), also fits into the human trafficking landscape in Scotland as a charity ‘committed to ensuring the recovery and long-term wellbeing of survivors of human trafficking’. The importance of SOHTIS is highlighted by the 45 referrals to this service in the first three months of opening.⁸

Victims of human trafficking or Section 4 offences are victims of a crime and thus have rights under the Victims’ Code for Scotland to support, for example from Victim Support Scotland. For victims who choose to engage in a criminal investigation and prosecution, ‘the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service’s (COPFS) Victim Information and Advice Service provides victims of human trafficking and exploitation with information about their case, the criminal justice system, and appropriate support agencies, as well as applying to courts for special measures to assist victims when giving evidence’ (GRETA, 2021, p. 25).

While support may be available to survivors to aid their recovery and reintegration, a survey undertaken for the Scottish Government identified that survivors were often not aware of what support was available to them, particularly before they were identified as a victim⁹. This is a gap that Victim Navigators can potentially offer support with, as discussed in more detail below.

⁷ Scottish Government (2022) Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy – Fourth Annual Progress Report and Strategy Review.

⁸ Scottish Government (2022) Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy – Fourth Annual Progress Report and Strategy Review.

⁹ Scottish Government (2020) Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy – Third Annual Progress Report and Strategy Review

Police Scotland and Tackling Human Trafficking and Exploitation

Police Scotland has been involved in investigating the crimes of human trafficking, forced labour, slavery, and servitude for many years. To improve its response to this complex crime type, the police force established a specialist unit in 2013; the National Human Trafficking Unit (NHTU). The establishment of the NHTU has been described as the most significant recent development in Scotland relating to the control of human trafficking in Scotland.¹⁰ The NHTU ensures effective coordination of information and intelligence on cases of human trafficking and exploitation, and it also provides support to officers across Scotland, in the form of tactical advice and training. Subsequently, it added specialist detectives to take on complex cases that require the input of specialist knowledge and resources, such as those involving organized crime groups. While the NHTU was established in 2013, it has changed over time to improve the police response to the threat of human trafficking and exploitation.

The NHTU now comprises 27 staff and has three Units/Teams overseen by a Detective Superintendent. The Human Trafficking Coordination Unit (HTCU) has a wide remit including coordination which includes prevention measures and media opportunities as well as partnerships, policy, strategy, and guidance. The HTCU has responsibility for developing partnerships with internal, external, and international bodies that enable Police Scotland to be more effective in preventing human trafficking and exploitation, in supporting victims, and in bringing perpetrators to justice. It is also responsible for recording all NRM referrals on the Police Scotland database and allocating cases. A key change instituted by its DI is to analyse the data on NRM records in order to extract intelligence to aid understanding of human trafficking and to enable Police Scotland to better target resources, identify emerging trends, and enhance proactive investigations into human trafficking and modern slavery. The Human Trafficking Investigative Unit (HTIU) is responsible for investigating complex cases as it has access to the necessary expertise and resources. A Human Trafficking Intelligence Unit has also been introduced to develop the intelligence needed for proactive police investigations as well as enhancing criminal investigations through for example analysing financial data of possible suspects.

¹⁰ Atkinson C and Hamilton-Smith N (2022) 'Still an 'invisible crime'? Exploring developments in the awareness and control of human trafficking in Scotland', *European Journal of Criminology*, 19(5) pp.911-931

Section Two: Victim Navigator Programme

Justice and Care is a UK-based nongovernmental organisation (NGO) delivering Programmes through country offices in the UK, Romania, and Bangladesh. It adapts programming to each country's context with the aim of supporting survivors to exit and recover from exploitation and reduce their vulnerability to re-exploitation, whilst also working with law enforcement and criminal and civil justice systems to bring charges against potential exploiters. After extensive discussions with the National Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit, police forces and leading national stakeholders, Justice and Care designed a pilot project in 2018 deploying 'Victim Navigators'. It entailed embedding specialist independent workers into senior policing teams to provide expert input to modern slavery investigations and to directly support survivors of modern slavery from the moment of identification. The Victim Navigator Programme was introduced to fill a specific gap in existing service provision by forming a bridge between the police and survivors of modern slavery; and by flexibly and independently brokering support from external specialist services according to individual survivors' needs.

The Navigator's role was to be embedded within law enforcement, with full access to the details of modern slavery cases, but with independence from the police to foster trust with the survivor. This was a unique feature of the role as most support services sit outside the police. The Navigator would be available to engage survivors from the moment of identification by police or other professionals, providing trauma-informed and specialist support during the crucial post-rescue period and then providing seamless ongoing coordination between the survivor and the officers investigating their case. Meanwhile, Navigators would help survivors understand their rights and entitlements and co-create individualised support plans, according to their needs, priorities, and aspirations. Navigators would act as an advocate and, where necessary chaperone, helping survivors to 'navigate' the complex landscape of services and entitlements and their journey through the criminal justice process. The final evaluation of the pilot in England was published in 2022 by Justice and Care.

The initial Victim Navigator pilot included a Navigator embedded in Border Force at Glasgow Airport who was then seconded to Police Scotland during the COVID pandemic. Justice and Care applied for funding for a Scottish Victim Navigator Programme, and in April 2022, the Scottish Government's Victim-Centred Approach Fund provided a grant to the Victim Navigator Programme in Scotland. The funding provided for two Victim Navigators who would be embedded within Police Scotland for three years. Navigators were to be independent support workers employed by the NGO Justice and Care but were to be based within the NHTU in Police Scotland.

Justice and Care set out 5 key streams of work for Victim Navigators which are set out below.

Workstream 1: Intensive casework with victims of modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), including:

- a. Consistent trauma-informed aftercare support to the victims as needed (psychosocial counselling, assistance with accommodation, legal support, medical care etc. as appropriate to individual needs).
- b. Referrals to and liaison with relevant support services.
- c. Acting as a trusted bridge between the victim and police investigations into their exploiters.

Workstream 2: Tactical advice in real time to live investigations into cases of MSHT, including:

- a. Advising on lines of enquiry.
- b. Investigation strategy.
- c. Identifying potential victims.
- d. Attending warrant executions.
- e. Attending border force interceptions.
- f. Producing resources and recommendations for force-wide improvements.

Workstream 3: Specialist training to Police Scotland in best practice victim identification and care.

Workstream 4: Training other frontline service providers in victim-centric practices.

Workstream 5: Supporting safe repatriations including liaison with support services in country of origin.

The intention was that these workstreams would include activities that focus on three main outcomes:

1. Survivors have improved outcomes across the rehabilitation/reintegration, domains of physical health, mental health, safety, economic stability, legal support, or social integration according to their needs.
2. Survivors provide increased intelligence and evidence to police and prosecutors.
3. Police Scotland see a force-wide increase in capacity to investigate modern slavery cases, including an increase in potential victims and exploiters identified, an increase in quality admissible evidence obtained, an increase in potential exploiters arrested and an increase in successful MSHT prosecutions achieved.

Section Three: Evaluation Methods

This section outlines the research design, participant recruitment, and data analysis. An engagement with ethical issues is woven throughout.

After discussion with Justice and Care regarding the research approach and design – which largely followed the evaluation of the Programme in England, the evaluation team applied for ethical approval with the University of Stirling's General University Ethics Panel in October 2022 (GUEP reference 2022 10772 8363). Data collection for the evaluation began in December 2022 and ended in December 2024.

The evaluation of the Victim Navigator Programme was designed to determine the Programme's effectiveness according to its workstreams. By exploring the perspectives and experiences of those who worked with or in the Victim Navigator Programme, combined with the evaluation team's own experiences and expertise, the team was able to evaluate whether the Programme achieved its aims and outcomes. Throughout the research, the evaluation team was open to identifying any other consequences or issues that emerged from the data collected, as agreed with Justice and Care and within the scope of the evaluation and funding.

The four participant groups in this evaluation were Police Scotland, victim-survivors of MSHT, Victim Navigators, and stakeholders from a wide range of organisations who had been in contact with the Victim Navigator Programme.

Victim Navigators

Access to Victim Navigators was provided through Justice and Care and contact with the Navigators facilitated recruitment of each of the three other participant groups. While interviews took place with Victim Navigators both at the beginning and the end of the data collection period, the evaluation team had numerous interactions with them in the recruitment of others, at stakeholder events where encounters were unplanned, and at an insight day with Police Scotland. Other conversations with Navigators also took place in the recruitment of victim-survivors and to clarify issues related to their work during the writing of the evaluation.

Police Scotland

Access to Police Scotland was approved by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (14 September 2022) and the Police Scotland National Human Trafficking Unit. Contact with members of Police Scotland was facilitated by the Victim Navigators. Participants included those working in the NHTU, but interviews were also conducted with officers from other Police Scotland divisions in Scotland who had been in contact with Victim Navigators and were identified by them to take part in the evaluation. The interviews included officers with varied responsibilities and ranks. Some officers dealt with human trafficking and exploitation on a regular basis while others had limited experience. Nevertheless, all officers interviewed had worked with Victim Navigators.

Interviews with Police Scotland took place both online and in person. Given that Police Scotland is one police force, it can be easy to identify participants and during these interviews, discussions of ongoing cases took place. Adhering to our ethics application and principles of sensitivity and confidentiality, care has been taken to remove as much identifiable information as possible concerning cases or officers.

Victim-Survivors

Understanding the experiences of victim-survivors who are part of the Programme was central to understanding its effectiveness. As victim-survivors are a hidden population and are often facing challenging circumstances, it was agreed early on by all involved that contact through Victim Navigators was the most ethical and trauma-informed approach. While this does mean that the data gathered from victim-survivors is based on a sample that may be positively predisposed to the Navigator Programme, Navigators were best placed to consider who may be willing and able to take part. Information sheets and consent forms designed for victim-survivors were reviewed and simplified by a volunteer who teaches English to survivors in Caritas Bakhita House, which supports victims of modern slavery. Although the research team has extensive experience in working with this participant group, this measure ensured that the forms were understandable and appropriate, particularly as they were being passed through Navigators and discussed with potential participants. Navigators provided potential participants with the evaluator's email address and phone number, enabling the victim-survivor to choose when to make contact, or not. When a victim-survivor contacted the researcher, they were responded to within 24 hours, asked if they had received the information and consent sheets (and in some cases forwarded them again), and invited to ask any questions they may have. Through conversations which took place via text messages, the researcher agreed on a time and location that suited the victim-survivor. Although the research team was happy to travel, all but one interview took place online, as requested by the victim-survivor. Time spent with each victim-survivor ranged from 1-4 hours. These interviews were conducted by a member of the evaluation team who has extensive training and experience in working with victim-survivors of MSHT, violence, and trauma. Semi-structured interview guides utilised the same design as those for Justice and Care's evaluation of the Navigator Programme in England, which was also reviewed by Caritas Bakhita House.

