

WHY WITNESSES ARE IMPORTANT

No one asks to be a victim of crime. Being the victim of a crime can mean many different things. For example, minor damage to property could just result in inconvenience and small financial cost. Conversely, a crime could mean serious and permanent injury or even loss of life.

However, no matter what the crime is, it needs to be dealt with in a proper way through the criminal justice system. At the outset, witnesses to crime (including the victims themselves) play a vital role in helping the Police to identify and arrest criminals and bring them to justice. Later in the process, witnesses are needed at court to give evidence during the trial of a defendant in a way that enables either Magistrates or a judge and jury to reach a decision as to whether or not the accused is guilty of the crime.

It is very important that witnesses not only come forward initially, but that they are given support throughout the period leading up to and during the trial. Reliable witnesses giving good evidence in court will result in more convictions of criminals and greater justice for victims.

Ensuring that victims feel that justice has been done is crucial, not just for the individuals concerned, but for wider society as well. The visibility of justice encourages confidence in the law and the criminal justice system.



SOME ONLINE INFORMATION SOURCES FOR WITNESSES:

- ▶ www.cjsonline.gov.uk/witness
- ▶ www.cps.gov.uk
- ▶ www.cumbria.police.uk
- ▶ www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk
- ▶ www.victimsupport.org.uk



HELPING WITNESSES, HELPING VICTIMS, SUPPORTING JUSTICE

CONTACTING US:

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CUMBRIA
CRIMINAL JUSTICE BOARD
Criminal Justice System: working together for the public



CUMBRIA
Witness Care Unit



ABOUT WITNESS CARE UNITS

- Witness Care Units (WCU's) were established in 2004 as part of the government's national strategy to improve the services provided within the criminal justice system to the victims and witnesses of crime.
- WCU's are designed to be able to offer various kinds of information and support to victims and witnesses in criminal cases both before and, where necessary, after the court hearing. This applies equally to cases heard at Magistrates' Courts and the Crown Court.
- Cumbria Witness Care Unit is based in Kendal, but it deals with cases from all over the county. The Unit is staffed by personnel from the Crown Prosecution Service and Cumbria Constabulary. Additionally, Victim Support Cumbria has a member of staff located within the Unit.
- These staff have considerable experience of working within the criminal justice system and in meeting the needs of people who are asked to attend court in support of the justice process.
- Once a decision has been made by the Crown Prosecution Service to proceed with a criminal case based on the evidence available, the Witness Care Unit is advised and contact is established with all the victims and witnesses in that case.
- Within the Unit, each case is allocated to an individual Witness Care Officer. This Witness Care Officer acts as the first point of contact between the Unit and the witness/victim and will monitor the case throughout the court process until a final outcome is reached. However, other officers within the Unit will be able to help if required.



WHAT THE CUMBRIA WITNESS CARE UNIT CAN DO FOR YOU

- We will, with your consent, keep you informed of any significant hearings as your case progresses through the court system. We can provide you with information about court procedures and how criminal proceedings work.
- If the case progresses to a trial at court, we can arrange for you to visit the court prior to the case. We can also help with advice about parking, court facilities and transport options. Assistance with transport or arrangements to help you with any special needs you may have, such as wheelchair access or carer arrangements are also available. If in doubt about what we can help you with, please contact your nominated Witness Care Officer.
- We can also put you in touch with the Witness Service, which offers facilities at every court in Cumbria. If required, they will accompany you on pre-trial visits to the court and provide support to you during your time at court. If you are not able to make a pre-trial visit to court the Witness Service can arrange to visit you at home if necessary and explain procedures to you.
- Finally, we can also suggest other organisations that may be able to help you, both during and after the court proceedings have finished.



VICTIM SUPPORT CUMBRIA - WITNESS SERVICE

Appearing at court is often a new and unfamiliar experience, and many people feel apprehensive about it.

Through its body of trained volunteers, Victim Support Cumbria offers a range of services to witnesses attending any of the Magistrates' or Crown Courts around the county. These services are free and confidential.

SERVICES INCLUDE:

- A pre-trial familiarisation visit to the relevant court;
- Basic information on court procedure and layout;
- Separate court waiting area reserved for witnesses;
- Accompanying you into the courtroom if circumstances allow and if you feel it would help;
- Practical assistance - for example, explaining and helping you to complete expense claim forms;
- Support that is friendly, independent, professional and entirely confidential throughout the time you are at court.

Please note that the Witness Service is unable to discuss matters of evidence or give legal advice to you, but they can put you in touch with the appropriate organisation or person.

The Witness Service is unable to provide a child-minding service for you at court. If bringing children with you on the day is unavoidable, you must ensure that a responsible person also comes along with you to look after the children whilst you are giving evidence.

The Crown Prosecution Service will pay necessary expenses, including the cost of child-minding. However, these are usually paid several days after the trial and you will need to bring money on the day to cover travel, car parking and refreshments, etc.