The evaluation team did not ask questions regarding the victim-survivors' experience of MSHT nor did they gather personal or demographic information regarding the victim-survivors. It was agreed with Justice and Care that there was no need for this data to be gathered by the evaluation team. The focus was on interviewees' experience from the point of their introduction to, or learning about, the Victim Navigator Programme. At all times, the victim-survivors were given space and time to discuss and disclose what they wished to, and the interviews were conducted in a manner that was conversational, respectful, and safe. When conducting research with those who have experienced trauma, interviewers can at times perform dual roles of data collector and support provider and, drawing from feminist interviewing methods and the researcher's experience and training in working with this participant group, compassion and expressions of empathy and support were also important in the interviews to ensure that the encounters were positive for the victim-survivors, and the victim-survivors' experience of the

interview was – in some way - uplifting, rather than re-traumatising. Although the purpose of the interviews was to gather information regarding the Victim Navigator Programme, victim-survivor well-being was prioritised. No questions were asked regarding victim-survivors' experiences of harm, although as the interview progressed and rapport was built with the researcher, participants often disclosed details regarding their experience of MSHT. Care has been taken in the storage and presentation of data from victim-survivors to remove identifiable information. The data collected was anonymised and pseudonyms were assigned. Victim-survivors often shared personal triumphs or specific instances of success, facilitated by the support received from Navigators, however following ethical principles, this information cannot be included in the report as each person had unique experiences and examples. Alongside well-being, victim-survivor safety is a priority. As the Navigator service works with those who are engaging or have previously engaged with Police Scotland, victim-survivor safety is a priority alongside well-being.

Stakeholders

As the Victim Navigator Programme now sits within a wider support network for victim-survivors in Scotland, other stakeholders that have worked with the Programme in some ways were invited to take part as well as those who work within this network of support. Stakeholders were also identified by the Navigators, with the evaluation team initiating contact with them. Questions to this participant group focused more generally on their own work with victim-survivors as well as how they worked with Victim Navigators, including if and how the Navigators added value to their collaboration. Challenges they encountered in support, and their knowledge and understanding of the Victim Navigator's role, were also explored. As those working in this area are easily identifiable in Scotland, care has been taken in the storage and presentation of the data to ensure that they are not identifiable.

Over the evaluation period, 31 people were interviewed. The largest number of interviews were conducted with police officers in Police Scotland who were based in the NHTU and within area Divisions. While this is the case, the evaluation team was conscious of ensuring that the voices of victim-survivors were also emphasised throughout the presentation of the findings as the Victim Navigator Programme is a victim-centred one. While recruitment of victim-survivors is challenging, it was important to include all insights, suggestions, and opinions of victim-survivors that were provided and that would be useful to the ongoing work of Justice and Care and the Programme.

Table 1: Total number of research interviews across the evaluation as a whole

Participants interviewed	Number of interviews
Police Scotland	12
Specialist organisations working with survivors	6
Government agencies	3
Victim Navigators and Programme Manager	4
Victim-survivors	6

Additional information was provided by Justice and Care to support the wider evaluation. This features where there is the presentation of statistics or other figures. This included but was not limited to results of a quantitative analysis conducted by Justice and Care of data stored on their Case Management System (CMS) which detailed a range of data related to Navigators’ activities around strategic advice, supporting victims-survivors, assessment of well-being, and training, and copies of their reports to the Scottish Government’s Victim-Centred Approach Fund that documented their progress.

Data Storage and Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded either using an audio-recording device or Teams. These were stored on the University of Stirling’s secure OneDrive and accessible only by the evaluation team. Recordings were deleted once transcripts were checked for accuracy. Transcripts were anonymised and other identifiable information was removed. This process of securing the data took place within 24 hours of data collection.

Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis¹¹ guided by our interest in exploring the work of the Programme according to the five workstreams and to identify if the desired outcomes of the Programme had been met. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify patterns (or themes) in data and was chosen as the evaluation explored perceptions and experiences of several different participant groups. The evaluation team highlighted and documented initial observations of the data across each of the participant groups, followed by primarily semantic coding. This meant exploring the data in terms of the surface or explicit meanings presented, capturing what participants are directly saying. While this research was not theory-driven, Justice and Care indicated during the research design phase and subsequent check-ins that they were also interested in areas of improvement or complexity. Latent coding was therefore used to explore what people say with greater interpretive depth, for example, to uncover underlying assumptions or ideas. While semantic coding was of greater focus during data analysis, latent coding proved useful in identifying an area of uncertainty that was identified during data collection which is useful for building on the success of the Programme.

¹¹ Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), pp.77-101. and Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2022. Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. Qualitative psychology, 9(1), p.3.

Data presented in the following section is therefore written around the themes that were identified from the data that allowed the research team to evaluate the outcomes based on the streams of work. This took place during what is an iterative process of reading, analysing, and discussing. A midline report was provided to Justice and Care with whom a discussion of emerging themes also took place.

Section Four: Findings

This section outlines the findings from the qualitative interviews across the life course of the evaluation. Where quotations have been included, care has been taken to reduce the possibility of identifying participants. In the case of victim-survivors, pseudonyms are used. Apart from Police Scotland and Victim Navigators, all other key professional stakeholders have been anonymised for the reporting of findings.

The first section comments on the specific achievements in relation to the Navigator workstreams for the service; followed by sections looking at; the perceptions about the role of the victim navigators; the value of the victim navigators as perceived by respondents; challenges and observations observed by the evaluation team.

Across the evaluation period, a substantial amount of data from key stakeholders was collated, in addition to the views of victim-survivors. Due to the sensitive nature of the material and specific references to potentially identifiable situations in a small country like Scotland, some of this, while evidence for the success of the programme, cannot be included in this report.

Meeting Programme Outcomes

Interviews with key stakeholders have clearly identified the importance attached to the development of the Victim Navigator programme in the Scottish context working with victims of human trafficking engaged in the criminal justice system. Participants viewed the role of Navigators as quickly becoming central to the support of victim-survivors and supporting other agencies within the criminal justice process, in addition to linking survivors to other services.

Through intensive casework Navigators delivered trauma-informed and victim-centred support and acted as an important bridge between survivors and criminal justice investigations. Working closely with Police Scotland and other key stakeholders, they have provided advice to live operations and delivered specialist training to help develop improvements in victim identification and care.

The Victim Navigator Programme has supported victim-survivors to access comprehensive support by adopting a holistic approach, addressing both immediate and longer-term needs. The programme has achieved this while also supporting survivor engagement with the criminal justice process. This has delivered operational benefits to law enforcement efforts as Victim Navigators

taking on more responsibility for victim support has enabled police officers to focus on investigative work.

In delivering on these key outcomes Victim Navigators, working closely with Police Scotland, have managed the complex and vital balance between welfare and justice objectives. Within the human trafficking framework in Scotland, support not being contingent on a positive National Referral Mechanism decision has also been an important consideration. The model demonstrates that with appropriate support and clear communication, survivor participation in justice processes has the potential to be both victim-centred and operationally valuable, and to contribute further to victim care in Scotland's anti-trafficking response.

Perceptions of the Role of the Victim Navigator

Across the data, the Victim Navigator Programme is understood to provide both focused support to victim-survivors and to facilitate, through this support, criminal justice processes. From Police Scotland's standpoint, they had three expectations for Victim Navigators.

Keeping people on board, freeing up detectives to do their work and ultimately providing a really good service to victims who have suffered at the hands of people and who have been exploited, at the hands of people who have shown them no humanity. (Police Scotland)

This facilitation, through support to victim-survivors, was highly regarded by Police Scotland, and victim-survivors experienced it firmly as a person-centred approach. These complementary views of the service underline the effectiveness of the programme and reflect different priorities and understanding.

Victim-survivor's understanding of the role of the Victim Navigator

For victim-survivors, when asked what they understood the role of the Navigator to be, their responses can be categorised in two main ways. Firstly, as one-to-one, dedicated support and secondly, as a bridge that could help facilitate contact and interactions with police and other services.

Victim-survivors navigate several different support services and contact with professionals, which they expressed can often be 'overwhelming' (Sarah, victim-survivor). The main role that victim-survivors understand Victim Navigators to hold is that of a key and consistent contact for them. Sarah was first introduced to the Victim Navigator Programme and the work of Justice and Care by Police Scotland. She explained that she was told there was this service that could assign someone to her who would be a key contact for 'everything':

At the time, I was dealing with a lot of professionals. I was dealing with a lot with the police... and I just wanted someone for that one-to-one support. (Sarah, victim-survivor).

A Police Scotland officer is required to seek consent from a victim prior to engagement with a Navigator, explaining the role as non-police and support orientated. Seeking consent occurs during police operations where Navigators are present, or if police identify a victim and later want to introduce them to the Navigator.

Obviously we need to ask for consent from the witnesses before we are allowed to pass on that information, but everyone I spoken to has consented to it, ...it's always been very well received when you say, look, there is a partner agency, there's a charity and you can speak with them, maybe just a phone call, first of all and you can see what they can offer you. (Police Scotland)

Navigating the various support organisations, alongside engaging in a criminal justice process, is challenging, and regular contact with Victim Navigators was appreciated by all victim-survivors interviewed. Ensuring that victim-survivors felt safe, informed, and comfortable was also considered to be a key part of the role.

The service they provided makes us feel at home like, yeah, be comfortable to talk to them. I think if you need anything then you contact them. I think they are a great help. (Jones, victim-survivor)

Another victim-survivor, Karl, pointed out that he felt 'very comfortable' at a time when he was 'just settling down' and 'had all [his] bad experiences on [his] mind'. On numerous occasions, Navigators were commended by victim-survivors for engaging with them in an informal and conversational manner to encourage them to discuss their life, their needs and even at times to just 'be normal' (Sarah, victim-survivor):

[The VN] made it explicitly, explicitly clear that any support that I need, I should just come out and [ask for it] and [the VN] will do their best to assist me with it. (Deliberate repetition of the word explicit. Karl, victim-survivor).

It was great to have someone around you to play with you [to talk about everyday things, to have some jokes, and to share things about your lives] (Karl, victim-survivor)

As victim-survivor needs and lives are often complex, they described Navigators as playing a key role in helping to identify their needs and signpost them to appropriate services, or initiate contact and refer them to services and specialists. With little desire to repeatedly discuss their experiences with numerous professionals, victim-survivors positioned and perceived Navigators as a bridge between themselves and other services. In some cases, this meant more timely responses to their needs, 'especially after everything starts to go a bit quiet with support or you've got less contact with other people' (Emma, victim-survivor).

Some of these needs were centred on clothing and food, particularly where food is supplied for victim-survivors as part of the support they receive when housed in hotel accommodation, for example. While no monetary support is provided,

a number of victim-survivors highlighted that they were taken shopping for basic necessities in terms of clothes and shoes and although it was expressed by Jones (victim-survivor) that in many ways having to rely on someone else for

I don't know what I would do without [VN], they have been there for me for everything... food, clothes, accommodation, work, just speaking to me and caring about me. I have been shocked to see how much they care. I was surprised.

(Jones, victim-survivor)

these everyday items felt 'humiliating and embarrassing', he also appreciated this kind of support and commended the Victim Navigator on managing this as kindly and sensitively as possible.

While identifying the needs of victim-survivors and signposting to services was noted as the primary responsibility of Victim Navigators and a core element of the Programme, some victim-survivors were confident that another core role of Navigators involved facilitating communication and contact with Police Scotland throughout the criminal justice process:

So, anything related to police work - and I don't feel comfortable talking to the police - I'll talk to Justice and Care. (Tom, victim-survivor)

Tom felt more relaxed speaking with the Navigators than with the police, although he made a particular note that this was not due to his dealings with the NHTU, but rather other encounters with police during his experience of being trafficked and seeking help. Jones' experiences echo this. Even hearing titles used by police can often 'feel like a tense moment' (Tom) and Tom described reactions to him, and his story, were often met with disbelief as he sought help and tried to explain what happened to him. The Navigators served as crucial intermediaries, facilitating dialogue between victim-survivors and officers while also ensuring victim-survivors' participation in police interviews and communications. As victim-survivors have experienced trauma, it is not always possible to recall details that the police may require, and so a key role of the Navigators from the perspective of interviewees was to also ensure that contact with the police was 'less daunting' (Jones, victim-survivor).

Police Scotland understanding of Victim Navigator's role

For police officers, the Victim Navigators are a bridge or mediator between themselves and the victim-survivor, as well as with other stakeholders. They pointed out that Navigators act as the 'conduit between the inquiry team, and the support to the victims, and the support from other agencies that were helping the victims' (Police Scotland). This position affords the police the ability to gather a holistic view of the individual.

Police officers identified the role of the Navigator as someone who can build a relationship of trust because they support the victim-survivor over a period of time. Due to the nature of the Programme being designed with the victim-survivor as the focus, Navigators have the time capacity for victim support that police do not.

...we've got a job just now with one victim who we recovered ... who's been getting exploited over three years, and [is] very vulnerable... The amount of time that the Victim Navigators have to spend with [them] in daily contact my team just wouldn't be able to do that. (Police Scotland)

Having somebody there who can effectively take your victim and do this sort of holistic overview of that person, really look after their welfare. I can prioritise a lot of other things and I can do a lot of things in the background, and I can free up my resources. Knowing that person's in very safe, capable hands and probably getting a far better level of service and treatment than a police officer could ever give them. (Police Scotland)

Being in this position of trust can enable Navigators to communicate more easily with victims who may not trust the police, either due to previous experience, cultural and social learning, or other impressions. As a result, victims of the crime of human trafficking who have support from a Navigator may be willing to share information with the police that they may have otherwise withheld.

Police officers in both the NHTU and in Divisions described how they try to include Navigators in operations so they can talk to victims and offer support. This can help open the door to further engagement with the police.

What [we] would tend to do is.... if you've got an investigation and we think there's potential victims there we will generally get the Victim Navigators involved... And we'll always tend, if we can, to... try and get that engagement from the start. And I think that's important because a lot of them don't want to speak to the police, but it gives them an alternative. You know, ... if you don't want to speak to the police, that's fine, but we've got victim Navigators here. (Police Scotland)

In addition, Navigators are asked to engage with potential victims where officers have concerns about their situation but find that the potential victim is unwilling to disclose information to the police. Navigators may identify information that has not been reported to the police that can aid the criminal investigation and may suggest the officer re-interview the victim.

Victim Navigator's understanding of their role

For Victim Navigators, the role is understood to be one that is all-encompassing and while there is a large focus on facilitating the criminal justice process through the support provided in the design of the Programme, Navigators also highlighted that a significant and much-needed amount of time is dedicated solely to welfare issues and support. This includes but is not limited to exploring issues of trauma and vulnerability, mental health, 'drugs, alcohol, homeless, all these kinds of things' (Victim Navigator) which involves being 'aware of what other partners or agencies are already working with them (victims)' (Victim Navigator). The role also enables them to identify possible victims to work with as well as take on referrals from police.

We sit in the coordination unit [in the Police Scotland Human Trafficking Unit]. We can see daily notes on trafficking or immigration indicators... as well as any NRMs... and we sort of review them and see what we can get involved with... and we reach out to the division [of the police] who's dealing with it. (Victim Navigator)

Victim Navigators also sit on numerous Scottish Government boards and attend meetings alongside victim support services. They therefore occupy a position where they are stationed within the specialist Police Scotland unit several times a week, but much of their work is being out visiting victim-survivors. This position means that they are often asked for training by partner agencies, for example, Police Scotland and Border Force. Over the course of the evaluation, this training has largely involved introducing Justice and Care and 'what [the VNs] can do to help support the investigations because [the police] do have a reasonable amount of training' and an '[already] reasonable understanding of the victim-centred approach' (Victim Navigator).

Navigators also highlighted the advocacy role they play in relation to striving for support for victims and their work with the police.

It's putting the victim at the heart of every sort of all the decisions we make. It's being aware of the trauma that the victims may have gone through and being trauma-informed as to how we actually go ahead with support plans and how we deal with the support plans and it's also trying to raise awareness amongst police colleagues as well about being victim-centred. (Victim Navigator)

Victim Navigators stressed that advocating for a victim-centred approach is central to their role, particularly in relation to the development of multi-partner police operations. Echoing the understanding of a Navigator role by victims, Navigators pointed out that they accompany victims to meetings with organisations, services, and the police, engage with Border Force and the Home Office where necessary, and offer advice and support for other bodies when requested or if there is a need to clarify, educate or identify potential cases of trafficking.

It's a triage system, and that's what we're meant to do is triage what we can support with, what we can't support, or report. We can maybe sign post to other support. (Victim Navigator)

We have the resource, if anybody needs to tap in and this resource then we are there to support whatever, whoever wants that support, if you know what I mean. (Victim Navigator)

Just being able to see that, to see someone starting from point A and then getting to point B and Point C and see the progress for that individual. (Victim Navigator)

Although there is a large emphasis in the Programme on supporting victim-survivors through criminal justice processes, each Navigator highlighted that

whether a victim-survivor was engaged in a criminal justice process, or not, they would still offer support and advice where necessary to relevant bodies dealing with the victim. Navigators do highlight, though, that the majority of their case load comes from police divisions, rather than through the NRM. This is important in terms of access to a service due to the challenges and possible impacts of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 in relation to the identification of victims and provision of support under the NRM.¹²

Navigators disclosed that, over time, their engagements with police divisions across Scotland have improved as they offered presentations and sessions on what they do.

And I mean, obviously there's like 13 divisions in Scotland. So, it's like anything, there's some who utilises the navigators more than others and it's just getting up that awareness out there that we are we are a support for them as well and we can help them with their investigations in terms of taking a lot of pressure off them. (Victim Navigator)

The Victim Navigator role manages an array of responsibilities towards the victim-survivor and the police that includes supporting victim-survivors during information gathering for investigations, being a bridge between victims and the police to ensure 'consistent engagement' (Victim Navigator), working with other key stakeholders, providing advocacy and support for victim-survivors, attending meetings, and providing advice and training.

I don't see it being different separate roles. I just see it as all part of the one. So, it's all a part of your job, but you work with slightly different people for some of the work... we work with everyone. (Victim Navigator)

Stakeholders interviewed worked in different ways with victim-survivors. For stakeholders working on issues of support, their understanding of the Navigator role was discussed in relation to what they knew about the Programme and what had been of value to them or their clients. This centred on a positive recognition of the Navigator's capacity to support with practical and financial needs.

You know when it comes to emotional support and stuff like that [the Navigator] will provide that and there's been times where the females have reached their full capacity with food banks and stuff. And so [the Navigator] will look at, you know, financial support there for the females to make sure that they're still continuing to eat. You know, they've got a safe place. (Stakeholder)

The increased regular contact Navigators were able to provide in addition to the type of support was also described as 'absolutely amazing' (Stakeholder).

Other stakeholders highlighted the role of Victim Navigators in aiding the identification of potential victims of trafficking at the border and providing support. The pilot Programme has involved Navigators providing training, advice, and support to Border Force staff if it has detained someone and expresses a concern that they may be a victim of trafficking.

¹² Magugliani D, Trajer J, Gauci JP (2024) Assessing the Modern Slavery Impacts of the Nationality and Borders Act: One Year On https://www.biicl.org/documents/183_naba_report__biicl_branding_final.pdf

One stakeholder defined the Navigators' key function as safeguarding possible victims.

We'll explain the NRM and if they don't want the NRM, what we can then say is OK we understand, but here is Justice and Care. Justice and Care can assist you in a variety of ways. ...and we'll explain a little bit about Justice and Care's role, and we'll ask would you like one of the Victim Navigators to contact you? They will contact you by telephone. ... Everything you say is in confidence And generally, we would get a better rate of success because there is no connection. (Stakeholder)

While different stakeholders remain focused on their own roles, nearly all recognise that Navigators can provide both advice and support to potential victims — and to organisations themselves — enabling informed decision-making. In addition, Navigators interaction with external agencies have helped victim-survivors in seeking work and in gaining employment.

The position of Victim Navigators as being independent is viewed as a core element of the role and is particularly useful when engaging with concerns of trafficking in different locations where they may be identified. The Navigators are seen as important for building trust with victim-survivors because of their location and close working relationship with Police Scotland, being perceived as a bridge to potential victims to aid an investigation.

[Navigator's] got a fantastic way about her... instantly can build a rapport and ... when we say we've got concerns, [we ask the Navigator] could you maybe have a chat and see what you get? She's not the law. She's not going to send them home. (Stakeholder)

With the support of the Victim Navigator Programme, stakeholders have expressed their ability to engage more with their core work, while the Navigators focus on the various elements of victim support. One stakeholder provided an example of Navigators being able to distribute leaflets about labour rights in various languages. In this respect, a key responsibility of the Victim Navigator and the Programme is to educate and raise awareness amongst both victim-survivors and stakeholders.

The Value of Victim Navigators

This section explores the Victim Navigators' key contributions through three areas: their role in delivering holistic support to improve survivor outcomes, their unique position in facilitating engagement between victims and police, and their strategic expertise and training in strengthening investigative capacity — demonstrating the Programme's dual focus on both victim-survivor welfare and justice outcomes.

Improving outcomes for victim-survivors due to holistic oversight of needs and collaboration with other key stakeholders

Data provided by Victim Navigators, Justice and Care's CMS, key stakeholders, and survivors indicate that survivors have received a wide range of support, over extended periods of time, based on their individual needs. This support has been flexible and responsive to changes in needs.

Through intensive casework and regular engagement with victim-survivors, Victim Navigators are well-placed to develop an overview of the victim's needs and tracking these. Gathering information on needs begins from the Navigators' first encounter with victims, where the focus is on introducing themselves, explaining what the role of the Victim Navigator may entail, and building a rapport. From the first meeting and in those that follow, Navigators can find out what support has already been received, other services that the individual is in contact with, what their most pressing needs are, and what their relationship and contact has been like with Police Scotland. CMS records show that Navigators are well-resourced to meet basic needs, including safe accommodation, food, clothing, a mobile phone, and support with utilities, to name a few. The Victim Navigator can financially support some of these needs where externally provided resources are inadequate or not available. Navigators referred to ensuring survivors had access to food through food banks or purchased it when survivors indicated they lacked food. Ensuring survivors had access to gas and electricity was also viewed as necessary as well as supplies for babies.

... they have been getting by, but it's been a struggle for them. And so like, I regularly end up purchasing gas and electricity for them and when I go and visit them because they're gas and electricity is running low. I was actually up yesterday. She ran out a baby milk for the little boy and so I got baby milk. I don't know if there's maybe some issues going on with the kid as well, at this stage he is almost two, but he's struggling to walk, so I've got a baby walker as well to try and help him. (Victim Navigator)

Support may also involve navigating issues around alcohol and drugs, immigration status, and unemployment, all of which are integral to victim-survivors' recovery. One of the stakeholders referenced what they perceived to be an important partnership between a Navigator, drug and alcohol worker, and a women's aid worker.

[Drug and alcohol worker] will focus more on the drug side of things. I look at safety planning and risk assessing, looking at trauma. But we worked really quite closely all three of us together on the kind of support, to do the best that we can and fill gaps in terms of safety planning, providing practical support, and helping with appointments (Stakeholder)

Other stakeholders working with victim-survivors echoed the value of the Navigators in providing support:

[The Navigator] as you know, is based in Glasgow but her support has been phenomenal in terms of what she provides to the females, and you know when it's coming to all the criminality stuff and things like that [the Navigator] has always been there. (Stakeholder)

Both substance or alcohol abuse and immigration status were issues that Navigators identified as affecting survivors' recovery but also their ability to reintegrate. Navigators worked with the relevant stakeholders to try and ensure survivors received the short or often longer-term services they needed to be able to make decisions and to move to new stages on their journey to more independence.

So, everybody's doing their own wee bit, but we are all kind of talking and making sure that any victim that wants that support, that they are getting the right support from the right people. (Victim Navigator)

Resolving immigration issues enabled one Navigator to help survivors obtain paid employment where they had a legitimate contract and would be paid a fair wage. These opportunities arose due to the Navigator's engagement with different organisations and charities. Access to work was seen as a very positive outcome, according to a Navigator and a victim who said:

I've been able to work with some organisations, charities in Scotland... and they [the survivor] actually just got their contract through yesterday for employment. So, they've been offered a job. It's their first wage... and they're absolutely delighted. (Victim Navigator)

Getting a job. It's like I'm a person again. I want to work. I want to have a proper contract and not work [illegally] or feel uncomfortable with what life I am living. (Jones, victim-survivor)

Being able to work can be empowering for victims as well as helping them regain their independence and dignity.

I think when you've been not able to work for such a long period, because they (the survivor) are really conscientious and just want to work and I think they get a little bit embarrassed when I have to buy them clothes, for example. So, they said to me 'I really appreciate that [Victim Navigator], but I would rather be able to buy my own clothes'. (Victim Navigator)

The ability to uncover and explore the needs and issues that face victim-survivors and in emotionally intelligent ways, is aided by the time and dedication to building relationships of trust. Trust building between victim-survivors and Navigators is an iterative process. Victim-survivors pointed out that the key value of Navigators was that after initial contact, the Navigators stayed in contact, often meeting up or speaking more regularly at the beginning. Navigators would indicate if they would be on annual leave and who to contact in their absence, and that transparency was appreciated. Meeting to talk and have lunch often provided time that was viewed as therapeutic for victim-survivors where conversations could also be on 'normal

things' (Sarah, victim-survivor). When asked about the value of a Navigator, one victim-survivor stated:

I would probably say the counselling aspect of it [of the support provided by the Victim Navigator], like holding me as a person again because I was a shell.... I just was in pieces, and I just didn't want to live anymore. Like I genuinely didn't, and they made me see like life can be amazing again and reminded me of things I've done in the past... She kind of bought my confidence up as well because I had really no self-esteem after all that happened, and she was just kind of like my rock. (Sarah, victim-survivor)

Similarly, Karl felt that over time, he had formed a strong bond with his Navigator and recalled fondly the interactions that reminded him that he could trust people:

It was very good, very comfortable, and I really loved it, and I simply can't forget about those moments. He psyched me up to look at things in a positive direction, so yes, he did a lot for me. (Karl, victim-survivor).

Almost all victim-survivors interviewed provided similar sentiments. The support that is provided to victim-survivors through the Programme and the ability to understand the intersection of issues that victim-survivors are facing can facilitate recovery and reintegration. The support provided to each individual is different and dealt with on a case-by-case basis and although a key aim of the Victim Navigator Programme is to facilitate the criminal justice process, support for individuals is not tied to their participation in a criminal justice investigation, nor does it end immediately post-trial. With reference to one victim-survivor in the Programme, a Navigator pointed out their person-centred and victim-led approach:

We're gonna be led by her really, as to support...if she wants support after the sentencing... but we certainly wouldn't just shut the door. I'll just, yeah, definitely put her needs first... (Victim Navigator)

Victim-survivors reported feeling they were centred in the Programme. They expressed that having someone who cared about them was important for their journey of recovery. Jones (victim-survivor) admitted feeling shocked that, after a period of disengaging with the Programme and with Police Scotland, the Navigator continued to pursue him, expressing deep concern for his wellbeing, and sounding relieved when they were back in contact.

I couldn't believe it. He really cared. That is.... He really cared. He was so worried, and I found it strange that he cared so much. (Jones, victim-survivor)

This level of care and concern, regular contact, and regular discussions around what victims need is considered by victim-survivors as adopting a victim-centred approach. For Police Scotland respondents, the ability to show this level of care and take time to explore and understand needs was a key value of the Navigators as they reflected on their lack of time to provide what they would like to, or can see, is required.

...we've got a job just now with one victim who we recovered ... very vulnerable, alcohol dependent.... The amount of time that the victim navigators have to spend with him in daily contact my team just wouldn't be able to do that. (Police Scotland)

Being able to offer a level of support that other services do not provide, including the ability to communicate accurately regarding the criminal justice process, was expressed by some victim-survivors as particularly valuable.

It's not always easy to understand everything that's happening, you know. Sometimes there's just lots going on and then other times there's like nothing. So, it's just good to have someone who will take time to explain everything and help me understand what I need to do.
(Sarah, victim-survivor)

Victim Navigator's also reflected on this:

I've found the Navigator role more rewarding and satisfying. And because I think that when you get invested in someone and you're trying to help them and support them and you might be seeing the small improvements in their well-being, their mental health etcetera. Whereas I don't think you see that so much as a police officer because... a lot of it is reviewing evidence and seeing whether there's a crime and you're just dealing with suspects and there's very little time to be really focused on the victims. So, I mean, I think the role of the Victim Navigator has been a brilliant concept altogether, to bridge that. I think that was missing previously. And now you've got someone who's really embedded, invested in supporting that survivor.
(Victim Navigator)

Data from Justice and Care's CMS further indicates the range of other services that the Navigator helped survivors access as needed. These included medical care, psychological support, substance and alcohol abuse support, advice about

their immigration status and/or other legal issues. Victim-survivors highlighted that all of this support is offered during conversations with Navigators and it is clear that Navigators have been able to identify relevant local services to meet survivors' needs, and help survivors access them, as one Navigator said: when all the partners are working together, then it makes a big difference (Victim Navigator).

Despite the support provided by the Navigators and other services, survivors' journeys are not always straightforward or have positive resolutions. In one instance shared with the evaluation team, the Navigators had to deal with the death of a survivor who was in their care, who struggled with addiction and wanted to work but was unable to due to their immigration status.

It is clear that Victim Navigators have developed a successful partnership with Police Scotland. This is based on the positive feedback from police officers based in the NHTU where Victim Navigators are embedded, as well as officers based in Police

I would probably say the counselling aspect of it [of the support provided by the Victim Navigator], like holding me as a person again because I was a shell.... I just was in pieces, and I just didn't want to live anymore. Like I genuinely didn't, and they made me see like life can be amazing again and reminded me of things I've done in the past... She kind of bought my confidence up as well because I had really no self-esteem after all that happened, and she was just kind of like my rock

(Jones, victim-survivor)

Scotland divisions. This positive feedback has been delivered based on officers' experience of receiving strategic advice from Navigators or enabling Victim Navigators to provide support plans to victims who were identified and consented to receive support. The increased number of requests for advice or help from the NHTU and the divisions attest to the value that Navigators bring to an operation/ investigation and to ensuring victims are identified and adequately supported.

Victim Navigators have also been willing to work with victim-survivor referred from relevant partner agencies that are not Police Scotland. For example, they have worked within the Scottish Prison Service as a trusted point of contact where a prisoner is seeking to disclose information about a potential human trafficking case or when prisoners are released post-conviction and recognised as a victim of human trafficking.

[The Navigator] went into prison to speak to a guy in prison and they've called us to go and have that deep prisoner debrief because he wouldn't talk to anybody else. So that's really important. You know that there's that sort of trust, I suppose, in that space. (Justice and Care)

Importantly, individuals who engage with the Victim Navigator Programme are made aware that the on-going support is not conditional on their engagement with police.

So, one of the biggest things was that they knew that they were getting that help and support irrelevant of whether they gave us a statement at the end of it or not. (Police Scotland)

It is the ongoing and often long-term support that Victim Navigators are able to provide which is impactful on victims, and for police and their investigations. One of the officer's indicated that one of the victims who had experienced a number of serious issues had been able to turn their life around. This was attributed to the strength of the victim and to the support provided by the Victim Navigator.

And for that turn around in 18 months is absolutely phenomenal and is about the strength that she's got. I certainly put that down to the fact that [the Navigator] was holding her hand along the way. (Police Scotland)

I honestly can't speak highly enough about [the Victim Navigator, they] were there for everything and it wasn't just the court stuff and the police stuffs, [they], like they just always listened... Honestly, I'm doing well. I'm doing great. I'm feeling much more like myself now (Sarah, victim-survivor)

Acting as a bridge between Police Scotland and victim-survivors enhances police capacity, information gathering, and victim-survivor engagement with criminal justice processes

As the Victim Navigator Programme was designed to support engagement with criminal justice processes, both Navigators and Police Scotland recognise the valuable role that Navigators play in building trust with victim-survivors, in communicating information about criminal proceedings, and in facilitating communication and contact. The support provided to victim-survivors has contributed to capacity building, evidence gathering, and criminal prosecutions.

Throughout the three-year evaluation, police officers highlighted how Navigators allowed them to concentrate on the criminal investigation.

They allow.....detectives in the team to focus specifically on police work, detective work, getting to the bottom of things. And that's not minimizing our approach to victim engagement or anything in any way shape or form. I suppose just with the recognition that Justice and Care Victim Navigators are way better at doing that than my detectives are, and we should always play to people's strengths, so it allows my guys and girl [police officers] to remain engaged and actually doing the police work and doing the detective work. (Police Scotland)

Police Scotland noted the complexity and longevity of support that was needed and indicated it was not something they could provide. Officers identified that they did not have links to the range of support services needed by survivors due to their complex needs and did not always have the time or resources to acquire these links. As a result, the support they would have provided would not match the quality that Navigators are able to provide:

I just know if [the Victim Navigators] are involved they keep the person engaged, they keep them safe, they're keeping them ok, they're keeping them updated, I don't need to worry about that constantly. I could get a victim statement today and a year down the line we're ready to take the case to court and the victims no longer engaged but if they are there, they are constantly keeping them engaged. (Police Scotland)

Moreover, given the demands on their time, as they were often working on multiple investigations, police officers often did not have the capacity to engage with victims-survivors as regularly as Navigators. Furthermore, Police Scotland recognised that at the end of an investigation or a prosecution, their engagement with a victim would end. They viewed it as significant that Navigators did not have this boundary, and that support was not time-bound in the way it would have been for them as police officers.

Officers described the benefits of Victim Navigators to the victims-survivors but also to themselves. For example, they indicated that Navigators would be able to offer a wider range of support than what the police could provide.

She facilitated getting clothing, accommodation, food, everything for our victim. She'd arrange forensic medicals as well. ... She took the victim to our facility to get that procedure carried out and effectively babysat the child as well. Social work were involved at that point and [the Navigator] was very good at probably relating things in a non-police fashion to social work, more of an independent kind of capacity. (Police Scotland)

The need to keep victims safe, given they are 'at risk' (Police Scotland) is a key concern of the officers in the NHTU.

I can guarantee you if someone phoned in now about an incident we're dealing with, my first question would be who is the victim, where are they and what are they doing about that and for me the Victim Navigators answer that first part...The moment I have some comfort that those people are safe and there are other people we're going to try and track down and put in a place of safety, I can relax a bit and then go back to conventional policing. (Police Scotland)

Another key benefit that has been reiterated by officers is that they have obtained much more evidence from the victim based because of the support provided by dedicating time to victim-survivors, Navigators appear to 'open lines of communication' to the police.

I don't think we would have got this sort of statement and the level of information we got from the victim ... had somebody impartial [the Navigator] not been in place I think as well with them, particularly [foreign] nationals, the police service is very different in [country X] to us in the UK. (Police Scotland)

I don't think, without the Navigators, we would have ever had this consistent engagement with them... We've noticed a real improvement in a lot of them [victim-survivors] to a point where they feel more comfortable coming and providing their statements [etc]. (Police Scotland)

Building trust and a feeling of safety was facilitated by the relationship that Navigators have with Police Scotland and their ability to act as a bridge between the police and victim-survivors when victim-survivors perhaps felt unable or unwilling to engage. For victim-survivors, this reduced the feelings of pressure around disclosing all information at once. As previously highlighted by Sarah (victim-survivor) and others, there can be issues in recalling evidence due to the trauma that has been experienced.

If there's anything I've also not told the police, [the VN] can assist me with it. [The VN] will tell the police to come back to me or better still, aid me to meet the police so I can give them the other information I think I've left out from my statement. (Victim-Survivor, Karl)

Despite some reservations about engaging with the police more generally, victim-survivors pointed out that their interactions with the National Human Trafficking Unit had been largely positive and this was due to their experience of working

I don't think, without the Navigators, we would have ever had this consistent engagement with them... We've noticed a real improvement in a lot of them [victim-survivors] to a point where they feel more comfortable coming and providing their statements [etc]. (Police Scotland)

on numerous human trafficking cases. One victim-survivor highlighted feeling relieved when he was put in contact with the NHTU officers because he felt he had not been believed by 'the other ones'. His experience of the NHTU was positive because 'they are not just regular ones, this kind, they're kind of high up or they know their stuff' (Tom, victim-survivor). Although it was viewed by victim-survivors that it is the role of the police to communicate regarding the progression of any criminal case, half of the victim-survivors pointed out that, helpfully, communication and information regarding investigations and court systems was also delivered through Navigators.

[The Navigator] is going beyond his boundaries sometimes just to make sure we get every piece of information we need, He keeps telling me everything he gets to know about the case. (Karl, victim-survivor)

The Victim Navigator's ability to communicate complex court processes and discuss movements in cases was valued by victim-survivors for making the information more accessible and understandable, as well as limiting direct contact with the police. All of this can contribute to a reduction of potential further trauma. Limiting contact with the police was something that all victim-survivors said they would prefer and, in this respect, the early presence of a Navigator in police operations provided opportunities to build rapport with the potential victim, and place victims' needs and concerns at the centre of the conversation. As a result, the Navigator was often able to obtain information that suggested 'red flags' or 'indicators of exploitation' (Police Scotland) or enabled the victim to share this information directly with the police.

These conversations also enabled Navigators to provide information about options for victim-survivors in terms of support, for example, the NRM or other services if the NRM was refused, and about engagement with police and what a criminal investigation might entail. Navigators were seen as important actors in terms of safeguarding the victim and ensuring that appropriate support was put into place. Navigators were able to reach out to people where divisional police had concerns and "find out about their finances, how long they had been in the country, whether they have access to their national identification card, a passport, bank, access to cash" (Police Scotland), what they referred to as 'red flags' or 'indicators' of trafficking or exploitation.

So, say for example. we've identified an individual that we've had that contact with already. We present those circumstances, and we ask [if the Navigator's] available to go in and make a further approach, given she's got a lot more knowledge of different support agencies people could be referred on to. [Or] For example, if a financial aspect is preventing a disclosure. So, she has that working knowledge from her experience. ... (Police Scotland)

CMS data suggests that the vast majority of survivors who have been supported by Victim Navigators have been willing to engage with police, and in particular provide intelligence and evidence in the form of witness statements or willingness to participate in a prosecution and provide testimony in court.

Table on Victims Engagement with Police

Type of engagement	Number of Victims	% of Victims
Providing a Victim Statement	33	60%
Supporting prosecution	15	28%
Providing intelligence or information to police on record	3	6%
Willing to take phone calls / meet with police but not submit information on record	2	4%
No engagement	1	2%

In a number of cases in Scotland, it has been possible to arrange, through the Procurator Fiscal's office, evidence by commission so that victims do not have to appear in court. Human trafficking victims have been identified as vulnerable and thus offered measures to reduce the level of trauma in providing testimony for a prosecution. A benefit of this partnership with the Procurator Fiscal's office for survivors is that it, "just makes the whole scenario, the whole situation much calmer and less traumatic" (Victim Navigator).

Over the three years of the pilot Programme Victim Navigators have recorded 67 Strategic Advice cases and supported 54 victims with support plans. They have also provided training to 345 police officers. All these activities have increased Police Scotland's capacity to investigate modern slavery cases.

Navigators' ability to build a relationship with victims-survivors has been viewed as crucial to victims' engagement with police and to supporting a prosecution and this was particularly clear throughout one particular case in Scotland that unfolded throughout the course of the evaluation. Navigators' role to accompany victims-survivors on their journey has meant that they are able to offer long-term support over the lengthy period of a criminal investigation and prosecution. From a criminal justice perspective, it is this focus which enables successful criminal justice outcomes.

The biggest focus for an inquiry is to keep victims engaged with the criminal justice process, because if that fails then the case collapses... So, the Victim Navigators, their primary focus for me is to they do everything they can to try and support that person and keep them engaged so that they can go to court and give evidence against that particular suspect. (Police Scotland)

From an operational perspective, an officer in the NHTU highlighted the difference to police officers, in terms of stress, and to successful criminal justice outcomes, when Victim Navigators become part of a team that works to identify and protect victims. He provided an example where the complexity involved with an international human trafficking group operating in the UK meant too little attention was given to the victims. Progressing the case entailed 'telecoms work, flight manifests, CCTV, financial work, we didn't have time to go anywhere near the victims. It was hugely challenging given the size of the team. And getting the evidence. And we definitely lost sight of trying to support them' (Police Scotland). As a result, by the time the

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(Police Scotland)

case was ready to go to court, the officers had to try and locate the victims as witnesses. They were spread across Europe and officers had little knowledge of their well-being.

So, I've lived life without Navigators, and I've seen how stressful it was and then coming here and seeing the role now where they take that onus away from the police, it's an important development that I was actually impressed with. And actually, when I landed here... I was keen to know about what they had done and really keen to use them across the force. (Police Scotland)

It is evident that the NHTU, over the years of the pilot, valued embedding the Victim Navigators in the Unit and sought to ensure they felt they were key partners of the team and were

aided in all facets of their work. It is also clear that they have promoted Navigators across Police Scotland through their incorporation in key training activities nationally and locally as well as reminding officers at a divisional level that the Navigators can support them when NHTU sees a new human trafficking related on their database. Officers' reference to a number of cases going to court is illustrative of the links between victim support provided by Victim Navigators, victim engagement with the police, and the prosecution of offenders which officers indicate have improved the response to human trafficking and modern slavery across the course of the pilot. For example:

I think if the Victim Navigators weren't there that would never have gone to court, never in a month of Sundays was that going to court. (Police Scotland)

Recognition of the added support provided by Victim Navigators was also highlighted by other stakeholders.

But I can say that without the supporters and the human trafficking navigators there is no way that we would have been able to get to court. (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service)

Navigators have worked closely with other stakeholders to ensure that the special measures for vulnerable witnesses were implemented and that the survivors met staff from the Procurator Fiscal's office. At times victim-survivors were also able to give evidence by commission, which meant they did not have to attend court.

I think we've worked quite hard with the Procurator Fiscal as well as the police and they've been super 100% on board trying to keep these [victims] engaged as well. So, they've created spaces where from a long time back, [victims] have been introduced to the procurator fiscal and the lawyer that's going to be presenting the case. So, there's no kind of mysticism about who are these people, sort of thing. and they're available anytime if they get any questions or anything like that. (Victim Navigator)

Victim Navigators have played several crucial roles that supported the work being done by Police Scotland and other relevant stakeholders, in prosecutions, with Police Scotland pointing out that:

Honestly, in almost 20 years in the police I've never seen a model like this as a model for best practice in victim support areas, in policing, criminal justice, prosecution, victim-centred. It's a model for best practice.

(Police Scotland)

A senior stakeholder expressed their gratitude to the Victim Navigators for their assistance and making the meetings regarding one particular case a success.¹³ Moreover, in recognition of their outstanding work providing support to survivors over the course of one case, the Navigators were awarded a Divisional Commanders Award and Recognition for 'Policing Partner of the Year', with a Senior Officer saying: '... your work and support has been outstanding- not just for the victims, but to my team also'.¹⁴

Justice and Care's theory of change assumes that if survivors are supported by the Victim Navigators, which builds a relationship of trust, they will be more willing to engage with the police. The evaluation indicates that Victim Navigators building this trust and providing support has resulted in engagement which has the potential to improve criminal justice outcomes.

Providing strategic advice and training that is informed by expertise and experience and which supports both Police Scotland and victim-survivors

A key aspect of the Navigator role was to provide strategic advice to police officers carrying out trafficking investigations across Police Scotland. The following material from Justice and Care's CMS records exemplifies the strategic advice work they are doing with the NHTU and police in different divisions within Police Scotland. This can be summarized as:

- Operational Support: Assisting in planning operations (e.g., hit days and reception centres) and advising on victim engagement strategies, including statement-taking approaches.
- Intelligence & Case Development: Advising officers on Victim Navigator support services to inform evolving intelligence and investigations.
- NRM Guidance: Advising officers on NRM processes and the use of reception centres for victims.
- Victim-Centred Approaches: Offering tailored advice on interacting with vulnerable individuals, including potential trafficking victims, with a focus on trauma-informed methods.
- Early Intervention: Providing initial guidance on identifying trafficking indicators in cases initially flagged as domestic abuse, including signs of modern slavery.
- Accessibility: Ensuring officers have contact details and out-of-hours support for urgent advice.

The number of officers seeking advice increased over the duration of the pilot

¹³ A letter sent to a Victim Navigator and shared with the evaluation team

¹⁴ Justice and Care Victim-Centred Approach Fund Report 2024

Programme which the Navigators attributed to word of mouth and the training they offered nationally and at divisional level about their role and what they had to offer. It was also because they were proactive and would reach out to officers to offer assistance in relation to a case that appeared on the NHTU daily crime note.¹⁵

And I just think the word is getting out there slowly but surely that actually Navigators would really help their investigations. (Victim Navigator)

Trained Human Trafficking Champions based in the 13 divisions have also helped cascade information about human trafficking and the Victim Navigator Programme downwards. In addition, the NHTU has been pro-active in promoting the Victim Navigators and the support they can provide to officers when a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral will require a police investigation at divisional level.

I would say anytime the NRMs are coming to me, there's normally followed by an e-mail or a phone call from somebody at the National Human Trafficking [Unit] to say we're here if you need us. The Navigators are here. Do you need a Navigator? Do you need support? So yeah, the National Human Trafficking Unit, very, very quick to try and push the Navigators out to help us and [the Navigator's] very quick to volunteer as well. (Police Scotland)

Victim Navigators provided strategic advice regarding a victim strategy for special action days where Police Scotland focused on coordinating operational activity. Navigators made suggestions about a victim-centred approach and the role they could play on the day, emphasising the importance of safeguarding and the NRM process. Navigators might also suggest other agencies that officers could work with to plan a multi-agency safeguarding response. In some cases, Navigators provided expert advice to less experienced police officers about human trafficking and a victim-centred approach in such circumstances. In some situations, they also provided tips on indicators of trafficking to aid the investigation, as well as how to identify a victim.

So, we would go along with them, and we would give them advice about what to do. So, for example, they might have never encountered a victim they might not know the process of the NRM referral, that the victim, if they consent, if they're an adult, then do the NRM. So, we could give them advice around that, could give them advice around the causes of human trafficking. What they're looking for and how they should maybe going to progress it and then what we can do, you know that we can step in and speak to the victims and, you know, safeguard them. (Victim Navigator)

Being embedded in Police Scotland (but not being a member of Police Scotland) promotes police officers' trust in the Victim Navigators. In addition, with the Victim Navigator Programme being promoted and supported by the NHTU, police officers appear more willing to seek and/or accept advice and assistance from Navigators. One Navigator reflected on this acceptance by Police Scotland and being embedded in the Trafficking Unit: 'I think 100% the fact we are embedded. I would say it's a selling point of the whole, the whole Programme.'

¹⁵ Daily crime note is used to indicate a daily report or summary that officers may use to document incidents and track ongoing investigations.

Police Scotland highlighted that having Navigators whose day-to-day role is dedicated to understanding legal and support frameworks was beneficial within the Trafficking Unit:

Just someone that has a far better knowledge of human trafficking and the processes and the kind of legislative frameworks around things and how things work as much as I hold the portfolio for Police Scotland about that ... I really don't have a complete knowledge of it. So having somebody who lives and breathes that every day. It's unbelievably beneficial. (Police Scotland)

The data gathered during the evaluation suggests that a strong collaborative relationship has developed over time where some divisional officers feel able to initiate calls to the Navigators for assistance and advice to inform support during investigations as well as their approach to dealing with victim-survivors.

They [officers] know what [the Navigator] is doing, and [the Navigator] kind of knows what we are doing, so that if we ever needed to pick up the phone and say, can you assist with this, then there is that very quick response to say, 'OK, I'm up to speed with this. Yes, I can support or can't and here's the reasons why'. (Police Scotland)

The close relationship between police and Navigators was also expressed as having an influence on policing response to victims of human trafficking, which Navigators felt was part of their role:

It's probably changed some of my colleagues in CID's view on how we can police differently through the support of multi agencies because it's not just about identifying the crime, getting a statement, getting a bad person in the jail, and moving on. It's about the aftermath and the impact that it can have on a victim. (Police Scotland)

So, we had to allow them their own space to make their own decisions, to come to us, but whilst also balancing off our operational needs and effectively getting what we needed to achieve to help others and protect others... They filled a lot of gaps we had and helped us to create and mould this approach that we had of the victim engagement, which without them and without that plan, we would never have even come close to an inquiry. (Police Scotland)

They guided me a lot of the time about how we're going to protect the victims, first and foremost' (Police Scotland).

The Victim Navigators have provided training to 325 members of Police Scotland in different settings. The training they offered over the course of the evaluation covered an overview of Justice and Care and the role of the Victim Navigators, best practice for victim identification and care, use of the NRM, and the importance of a trauma-informed approach. Navigators provided case work examples of how they can provide strategic advice to police and how it assisted police in specific cases. They provide information about a victim-centred approach and the role that Navigators can play in a criminal investigation, as part of the specialist Human Trafficking Investigator courses run at the Scottish Police College. In addition, they have visited most of the divisional offices across Scotland to provide training on human trafficking, on how to spot the signs and indicators, and they have

described and explained their role of supporting victims which in turn can aid the police investigation.

It is the Navigators' accounts of the practical ways they have helped on specific human trafficking cases that acts as a key selling point across the criminal justice sector of the Victim Navigator Programme. The Navigators indicated they would like to do more training with front line police response teams, as these are the officers who might come across a situation where they might identify a possible victim of human trafficking. This training is seen as important because some police officers operating in response units may have limited knowledge of human trafficking in relation to the NHTU.

I mean, if a victim turns up a police station, it's those response officers who are going to get the call. They deal with them rather than CID. They'll get the inquiry once it progresses, but that initial engagement will be those frontline officers and they tend to be the ones that really don't know anything about human trafficking, 'cause it's not something they deal with regularly.... I can give them information or can give them scenarios. If a victim turns up a police station and says I'm a victim of human trafficking, this, this, and this has been happening to me. What do you do? So I'm able to fill those gaps and so that they know their role for that initial engagement and then put it into practice after that. (Victim Navigator)

There remain several challenges to delivering this training. According to the Navigators, a training session may be planned but, on the day, officers may not attend because they have other claims on their time which are seen as a higher priority. The long distances to reach some divisions means Navigators must allocate considerable time to reach out to the 13 divisions and they indicated that other commitments sometimes reduce the capacity to promote or provide training to all police officers who may respond to trafficking cases.

When the training has been fulfilled, Navigators request officers to complete a post-training survey. While only a small number of officers responded 80% (n=8) of those that do indicate that the training has 'improved their knowledge 'a lot' in relation to the particular needs of victims of modern slavery, how victims can be encouraged to engage with their investigation, how they can better support victims of modern slavery. 70% said the training improved their overall confidence in investigating modern slavery cases 'a lot'. Police officers also indicated that knowing about the Navigators might change how they did their job in the future. Those who completed the survey indicated that they may contact the Navigators for advice or to help them support a victim.

Victim Navigators have also provided training to other front-line providers including training to 243 additional individuals working for stakeholder organisations from March 2022 to end of February 2025.

Navigators have provided training to Border Force and to Immigration Compliance and Enforcement Teams. They have been invited by Border Force to participate in the three-day safeguarding course run in Glasgow, which identifies the problem of human trafficking, indicators to aid identification, and how Border Force needs to respond. Victim Navigators also contribute to highlighting their role, alongside other frontline services including the NHS, and Police Scotland.

These training activities have helped build collaborative responses. For example, Border Force has, in some situations, called the Navigators when they have identified someone at the Border who they consider to be a potential victim of human trafficking. As a result of this collaboration, more potential victims might be referred to the Victim Navigators and possibly to Police Scotland. The intention of the work with Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) Teams is also to help them have a better understanding of human trafficking and its signs so that they might identify victims and ensure they are safeguarded and may be referred into the NRM.

This training has also helped develop relationships with the Scottish Prison Services, whereby Navigators have been asked to talk to prisoners who have been identified as potential victims of human trafficking.

Supporting safe repatriations including liaison with support services in country of origin

Repatriation, where survivors express a desire to return to their home country, is also part of the support that can be provided by Navigators. In the three years of the Programme, they have helped seven survivors return home. This has entailed ensuring the survivor has the necessary documents, purchasing airplane tickets, liaising with organisations in the countries of origin to facilitate a safe return. For example, in one case 'they provided strategic advice and victim support in a case involving a... survivor, providing her with clothing and basic necessities, helping to arrange her requested repatriation to [country of origin] and local support upon her return'¹⁶. In another example the Navigators were working with a survivor, to help her and her baby return home. The Navigator was liaising with Immigration Enforcement who had key documents which were needed in order to provide a passport for the baby, as well as exploring a grant for voluntary return which would aid the survivors' resettlement. Thus, the Navigators are liaising across a number of agencies to help victims be repatriated, including support agencies in the country of origin:

So, once we get closer to the time where she can go back home, we can speak to her about continued support from a Victim Navigator in [country of origin] if that's something that she would like, which I'm sure she will. (Victim Navigator)

For officers supporting victims who wish to return to their country of origin, the Victim Navigator Programmes in the UK and internationally offer coordinated and continuous support. British Navigators facilitate travel, liaise with counterparts in the victim-survivor's country of origin, who then meet the individual upon arrival and escort them to safe accommodation. Ongoing support is tailored to the individual's specific needs, with Navigators also working to understand the underlying factors such as vulnerability to trafficking, poverty, or lack of employment, and helping to identify sustainable and long-term solutions. An officer in the NHTU said:

¹⁶ 2024 Justice and Care Victim-Centred Approach Fund Report

We were able to get the Victim Navigator network working at its best, because of the Victim Navigator in [county of origin] to speak to her, engage with her and support her which has been ongoing for some time. (Police Scotland)

Challenges and Observations

No pilot is without some challenges and through the course of the evaluation we identified two inter-related challenges. The first challenge identified is concerned with uncertainty regarding the boundaries, and remit of the Victim Navigators that was expressed by both victim-survivors and stakeholders. Related to this is the capacity and well-being of Victim Navigators to fulfil all required workstreams during the pilot and beyond.

Victim-Survivor Uncertainties

While victim-survivors were unanimous in their appreciation of the Programme and the dedication of the Navigators to coordinate support across police and other stakeholders, over half of the interviewees revealed uncertainty regarding the parameters of this support. Many described feeling hesitant to request assistance, unsure of what they were entitled to or where the boundaries lay. Tom (victim-survivor) explained, “It’s not very clear what they do. I just know they support with anything that I want”. While the lack of boundary here is inclusive and admirable, Karl (victim-survivor) pointed out that

“Sometimes people are very reserved, and they are shy. Nobody owes them any obligation to do anything for them, so they will not be able to voice out what they want or the kind of assistance they want or need”.

This reflected some victim-survivors’ expressions of being reluctant to ask for more help when it had already been provided. This reluctance often resulted in unmet needs, for example, one victim-survivor pointed out they would appreciate another few items of clothing but felt they couldn’t ask after being provided with some basics.

“[The Navigator] keeps talking about support, support, support but obviously it’s only going to be greedy individuals we will be asking for support again and again... [The VN] made it explicitly clear that any support that I need, I should just come out and they will do their best to assist me with it. Ok, yes, but personally I don’t think it is right to demand everything of [the VN]. There are other victims. So, I don’t want to overburden them” (Karl, victim-survivor).

Navigators being able to support with everything was valued but this sometimes meant that victim-survivors were unsure of what might be too much, and in some cases, this meant they stopped asking for anything. This suggests that clearer communication about the scope of support—perhaps through written guidelines or introductory sessions—could bolster victim-survivors’ confidence and empower them in engaging with the service. This is also important with regards to Navigator capacity and wellbeing, given that their days are unpredictable, and the work undertaken can be emotionally charged. However, Navigators themselves do

receive support due to the emotional challenges of the role. Overall, it was clear throughout the evaluation that Navigators are committed to providing as much support as they can for victim-survivors; however, the possibilities for support are not endless and more discussion and information on this may be required.

The suggestion of written information came from one victim-survivor, Jordan, who expressed concern at not knowing where Victim Navigators are, physically. Although he described being informed about the Navigators by police and by the Navigators themselves, he did not think that the Navigators and the police were in close contact with one another.

They haven’t, they haven’t met each other. Whenever [the VN] comes round, the police were not around. Whenever the police were around, [the VN] was not. (Jordan, victim-survivor).

Jordan proceeded to share feelings of concern and discomfort at not knowing as much about Justice and Care and Victim Navigators as he would like, and that at the beginning, he would have welcomed a leaflet or direction to a website that provided more information. Where his uncertainty was most clear was in relation to not knowing where Navigator offices are although he caveated that he did not think that was anything ‘major’. When asked if he knew where they were, he stated he did not, and that he did not think they were co-located with police, nor indeed work with them at all.

They can’t be traced as I don’t go to any of their offices. I don’t even know if they exist. It has been a concern, but I don’t... I don’t think it’s a major, it’s a major... yeh... They made it clear to us they are not working with the police, they are different from the police, but you know... yeh... it’s not like they are working hand in hand.

While there is uncertainty around the physical location of the Navigators, the above statement also suggests that there may be the need for either greater clarity regarding the Navigator’s relationship with the police and their embeddedness, or indeed reminders of this throughout their time with victim-survivors. It is important to note that victim-survivors are informed about the role of the Navigator from the outset, as highlighted by both Victim Navigators and victim-survivors themselves. It is necessary to note that uncertainties they express could be a result of the trauma they have experienced, combined with the overwhelming amount of information they receive at the point of initial identification. As almost all victim-survivors point out, there is a lot happening and it is not always possible to recall details. Regardless, for victim-survivors a clear understanding of the relationship between the Victim Navigators and the police is paramount in order for them to make informed decisions about being part of the service. The suggestion of more physical materials available and a clearer indication of where Navigators’ place of work, or offices are, around the country was suggested by Jordan as a way to improve the Programme’s transparency and raise confidence and engagement with it.

While one victim-survivor expressed that they did not think Victim Navigators worked with the police, there were frequent positive references by others to Navigators going ‘above and beyond’ or ‘beyond their boundaries’ in terms of explaining what was happening and their remit. Victim Navigators occupy a space

of independent advocates with a victim-centred approach but in an adversarial criminal justice system, this is not an easy position to be located. Though Navigators operate independently, the distinction between their role and others in the justice system is something that should be constantly reiterated.

Stakeholder uncertainties

Initially, external stakeholders—including third-sector organisations and statutory services—lacked clarity about the Navigators' responsibilities within the wider anti-trafficking and support response. To facilitate better working relations with other NGOs that are supported by Scotland's Victim Support Approach Fund, a round table discussion was set up with other NGOs. This group has enabled all participants to understand what each organisation is doing and how it fits into supporting victims of human trafficking and exploitation across Scotland. The referral process to Victim Navigators was one area that needed clarifying. These round table meetings led to improved communication between the different NGOs, with improved multi-agency responses for some survivors. For example, the Navigators might 'contact legal support usually about anybody needing legal advice or needing that negative decision reviewed' (Victim Navigator). As a result of an invitation to a meeting with front-line professionals in a support organisation, Navigators learned about a *'women's group they were setting up and obtained agreement that if we've got anybody that fits or needs a bit of time or needs an art group, that we can feed into their woman's group'* (Victim Navigator). In addition, this initiative has helped clarify for all partners which organisation might be the best fit for someone needing support. Justice and Care have acknowledged the challenges of starting a Programme such as this and reflected on the development of the programme over time:

From a strategic point of view, I think we've made partnerships work better, but it's been a much more challenging landscape than I think I expected it to be. (Justice and Care)

This highlights the importance of early and ongoing engagement with stakeholders to ensure cohesive support for survivors from the outset.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the Victim Navigator Programme, as applied in Scotland, has largely drawn on data from key stakeholders involved in the Programme, especially the experiences of victim-survivors, police officers based in Police Scotland NHTU and Police Scotland Divisions, support workers from agencies who aided victim-survivors' recovery, as well as organisations linked to border security or are part of the prosecutorial sector. The evaluation also drew on data provided by Justice and Care from its Central Management System. The views of these respondents indicate good progress for the Navigators in achieving the outcomes identified at the outset of the pilot project as they are contributing to the support of victims of human trafficking in Scotland. The fundamental aim of helping survivors of human trafficking navigate the justice system and link to other support services is clearly apparent.

Those victim-survivors in contact with Navigators, and who agreed to be interviewed for this research, were clearly very appreciative and grateful for the support and advice provided by Navigators, whose commitment and support for victim-survivors was apparent. The victim-centred approach applied by the Navigators ensures a positive bridge between the criminal justice system and the well-being of victim-survivors. It must be noted that the victim-survivors interviewed were in contact with Navigators and the police, the extent of refusal or reluctance to engage with services is not known.

The contribution of Navigators in managing the complex, and often extended periods, of support required has been particularly appreciated by Police Scotland. The involvement of the Victim Navigators has 'freed up' police officers' time to focus on criminal investigations and apprehension of perpetrators. Police officers have also been able to draw on the expertise of the Navigators in relation to the nuances of human trafficking and provide a more victim-centred response during their investigations. Similarly, the support of Navigators for victim-survivors involved in criminal cases has also been recognised and welcomed by other agencies.

Adopting a broad evaluative approach allowed the evaluators to explore a wider perspective than the key intended outcomes of the Victim Navigator Programme, while being able to comment on these outcomes and the workstreams adopted by the service.

As outlined in the Victim Navigator Programme design, the Victim Navigator initiative was structured around three key intended outcomes: (1) improved survivor rehabilitation and reintegration across essential domains, (2) enhanced survivor engagement in providing intelligence to justice processes, and (3) strengthened Police Scotland capacity to investigate modern slavery cases. These objectives were pursued through five defined workstreams, which guided the Navigators' day-to-day activities.

Workstream Activity

Through intensive casework (Workstream 1), Navigators delivered trauma-informed support to victim-survivors—including psychosocial care, accommodation assistance, and legal advocacy—while serving as a crucial bridge between survivors and the criminal justice process. Key stakeholders commented on the value of this support and how it aided the well-being of victim-survivors but also enabled them to engage in ongoing investigations and in some cases provide prosecution testimony. Evidence from police officers indicates that Navigators free up police time and resources to enable officers to focus on criminal investigations and prosecutions because they know survivors are supported. This is a distinguishing feature of the Victim Navigator programme as detectives' large workloads mean they cannot always provide the level of contact with survivors that they want or require. Instead, Navigators have taken on responsibilities related to survivor support, ensuring survivors' needs were met, and having regular contact with survivors in relation to their recovery and to keep them engaged with, or updated about, the criminal investigation.

Victim Navigators' advice to live operations (Workstream 2), such as advising on investigative strategies and attending warrant executions, was considered by respondents to have contributed to more victim-centred policing. Over the course of the evaluation period Victim Navigators worked with an increasing number of police officers within the NHTU and across police divisions. They provided a range of advice and support and liaised with individuals identified by the police as potential victims. The work entailed the following areas of focus:

Operational Support: Assistance with planning operations (e.g. hit days and reception centres) and advice on victim engagement strategies, including approaches to statement taking.
Intelligence and Case Development: Guidance on the use of Victim Navigator support services to assist victim-survivors in investigative processes.
NRM Guidance: Advice on National Referral Mechanism (NRM) procedures and the use of reception centres for supporting victims.
Victim Centred Approaches: Tailored recommendations for interacting with vulnerable individuals, particularly potential trafficking victims, with an emphasis on trauma informed practices.
Early Intervention: Initial input on recognising indicators of trafficking in cases first identified as domestic abuse, including signs of modern slavery.
Accessibility: Provision of contact details and out of hours support for officers requiring urgent advice.

Meanwhile, the delivery of specialist training to both police (Workstream 3) and frontline services (Workstream 4) helped embed sustainable improvements in victim identification and care, located around a trauma-informed model. Strategic advice and training provided by Victim Navigators was the subject of particularly positive responses from various stakeholders as it was seen as improving operational responses.

Over the three years of the Pilot Programme, Victim Navigators provided training to 325 police officers as part of specialised human trafficking courses, bespoke

training to human trafficking champions or response teams or in conference settings. The evidence suggests that Navigators' training helped improve police understanding of human trafficking and the identification and support of victims. In addition, police officers became aware of the Navigator role and the practical support they could offer to victims as well as to the police. This training helped foster engagement with the Victim Navigators and encouraged the development of more victim-centred policing and enhanced support and care for victim-survivors.

Engaging with non-police stakeholders was another core element of the Victim Navigator role. Navigators provided training to 243 non-police stakeholders. These training engagements helped foster working relations with several other agencies that encounter victims of human trafficking, including Border Force, Immigration Compliance and Enforcement, and the Prison Service.

Finally, information from interviews and from Justice and Care reports identified that Navigators' work on safe repatriations (Workstream 5) ensured support for survivors who were choosing to return to home countries. Repatriation is part of the support that has been provided by Navigators where survivors desire to return to their home country. In the three years of the Programme, they have helped seven survivors return home. This has entailed ensuring the survivor has the necessary documents, purchasing airplane tickets, and liaising with organisations in origin countries to facilitate a safe return. Due to Victim Navigator Programmes in-country there appears to be seamless safeguarding and support for survivors. British Navigators help organise victim-survivor trips home, and arranged for Navigators to meet them at airports, take them to safe accommodation and provide ongoing care during their reintegration.

Meeting Outcomes

Outcome 1: Improved Survivor Rehabilitation/Reintegration Outcomes

The Victim Navigator Programme has enhanced victim-survivors' access to comprehensive support. By providing support and assistance with housing, healthcare, legal matters, and essential provisions, the Programme has contributed to survivors' ability and confidence in rebuilding their lives. Particularly noteworthy is the Programme's holistic approach, which addresses both immediate needs and longer-term integration challenges. Accounts from victim-survivors highlight the profound difference this personalised, trauma-informed support has made to their recovery journeys. The Programme's introduction has contributed to victim care in Scotland's anti-trafficking response.

Outcome 2: Enhanced Survivor Engagement with Justice Processes

The Programme has created an environment where victim-survivors feel increasingly able to share information with Police Scotland while maintaining their sense of agency. Through the Navigators' sensitive approach, survivors have, based on the data, contributed to investigations without feeling

instrumentalised, striking an important balance between welfare and justice objectives. The model demonstrates that with appropriate support and clear communication, survivor participation in justice processes has the potential to be both victim-centred and operationally valuable, although continued vigilance, care, and attention is needed on this dynamic.

Outcome 3: Strengthened Police Scotland Investigative Capacity

The Programme has delivered operational benefits to law enforcement efforts against human trafficking and exploitation. By assuming responsibility for victim support, Navigators have enabled officers to focus on investigative work, resulting in measurable improvements - from victim identification to prosecution. Perhaps most importantly, this has been achieved while simultaneously influencing the quality of victim engagement, emphasising the need for effective law enforcement and victim-centred approaches to be mutually reinforcing. The increased understanding, across police divisions, of human trafficking and victim-centred approaches in handling trafficking cases reflects the Programme's capabilities in building institutional capacity.

Considerations and Recommendations

While the interviews did not ask specifically about victim-centred work it became clear to the evaluators during the period of evaluation that Navigators are dedicated to the wellbeing and support of victim-survivors, while also supporting progress through the criminal justice process. This dynamic of welfare and survivor focus within an adversarial criminal justice system, which emphasises evidence gathering and prosecutions, has the potential to create tensions and possible confusion for survivors. Striking this balance requires clear communication about rights, explicit separation of advocacy from investigative functions, and recognition that recovery and legal outcomes may not always align. Victim Navigators, working closely with Police Scotland, have demonstrated commitment to this balance and tension, and it is likely to be an ongoing process of navigation and compromise for Navigators as the programme develops. The challenge lies in ensuring that victim-centred principles—transparency, unconditional support, and trauma-informed care—are prioritised in the criminal justice system. The unique point of the Programme - the link between survivors and police, without which many survivors would not have the necessary means, support, or confidence to pursue justice against their exploiters - will remain key to ensuring this tension is navigated with a victim-centred approach.

While the main focus of the Navigators has been victim-survivor support, working towards key outcomes, not least in the criminal justice system, the initial roles agreed at the outset have provided for a broad remit. While the different aspects of the role and being embedded in Police Scotland's National Human Trafficking Unit, have been welcomed by professional respondents, there are elements that have the potential to be confusing for victim-survivors. While only one survivor expressed confusion about the role of the Navigators and Police Scotland this is a potential issue identified by evaluators during the research. This is not to suggest that victim-survivors have not been fully appreciative of the support and advocacy, merely that the present model of work, being embedded in the NHTU, may be

potentially confusing for some survivors who could be impacted by trauma and with limited understanding how the criminal justice system works.

From a police and Navigator perspective, however, this embeddedness has worked well and there is no doubt this model of co-location was considered as beneficial regarding effective partnership working and collaboration. From a victim-survivor perspective consideration needs to be given to always ensuring that victim-survivors fully understand the differing roles.

While wider outcomes linked specifically to the introduction of Victim Navigators in Scotland are difficult to ascertain interview data indicates that Navigators have, through advice, referrals, and financial assistance, been able to provide support to meet basic needs in relation to safe accommodation, food, clothing, a mobile phone, and utilities. These are all important for victim-survivors and their responses clearly indicate a positive experience from the Navigator service in relation to this support. There has also been assistance from Navigators in accessing medical care, psychological support, substance and alcohol abuse support, and signposting regarding immigration status and/or other legal issues. While this broad spectrum of support, assistance and signposting has been welcomed and appreciated, its broad nature is potentially time-consuming and if the numbers of victim-survivors in the criminal justice process continues to increase there will be a challenge for Navigator caseloads and ability to provide this more intensive face to face support and liaison, particularly as Navigators support victim-survivors across Scotland.

A specific aim linked to the establishment of the Victim Navigators focused on survivors being helped to provide increased intelligence to police and prosecutors. While respondents in the research identified this as a positive feature of the service, care is required to ensure that victims and survivors are clear that support is not contingent on providing information.

This is particularly important now given some of the UK national rhetoric surrounding migration. The complexities of trafficking and exploitation, when linked with the immigration system and identification through the National Referral Mechanism, create the potential for the blurring of lines and service provision for victims and survivors unfamiliar with the system. This has been managed well to date but may become more of an issue as the full impact of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 in relation to access to support and involvement in criminal justice processes becomes apparent.

Victim Navigators are well placed to address any concerns working at the nexus of welfare and criminal justice, not least as their involvement and support is not contingent on a positive decision under the National Referral Mechanism.



Recommendations

- Ensure assistance and support for victim-survivors engaging with the criminal justice system is continued through a Victim Navigator Programme. Evidence from the evaluation indicates victim-survivors, the National Human Trafficking Unit and Police Scotland divisions, Victim Navigators and other key stakeholders value the support and advice provided by the service.
- In relation to any future developments and sustainability, ensure that if the numbers of victim-survivors going through the criminal justice system continues to increase the project expands to mitigate Victim Navigators being spread too thinly across Scotland and caseloads and support becomes unmanageable.
- Victims Navigators need to ensure that victim-survivors are always clear about the relationship between themselves and Police Scotland, with a clearer indication of roles and boundaries. The production of clearer guidance and accessible materials that outline the roles and remit of the Navigators for victim-survivors as well as the boundaries of support will support this.
- Continued monitoring of developments across legislative and policy changes at UK level is also required to ensure continued transparency and understanding for victim-survivors. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 could have implications for victims of trafficking, undermining efforts to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. Changes to the NRM linked to this legislation may also impact on statutory support available. The role of Victim Navigators may therefore become more important as changes impact further on victims and survivors.

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